

# Before it Happened

Stepping-stones to tragedy

The bombing of Hiroshima did not happen overnight. The events leading up to it can be traced back nearly as far as one wants to go, but in this case to January 30, 1933, the date when Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany. This caused many German and Jewish scientists to flee to the United States out of fear for Hitler's anti-Semitism. Many of these were the great minds that would eventually formulate and make atomic energy a reality. Leo Szilard, one such former-German scientist would place a patent on the concept of using neutrons to break apart atoms and create a chain reaction in July of 1934.

Numerous discoveries and firsts occur between 1934 and lead up to the next significant date, December 6, 1941. On this date, one day before the "day that will live in infamy," President Roosevelt signs over \$2 billion to the Manhattan Project for research. Unbeknownst to his vice president, Harry Truman, the weight of this research will eventually fall onto his shoulders.

The next event, which will lead the United States to its destiny of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, will serve the generation of the day most strongly in the justification of the dropping of Little Boy and Fat Man. December 7, 1941, while entertaining dead-end negotiations over the acquisition of Pearl Harbor by the Japanese, the Japanese bomb the US naval fleet docked at the Hawaiian island. Also, the Philippines and the islands of Wake and Guam, under the control of the US Navy are bombed and occupied by the Japanese forces.

A little known event in US history is that in July 17, 1944, in a fairly important San Francisco area base, a huge explosion erupted and killed 323 men, totally disintegrated two ships and the entire length of a train stationed there. Recent declassified documents have lead to speculation of a miscalculated nuclear explosion test on US soil.

As the war escalates and the United States begins to regain its composure in the Pacific, the American forces are able to take away greater and greater victories. The US forces begin a campaign of “island hopping,” taking island after island on a route to the Japanese homeland. The fighting gets bloodier and bloodier for the Americans and a ratio emerges from the carnage: about one American will die for every two Japanese killed. The US victories in Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands in March of 1945 are the harshest-fought, as they are getting so very close to mainland Japan. The American troops begin to set up Okinawa as a base of operations for what they anticipate to be a very brutal and very bloody invasion of Japan.

On April 12, 1945, FDR dies in office and leaves the presidency to his vice, Harry Truman. For the first time, on the 25<sup>th</sup>, Truman is given word of the Manhattan Project and that General Leslie Groves had always intended it for use in Japan.

July 16, 1945, the infamous New Mexico Trinity Test, an atomic bomb is exploded in the desert with the equivalent of 18,000 tons of TNT. Accounts of the day say that some Manhattan scientists in attendance took bets as to whether or not the bomb would start a chain reaction and destroy the world on the spot. The bomb itself was said to have been transported out across the pothole-ridden dirt roads in the back of a pickup truck.

August 6, 1945, in response to Japanese heel dragging over the requisite unconditional surrender, President Truman orders the atomic bomb to be dropped over Hiroshima. The explosion completely devastates the city, annihilating square miles upon miles of buildings and the death toll to a total of around 100,000 persons.