

US History

Topic and Focus → WWII and the Atomic Bomb

IN THEIR SHOES.....HARRY S TRUMAN

Some Background: It is late July 1945. Over 400,000 US servicemen have been killed during America's four years at war. Italy overthrew Mussolini and his fascist regime in 1944 and freedom loving Italians quickly joined the Allies. Hitler's "Thousand Year Reich" was defeated in May 1945 after 12 years. Japan though was still savagely fighting against the oncoming Americans in the Pacific.

Japan of course was the country that pulled us directly into this war with their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii in Dec. 1941. In the next six months, they were able to take archipelagos and single islands all within the Pacific rim giving themselves the empire they desired for so long. Included in this early conquest was the Philippines where US soldiers became prisoners of the Japanese for the first time. What followed slowly became public knowledge of how Japan mistreated captured soldiers including torture and being put to death on a whim. (The US did not understand at that time Japan's culture and military values which were different from ours)

With Japan having its empire in 1942, it came down to defending it against the Americans until they grew tired of sacrificing men, money and time against what the Japanese thought was their three advantages of better men, a better navy and better planes.

President Franklin Roosevelt stated a goal of "unconditional surrender of the axis powers" in 1943 according to Admiral Wm. Leahy. At this time, the US was slowly but successfully regaining territory taken early by the Japanese. The Japanese may have at this time begun to realize that they underestimated the US's resolve in defeating the Japanese completely and not falling prey to "tiring" of the war.

In 1944, as the US "island hopped" closer and closer to mainland Japan, the desperate Japanese dispensed a new weapon in the form of the *kamikaze*. While striking fear into many naval personnel, it did not deter the US's effort to forge "onward toward Japan!"

In early 1945 at the battle of Okinawa, an island considered part of Japan, casualties were horrifying....about 50% of all US forces that invaded the island were killed or wounded. Bottom line....the closer US forces got to mainland Japan, the more desperately the Japanese fought and prepared their people for the incoming invasion. As an example of this desperation.....the Japanese were training small children how to stab a landing US soldier in the leg with poison spears. In April of 1945, the tragic news of FDR's death left the nation feeling uncertain that the heir to his office, Vice President Harry S Truman could fill the battle tested Roosevelt's place.

Germany surrendered in May ending the war in Europe. Truman made a speech meant for the world to hear that the US would not quit the war in the Pacific until Japan surrendered unconditionally. With no formal surrender from Japan coming after the speech, it looked like a full scale invasion of the

mainland was the destiny of at least one million servicemen, some of whom had helped to win the war in Europe and thought they were headed home. Then while at a conference in Potsdam, Germany, Truman got word that the United States had successfully exploded an atomic bomb back in Los Alamos, NM. Harry S Truman from the small town of Independence Missouri then had a decision to make.....and that decision and a small taste of the consequences of it is now yours!

Your two options:

1. Order the mainland invasion of Japan, secure it with ground troops to force the surrender of Japan. Estimates from Generals in the Pacific have the number of casualties starting in the 200,000's to complete this.
2. Order the dropping of an atomic bomb(s) to force the surrender. Estimates vary, but dropping an atomic bomb on a city will kill somewhere between 15,000 to 75,000 instantly. While a city that makes munitions for the war will be chosen, it cannot be helped that many civilians including children are part of that estimate.

Your Harry Truman in June 1945.....what will you choose?!?!

Invasion _____

Drop the a-bomb _____

Explain your reasoning here:

Now...

If you chose invasion, then write a response letter to a woman who lost her husband and one of her three brothers in the invasion. She wants to know why we had to invade. She states that Japan was already beaten and was no longer a threat. She asks who will support her three year old girl. She is devastated.

If you chose to drop the a-bomb, then write a response letter to a woman who lost her entire family, including her husband, her 11 year old son, her 6 year old daughter and her parents, in the bombing of Hiroshima. She was North of the city on the horrific day the world was changed forever. She wants to know how you sleep at night. She sent pictures of her killed family members. She wants to know if this is how America defines liberty and peace. She is devastated.