

Honoring Veteran Legacies Eternal Salute Program

Activity: The decision to drop the Bomb

Document-Based Questions

Developed By: Brad Vinson

Subject(s): Social Studies/History

WWII Veteran: Ted Estridge

Duration: 55 minutes



What factors were evaluated by the American government that led to the decision to drop an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan?

OVERVIEW:

Watch the interview from Ted Estridge as he recalls his participation in the Battle in Okinawa, and the use of the atomic bomb that followed in Hiroshima, Japan. Use the PowerPoint presentation to introduce the primary documents, then have students analyze the documents, answer the corresponding questions, and finish up with a class discussion question to check for understanding.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The first atomic bomb was used on Hiroshima, Japan during the later stages of World War II. Although the bomb created catastrophic damage and loss of life, the argument has been made that it would have been worse if the U.S. used their military forces to invade Hiroshima after engaging in conflict in Okinawa.

"There would have been millions killed if we had to invade Japan. I'm just thankful that we didn't have to."

**-WWII Veteran,
Ted Estridge**

OBJECTIVE:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and explain the specific factors that the U.S. evaluated and ultimately used to decide to drop the atomic bomb.

STANDARDS:

CC.11-12.RH.1. Reading Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CC.11-12.RH.2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CC.11-12.RH.7. Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

MATERIALS AND DOCUMENTS:

- Video: TED ESTRIDGE: SURVIVING OKINAWA
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WqI01I9nnZY>
- PowerPoint Presentation: The Decision to drop the bomb. (This presentation can be used as notes, but it is intended to be a bridge between the video and the primary documents).
- Document A: Letter from Vannevar Bush (Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development) to FDR (president)
- Document B: "The Decision to Use the Bomb" (February 1947) By Henry Lewis Stimson
- Document C: Post-bomb data
- Document D: photograph of post-bomb Hiroshima

Primary Document Analysis:

- Letter from Dr. Vannevar Bush (Director of the Office of Scientific Research and Development) to FDR (president) National Security Archive, Suite 701, Gelman Library, The George Washington University,

2130 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C., 20037,
Phone: 202/994-7000, Fax: 202/994-7005, nsarchiv@gwu.edu

British Documents

DECLASSIFIED
DOE 3803942A-HS
BY MHC 2/6/89

American Documents

DECLASSIFIED
812018
BY MHC 2/6/89

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UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20545
HISTORICAL DOCUMENT NUMBER 30

OFFICE FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

OFFICE OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

1550 P STREET NW.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

VANNEVAR BUSH
Director

March 9, 1942.

The President,
The White House,
Washington, D.C.

John F. Kennedy *H. Carroll*
10-12-64

Dear Mr. President:

On October 9, 1941, Mr. Wallace and I presented to you the status of research in this country and Great Britain on a possible powerful explosive.

In accordance with your instructions, I have since expedited this work in every way possible. I now attach a brief summary report of the status of the matter.

Considerations of general policy and of international relations have been limited for the present to a group consisting of Mr. Wallace, Secretary Stimson, General Marshall, Dr. Conant, and myself. Mr. Wallace called a conference of this group, to which he invited also Mr. Harold D. Smith as the matter of funds was there considered.

The technical aspects are in the hands of a group of notable physicists, chemists, and engineers, as noted in the report. The corresponding British organization is also indicated. The work is under way at full speed.

Recent developments indicate, briefly, that the subject is more important than I believed when I last spoke to you about it. The stuff will apparently be more powerful than we then thought, the amount necessary appears to be less, the possibilities of actual production appear more certain. The way to full accomplishment is still exceedingly difficult, and the time schedule on this remains unchanged. We may be engaged in a race toward realization; but, if so, I have no indication of the status of the enemy program, and have taken no definite steps toward finding out.

British Documents

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American Documents

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The subject is rapidly approaching the pilot plant stage. I believe that, by next summer, the most promising methods can be selected, and production plants started. At that time I believe the whole matter should be turned over to the War Department.

You returned to me the previous reports, in order that I might hold them subject to your call. I shall be glad to guard this report also if you wish.

Respectfully yours,



V. Bush,
Director.

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British Documents

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American Documents

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By MHC DATE 2/6/89

UNITED STATES ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20545
HISTORICAL DOCUMENT NUMBER 32

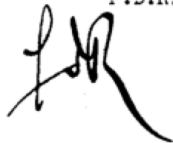
THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

March 11, 1942.

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. VANNEVAR BUSH:

I am greatly interested in your report of March ninth and I am returning it herewith for your confidential file. I think the whole thing should be *pushed* not only in regard to development, but also with due regard to time. This is very much of the essence. I have no objection to turning over future progress to the War Department on condition that you yourself are certain that the War Department has made all adequate provision for absolute secrecy.

F.D.R.



Questions:

1. Why do you believe there was such a need for secrecy, and for President Roosevelt to request that Dr. Vannevar Bush expedite the project "in every way possible?"
2. What was Dr. Vannevar Bush's assessment of the project's progress based on previous beliefs regarding the potential of the weapon they were developing?
3. Why do you believe Dr. Vannevar Bush recommended the project be turned over to the war department?

Document Excerpts from Harper's Magazine, February 1947, The Harper's Magazine Foundation. Reproduced here with the indirect permission of the Harper's editors: "In view of the exceptional public importance of this article, permission is given to any newspaper or magazine to reprint it, in part or (preferably, since its effect is cumulative) in full, with credit to Harper's Magazine but without charge."

"The Decision to Use the Bomb" (February 1947) By Henry Lewis Stimson ...

The possible atomic weapon was considered to be a new and tremendously powerful explosive, as legitimate as any other of the deadly explosive weapons of modern war. The entire purpose was the production of a military weapon; on no other ground could the wartime expenditure of so much time and money have been justified. ...

[The article continues by quoting a memorandum of July 1945 from Secretary Stimson to President Truman] ...

"b. think she (Japan) has within her enough liberal leaders (although now submerged by the terrorists) to be depended upon for her reconstruction as a responsible member of the family of nations. ... On the other hand, I think that the attempt to exterminate her armies and her population by gunfire or other means will tend to produce a fusion of race solidity and antipathy which has no analogy in the case of Germany. ... It is therefore my conclusion that a carefully timed warning be given to Japan ..."

On July 28 the Premier of Japan, Suzuki, rejected the Potsdam ultimatum by announcing that it was "unworthy of public notice." In the face of this rejection we could only proceed to demonstrate that the ultimatum had meant exactly what it said ... Had the war continued until the projected invasion on November 1, additional fire raids of B-29's would have been more destructive of life and property than the very limited number of atomic raids which we could have executed in the same period. But the atomic bomb was more than a weapon of terrible destruction; it was a psychological weapon. ... The bomb thus served exactly the purpose we intended. The peace party was able to take the path of surrender, and the

whole weight of the Emperor's prestige was exerted in favor of peace. When the Emperor ordered surrender, and the small but dangerous group of fanatics who opposed him were brought under control, the Japanese became so subdued that the great undertaking of occupation and disarmament was completed with unprecedented ease. ...

Questions:

1. What reason does Stimson use to justify the use of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?
2. If you were a podcaster with the opportunity to interview Stimson and ask him three questions regarding the decision to drop the bombs, what would those questions be?
3. Stimson refers to Japan's wartime military leaders as "terrorists." What do you think his reasoning was to use this label to describe these men? Do you think this label is appropriate?
4. How does this document present the role of the Japanese Emperor? Why do you think Stimson brought attention to the Emperor's role?

Post-bomb Data

City	Hiroshima	Nagasaki
Pre-bomb population	255, 000	195,000
Injured	69,000	25,000
Acute deaths	66,000	39,000
Total Casualties	135,000	64,000

* It is estimated that one million American soldiers and four million Japanese would have died in a conventional military assault on the Japanese mainland.

Post-bomb Hiroshima



Class Discussion: After analyzing the primary documents and the state of the war and the circumstances that led to the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima, do you believe the United States actions were appropriate? Why or why not?