

Legacy Of The Bombs

Veterans Share Their Feelings On
The Atomic Bombs That Closed WWII

BY DAVE HOSMER

Every World War II veteran will provide an answer to the question: "Did you support President Truman's decision to drop the Bombs?"

There is no need to define "bombs." It's just understood. Perhaps the only other question of equal significance to the "Greatest Generation" is — "Where were you when you heard about the attack on Pearl Harbor?"

World War II was obviously significant because it impacted so many people around the world. Its end was, too. Harriet Randall Johnson said the news of the end of the War made her "heart pound." The end of the War remains embedded within the psyche of those veterans.

Let's step back to the summer of 1945, prior to either Bomb being dropped. For many men the War was over. Dale Haug had been injured in the Market Garden operation and he was back in the States recuperating. Orvin Oien heard about the Bombs as his back healed up in a French Hospital. He still celebrated. "Best thing I ever heard."

Bob Steinbach had seen the horror of Okinawa and was returning home after suffering from concussion injuries. He recalled hearing Tokyo Rose broadcast after the first Bomb was dropped. "Americans have come up with destruction." She thought it was worse than poison gas. "If America continues with this, then we will use every facility that we have to stop them." He ignored her, as usual.

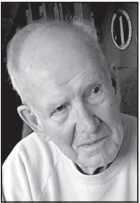
There were many men in Europe who suspected that they would face more combat, but they were far enough away to think of it as a mere possibility. Art Giggee, who was near the Danube River in Germany, didn't get too excited when the War ended with the Germans. Although he had ample points to be sent home he was told that he was "essential" and had to remain, which meant that his unit may be shipped to the Pacific. When he heard that the war with Japan ended he celebrated, of course, but they "didn't go hog wild like they portrayed it on television!"



Steinbach



Oare

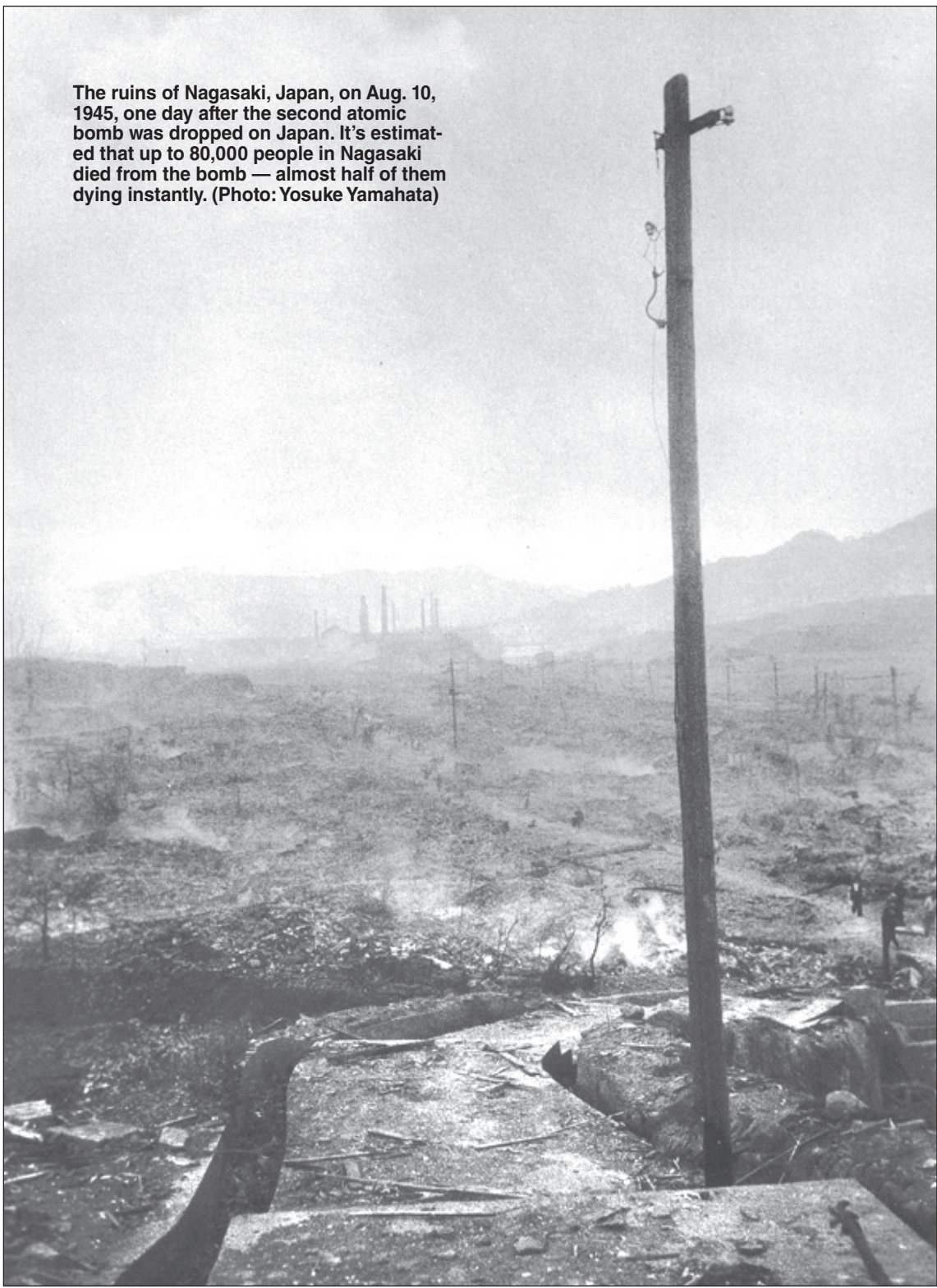


Henseler

Dr. Brooks Ranney was similarly situated. Ranney easily had 100 points, and only 85 were needed to be sent home. (According to Brooks, the point system was despised because so many points were awarded to married fathers; many men intentionally delayed marriage because of the War.) At first, he was told that he was returning home. All of a sudden, on August 4, 1945, there were changes. Ranney and the other members of the engineer unit were to report to Marseilles, France to board a ship to the Pacific Theater. However, as luck would have it, the orders were soon rescinded.

A few men who had seen ample death and destruction on small islands one after another were headed home. Dale Oare was half way to Hawaii from Okinawa when he heard the War was over. There was an active discussion amongst the Marines to continue onward and to attack Russia. "We never really trusted them."

But up to the moment when the Japanese surrendered, millions of able-bodied men in the Pacific were being trained for the inevitable invasion of Japan. They thought they were going to fight onward. Ken Henseler, Bill Dayhuff, Orval Schneider and Ken Custis were all at Okinawa waiting for the Japanese mainland invasion. As Henseler said, "It was dreaded." Ken Snow was in Guam, another staging area. Ralph Morman, Fred Branaugh, Lloyd Seger and Jim Snow were waiting for rides to the Philippines, a third staging area. Bennie Mazourek, Bud Lacroix, Marvin Schaefer, Ed Pugh, and Joseph Hejl were already there. Morman said the men were relieved when they heard the War was over — they played poker every day as they



waited to return home.

As happy as they were, almost no one knew anything about atomic energy. Joe Reynolds was aboard the U.S.S. Pasig at Eniwetok. The radioman confusingly asked, "Ever heard of an atomic bomb?" No. "Well, we dropped one in Japan and it caused a lot of destruction." Eugene Weidenbach, who was already back in the States, said description of the Bombs "didn't mean that much" because no one "really knew what an atomic bomb was." He was "surprised." Jim Abbott, who was aboard his B-24 on his 28th and final mission when he heard that the first Bomb had been

dropped, said there was no cheering because "we never knew what this bomb was. It could have been a basket of candy!"

Every single veteran that I have interviewed had the same answer. In 1945, they supported Truman's decisions regarding the Bombs. Sanford Pechous was succinct — "you betcha." Weidenbach, among others, lamented the "loss of the innocent" lives. However, it was "damned if you do, and damned if you don't." Innocents would have also died during an invasion of Japan.

Ivan Vitek expressed one common sentiment. "They started it; we'll

finish it off." Bob Warren was proud of Truman; "he had the guts to do it." However, the most common answer is similar to that given by Ken Hagen. "I probably wouldn't be here today because we would have invaded Japan." Even though these men and women ushered in the atomic era they are not warmongers. Quite the contrary. They have reservations about using such a bomb today. They have seen and smelled death. They never want such horror to visit their grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



COURAGE

*Bravery doesn't mean
you aren't scared.
It means you go anyway.*

*For all that you are and all that
you've given to our country, we salute
you, veterans. Thank you for protecting
our freedom at home and overseas.
Your service and your sacrifice will
always be remembered.*

*With gratitude, we honor America's
veterans and military personnel.*

Thank You.



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