

# Ground Zero 1945

Pictures by Atomic Bomb Survivors  
John W. Dower

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## Introduction

For most Americans today, the words "Ground Zero" immediately call to mind the horror of September 11, 2001, when terrorists crashed hijacked airplanes into the World Trade Center in New York City, destroying two skyscrapers and killing some three-thousand individuals. As a place, Ground Zero thus refers to the dead center of an explosive act of violence. As a concept, these ominous words are inseparable from the terrifying vision of WMD—Weapons of Mass Destruction. What if the next Ground Zero involves nuclear weapons?

Prior to "9-11," Ground Zero did in fact have a concrete, historical, explicitly nuclear meaning. The phrase was coined in reference to the first nuclear weapons tested and used by the United States in 1945—the top-secret "Trinity" test in the desert of Alamogordo, New Mexico, in mid July 1945, and the atomic bombs dropped with devastating effect a few weeks later on Hiroshima (August 6) and Nagasaki (August 9).

The historical monument that used to mark the epicenter of the Trinity test bore the simple legend *Ground Zero*. It is possible that the "zero" designation had its actual origin here, before the bombs were deployed against the two Japanese cities. By 1946, in any case, "ground zero" had become a media catch phrase referring to the epicenter of a nuclear explosion. Hiroshima and Nagasaki stood before the world as stark examples of what this really meant.

Japan surrendered on August 14 (August 15 Japan time)—eight days after Hiroshima, six days after the Soviet Union declared war on Japan, five days after Nagasaki. These were the first atomic bombs ever actually used against an enemy population. To date, they are the last.

Most of this history—this genesis of an awesome, horrifying catch phrase—has been forgotten.

\*

The American decision to deploy the new technology of nuclear destruction against densely populated cities will always remain controversial. Supporters of this decision—and, to the present day, this includes the great majority of Americans—argue that the bombs were necessary to end the war against a fanatical enemy quickly and save untold numbers of American lives. A well-known essay by the distinguished historian Paul Fussell succinctly captures this position in its title: "Thank God for the Atomic Bomb."

Critics of the decision to use the bombs argue that the Japanese government could have been persuaded to surrender by other policies—most notably, by (1) clarifying the U.S. terms of surrender (to make clear that Japan's imperial dynasty would be maintained), and (2) waiting for the imminent declaration of war against Japan by the Soviet Union (which the Japanese were known to be desperately trying to prevent).

This controversy will never be resolved but should never be ignored, for it raises practical and moral issues of the highest order. The debate over the use of the bombs in 1945 is inseparable from present-day controversies concerning just and unjust war. It involves an issue that has been with us since World War II and was abruptly thrown to the forefront of popular consciousness by 9-11: when, if ever, is it appropriate to identify civilians as a legitimate target of war?

That, however, is a subject in itself. This present treatment of "Ground Zero 1945" is

more narrowly focused. It addresses what it was like to be present, on the ground, when nuclear weapons were actually used.

\*

It is impossible to give precise figures for the victims of mass slaughter. We can only venture plausible estimates, for example, concerning how many tens of millions of people died worldwide in the course of World War II. This imprecision of numbers is also true with Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

By the final year of the war, Japan was disintegrating. Malnutrition was widespread. City residents made constant trips to the countryside to barter for basic foodstuffs. Many urban women and children relocated with rural kin to escape terror bombing by the U.S. Army Air Force, which followed a massive air raid on Tokyo in March 1945 with a policy of systematically targeting urban centers. Troops and labor forces (often schoolboys and schoolgirls mobilized for factory work) were moved from place to place. Populations were in flux.

By the time Hiroshima and Nagasaki were bombed in August 1945, over sixty Japanese cities had been targeted with "conventional" napalm fire-bombing. The nuclear destruction in the two cities was so extensive that entire neighborhoods were obliterated, often with few survivors (or paper records) to recall them.

The most careful and persuasive estimates suggest that somewhere in the neighborhood of 140,000 individuals probably died as a result of the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima. In Nagasaki, where the bomb exploded off-target, fatalities probably numbered around 70,000. (Both of these figures are roughly double the estimates commonly cited shortly after the war.)

Most of these deaths occurred immediately or by the end of 1945. By one standard calculation, 60 percent of the deaths came from burns, 20 percent from trauma from the blast, and 20 percent from radiation sickness. Many deaths, however, also took place between 1946 and 1950. Over the decades that followed, small numbers of survivors continued to die from bomb-related injuries or illnesses.

Despite the scale of these casualties, the visual record of them is comparatively sparse. The major U.S. survey team sent to assess the effects of the air war (the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey) produced thousands of photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that focused almost obsessively on damage to physical structures. Other American military and civilian photographers who worked in Japan in the immediate wake of the war also, as a general rule, shied away from human suffering.

Where the Japanese themselves were concerned, censorship by U.S. occupation authorities, who exercised control over defeated Japan from August 1945 to April 1952, resulted in a remarkable occurrence: the public had virtually no access to graphic images of Hiroshima and Nagasaki until seven years after the bombs were dropped. The magazine *Asahi Guraifu* broke the ice by publishing a portfolio of photographs in August 1952. That same year also saw belated publication of a somber record of the destruction in Nagasaki, taken on August 10, 1945, by Yamahata Yōsuke.

Although Japanese filmmakers produced several hours of black-and-white footage of the nuclear destruction in the weeks that followed, only a surprisingly small portion of this focused on human suffering. This footage was confiscated by the U.S. government and remained censored until the mid-1960s. (After being declassified, the most dramatic frames were privately edited as a short documentary titled *Hiroshima Nagasaki, 1945*.)

This averted gaze was as psychological as it was political. Few Japanese wished to dwell on the madness and misery of the war, and the *hibakusha*—the survivors of the atomic bombs—were essentially stigmatized or ignored until the late 1950s and early 1960s. It took two famous photographers to draw serious public attention and sympathy to them. Dōmon Ken published an influential study of Hiroshima *hibakusha* in 1957. Four years later he and Tōmatsu Shōmei collaborated on a volume depicting the nuclear legacy in the two stricken cities, and in 1966 Tōmatsu followed this with a truly distinguished collection of photographs titled *Nagasaki "11:02 a.m."* (the time the bomb exploded).

This time-warp is worth keeping in mind. It took until the 1960s before people in Japan (as well as outside) really began to see the human face of nuclear devastation. Even then, it was all too easy to avert one's gaze: these images were almost unbearable to look at.

\*

Beginning in 1974—over a quarter century after the bombs were dropped—an entirely new window on the atomic-bomb experience was opened. This took the form of drawings and paintings by survivors.

Every August, it is customary for the Japanese media to observe the anniversary of the end of World War II with retrospective pieces. These include television documentaries and personal reminiscences in magazines and newspapers. The tone is somber, commonly focusing on the suffering and horror of war. More than is appreciated outside Japan, some of these observances also address Japanese atrocities and war crimes (there are numerous private institutions and organizations devoted to such "peace" activity in Japan). Unlike in the nations that emerged victorious in World War II, there is nothing to celebrate on this anniversary occasion. There is, on the contrary, a great deal of a cautionary nature to pass on to ever-younger generations.

In Hiroshima (more than in Nagasaki), August becomes an occasion for intensified reflection on the atomic bombs and agitation for nuclear disarmament—a tradition that dates back to the mid-1950s. The Peace Memorial Museum opened its doors in 1955, and the first Japanese anti-nuclear organizations emerged around the same time, initially on the political left. By the 1970s, the "peace movement" had become not only politicized but also highly factionalized.

This was the setting in which the *hibakusha* moved toward center stage to tell their personal stories by drawing or painting what they had experienced and witnessed in August 1945.

This was an unplanned development. It began in 1974, when a survivor visited the Hiroshima office of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) to give them a picture he had drawn of a scene from 1945 that still haunted him. This prompted NHK to solicit other such graphic recollections, and these became the basis for a television program and exhibition in Hiroshima in August 1975. Eventually, several thousand such pictures were collected and exhibited throughout the country.

These are the intimate images that have been drawn upon for this site. There is nothing like them. John Hersey, who introduced Americans to atomic-bomb survivors in a celebrated long essay in 1946 (issued in book form as *Hiroshima*), put his finger on the difference between these visuals and the more familiar photographs and film footage from Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The pictures by *hibakusha*, he observed, are "more moving than any book of photographs of the horror could be, because what is registered is what has been burned into the minds of the survivors."

*All images that follow have been provided  
by the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.*

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## Hellfire

Essentially, we remember grand and even cataclysmic events through one or a few emblematic fragments—a particular image or two that, in Hersey's phrase, burn into the mind and remain branded there. "This is the scene I can never forget," survivors say in explaining the particular subject of their artwork. The intensity of this carries over to most viewers of the picture in ways rarely replicated in the cooler, more detached medium of photography.

For these survivors, these amateur artists, the part contains the whole. For those of us who come to these pictures as outsiders, these many parts comprise an intricate mosaic of the human experience of nuclear devastation. The pictures remind us of the *individuals* who made up the huge number of casualties and fatalities that occurred at and around Ground Zero 1945.

We can perhaps best approach this mosaic by imagining August 6, 1945, from a distance, with a single American B-29 bomber, accompanied by two escort planes, releasing a parachute over Hiroshima.

*Parachute dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima; the bomb exploded over 500 meters above ground, maximizing burn and blast effects.*

*HARADA Haruo  
10 years old in August  
1945  
[09\_01]*



The morning scene is serene. The parachute cradles "Little Boy," the first nuclear bomb, timed to explode between 500 to 600 meters above ground. Then comes the "mushroom cloud" as seen from the outskirts of the city. This is what impressed the crew of the *Enola Gay*, the plane that dropped the bomb, as it turned away. It is the image with which most American narratives of the use of the bomb end.

*The "mushroom-shaped" cloud from the bomb's explosion, seen from the outskirts of Hiroshima.*

*HORIKOSHI Susumu  
6 years old in August  
1945  
[03\_02]*



When the bomb was tested in New Mexico in July 1945, an awed American observer described the explosion as "brighter than a thousand suns." In Japanese, the well-known phrase for the extraordinary light of the nuclear explosion, and the thunderous blast that followed, is *pika-don*—literally (and prosaically) "flash-bang."

"Pika-don," *the blinding flash and massive explosion of the bomb.*

*YAMADA Sumako*  
20 years old in August  
1945  
[09\_02]



The temperature at the center of the explosion was between 3,000 and 4,000 degrees Centigrade (5,400 to 7,200 degrees Fahrenheit); unshielded people suffered flash burns within a radius of 4.5 kilometers (2.8 miles); all wooden structures within 2 kilometers (1.2 miles) were obliterated, and firestorms immediately began to sweep through these ruins.

*KOJIRI*  
*Tsutomu*  
4 years old  
in August  
1945  
[06\_33]



*Downtown Hiroshima in ruins, as seen two weeks later.*

Corpses lay everywhere. In many depictions by *hibakusha*, the dead are naked and bright red or coal black.





HAMADA  
Yoshi  
26 years  
old in  
August  
1945  
[15\_34]

*Bomb victims at Kokuzenji temple.*

Certain phrases run like a thread through the words of survivors. "It was like hell (*jigoku*)" or "this is what hell must be like" is said over and over. Traditional Buddhist painting actually provided vivid depictions of hell as a place (much like Dante's *Inferno*) of raging fires, grotesque figures, unspeakable tortures and pain.



NAKANO  
Kenichi  
47 years  
old in  
August  
1945  
[02\_33]

*Hiroshima in flames on the afternoon of August 6. The writing on the painting speaks of encountering "living Hell in this world."*

For many survivors, the attempt to escape the firestorms that spread from the epicenters of the explosions or the memory of someone who failed to escape these hellfires—became the image burned on the mind.



*The artist and an injured girl attempting to escape “a sea of flames.”*

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## Water

Fire and water merge in many *hibakusha* recollections, as if the most basic of elements were conspiring against humanity. This was particularly the case in Hiroshima, which lies on the Inland Sea and is fed by seven tidal rivers. Thousands of people fleeing the firestorms threw themselves into the rivers to escape, often from high above.

Many were already injured, and few survived. The rivers became choked with bodies—carrying them out to sea and then, when the tide turned, bringing some of them back again.



*People leaping into the river  
at Sumiyoshi Bridge, 1,450  
meters from the hypocenter.*

*MICHIDA Yoshie  
32 years old in August 1945  
[06\_39]*



*“Corpses floating in the  
river.”*

*SASAKI Chizuko  
20 years old in August 1945  
[18\_10]*

Corpses became bloated and discolored—literally monstrous. One survivor who painted such a scene 30 years later wrote of fearfully being led across a railroad bridge the day after the bomb was dropped, and seeing "red, blue, green, and purple corpses swollen three or four times floating under it."



*Crossing a streetcar bridge  
1,680 meters from the  
hypocenter on August 7.  
The artist's text tells of  
"red, blue, green, and  
purple corpses swollen  
three or four times"  
floating under the bridge.*

*KIHARA Toshiko  
17 years old in August  
1945  
[13\_10] detail*



Water also became ghastly death in other ways. In Hiroshima, many people made their way to large cisterns that had been placed on the city streets for fighting fires. They drank from these because they were parched, and climbed into them in the hope, again, of escaping the firestorm. In one survivor's picture, a pregnant woman floats in the cistern and burned bodies hang over its edges. ("My chest hurts as I apply the red paint," the man who drew this in 1975 wrote.)



*Corpses at a cistern  
used for fire-fighting.  
"My chest hurts," the  
artist notes in his text,  
"as I apply the red  
paint."*

*ONOGI Akira  
15 years old in August  
1945  
[13\_11]*

Another rendering depicts a cistern choked with red corpses locked in a grotesque rigor mortis of furious screaming.

*"Corpses in the fire  
cisterns were  
swollen red, while  
those in the vicinity  
were charred."*

*OGAWA Sagami  
28 years old in  
August 1945  
[15\_44]*



Water also became an abiding symbol of what we speak of clinically as the guilt of the survivor. Injured people experienced thirst, and many cried out for water in their final moments. Because they had been instructed by public authorities not to give food or liquids in such circumstances (since this might exacerbate internal injuries), many survivors did not respond to these last requests. They bore the burden ever after of failing to give comfort to a victim in his or her last moments.



Victims beg for water and cry out that they can not see.

UESUGI  
Ayako  
45 years old  
in August  
1945  
[15\_02]

An injured woman asks for water.

YAMASAKI  
Sayoko  
23 years old  
in August  
1945  
[01\_22]



Guilt similarly consumed survivors who were unable to save a loved one, or even a stranger, pinned in collapsed buildings as the flames advanced. In one drawing, a survivor prays for forgiveness as a trapped stranger urges her to flee.

YAMASHITA  
Masato  
20 years old in  
August 1945  
[26\_42]



1,300 meters from the hypocenter, the artist begs forgiveness for being unable to save a stranger trapped under a collapsed building. "The flames began to rise. There was nothing I could do to help. 'Get away, hurry!' the person screamed at me."



Other survivors chose to tell of the "black rain" (*kuroi ame*) that fell on Hiroshima. Although the weather was clear when the bomb was dropped, the explosion changed the atmosphere and rain began to fall soon afterwards. This was welcomed.



CHAKIHARA  
Jitsuto  
31 years old in  
August 1945  
[15\_42]

*Black rain falls 1,300 meters from the hypocenter, as fire consumes the city on the other side of the river.*

Parched survivors even turned back their heads to catch raindrops in their mouths. Here, at least, was a tiny blessing.

*"A woman driven by unbearable thirst tried to catch the black raindrops in her mouth."*

TAKAKURA Akiko  
19 years old in August 1945  
[13\_06]



It was observed at the time, but without knowing what it meant, that the rain left black streaks on light clothing or walls. It was, in fact, bringing back radioactive debris. As a consequence, people who thought they had escaped death or serious harm often had not. Weeks or even months later, whether from direct and immediate exposure to the bomb's radiation or from exposure to the black rain, survivors began to show the symptoms of radiation sickness: nausea, diarrhea, bloody vomit, urine, and stools, hair loss, bruise-like spots all over the body. ("Black Rain" became the title of a celebrated book by Ibuse Masuji, and the book in turn became a well-known movie with the same title.)



*YAMASHITA  
Masato  
20 years old in  
August 1945  
[06\_36]*

*The artist's text tells how his younger brother was exposed to radiation while doing demolition work (to prevent fires) on August 6. "He returned home on August 20. On around the 25th, his nose began bleeding, his hair fell out, and small red spots appeared all over his body. On the 31st, he died while vomiting blood."*

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## Ghosts

Radiation sickness was often fatal, and quickly so for those exposed to the immediate blast. Even persons who came into the area within 100 hours of the bombing, however, could be susceptible to residual radiation; as time passed, delayed effects such as leukemia and other cancers became identified. This was a curse of an unimagined sort, for no one knew what it was at first, and no one could ever be sure what it portended. Did survivors carry this man-made seed of death in their bodies? Would they pass it on to their children? With such uncertainties came stigmatization of the *hibakusha* by other Japanese, and for the survivors themselves what has been called scars of the heart, cancer of the soul, a "permanent encounter with death."

Intimation of hell also took the graphic form of what is well known in the special lexicon of the bombs as "the procession of ghosts." When the sudden flash (*pika*) of the explosion occurred, people in the streets instinctively threw their hands over their eyes; and those facing the explosion, even several miles away, often suffered severe burns on their forearms and hands. (In Hiroshima, the bomb was dropped at quarter past eight in the morning, when the streets were full of workers and schoolchildren.) In another spontaneous phrase, survivors often speak of how skin "peeled off like a glove."

*People in the open, exposed to flash burns from the immediate explosion, became known as "the procession of ghosts." Here the artist explains that "to prevent their red, exposed flesh from sticking, people thrust their arms in front of them like ghosts. Their skin, like the thin skin of a peeled potato, hung from the fingernails, where it was still attached."*

*MATSUMURA Kazuo  
32 years old in August 1945  
[03\_40] detail*



Instinctively, to ease the pain and prevent the exposed flesh from sticking, people injured in this manner extended their arms out in front of them; and the streets and ruins soon became full of lines of injured survivors staggering along in this manner. In Japan, as in the West, they fell into the stereotypical image of the "living dead"—humans, once again, made monstrous.



*A man, skin peeling from his hands, “desperately looking for his child.” Neither the man nor his child survived.*

*ONOGI Akira  
15 years old in August  
1945  
[09\_41] detail*

Often these were family-like scenes—that is, clusters of men, women, and children. Frequently the figures were semi-naked, and sometimes they were lacerated with cuts from flying glass or other debris.

*The artist’s text describes a long line of burned people “sticking their hands forward and crying for water.”*

*IKEGAWA  
Haruo  
20 years old  
in August 1945  
[16\_11] detail*



Where were these processions heading? Here the enormity of the disaster became compounded, for there was in fact almost nowhere to go. Most hospitals and clinics had been entirely or at least partially destroyed. Most doctors and nurses had been killed or injured. For days, there were almost no medicines. Severely burned victims were treated with mercurochrome. Some of the injured resorted to home remedies such as applying cooking oil to their wounds or rubbing them with vegetables (such as cucumbers).



*Badly burned survivors  
being treated with  
mercurochrome.*

*YOSHIMOTO Satoshi  
13 years old in August 1945  
[16\_07] detail*

Uncounted numbers remained unattended for days. Flies quickly found them, and their wounds were soon roaring with maggots. For more than a few survivors, this became the hell scene that would never go away.

*In this scene from August 17, 11  
days after the bomb was dropped  
on Hiroshima, a child clings to  
its mother, whose wounds are  
breeding maggots. The small  
white box on the ground contains  
ashes from a cremation. The  
mother and child were strangers  
to the artist, who wrote at  
length separately of the horror  
of this scene.*

*ICHIDA Yūji  
32 years old in August 1945  
[11\_11] detail*



*Only four years old at the time, 30  
years later the artist recalled the  
sight of removing maggots from  
wounds.*

*KOJIRI Tsutomu  
4 years old in August 1945  
[05\_50] detail*





Some pictures by survivors are striking by virtue of their singular grotesqueness. An injured man gazes at his own eyeball in the palm of his hand. A skeleton sits in an intact, still upright barbershop chair. A woman's hand rises out of the rubble, the fingers burning like candles. The charred corpse of a child lies on the ground (this a survivor's memory from three days after the Hiroshima bomb) with its arms reaching toward heaven.



*On August 12, six days after the bomb, the artist came upon a skeleton sitting in a still-intact tilted barber's chair.*

*YAMABE Shōji  
42 years old in August 1945  
[01\_29] detail*



*The hand of a corpse lifted toward heaven, fingers "burning with a blue flame."*

*TAKAKURA Akiko  
19 years old in August 1945  
[14\_06]*

*"Corpse of a child pointing to the sky" about 600 meters from the hypocenter.*

*YAMASHITA  
Masato  
20 years old in August 1945  
[13\_05] detail*





In one exceptional survivor's painting, a dead young Caucasian man is shown tied to a toppled telephone pole near Hiroshima's shattered city hall. Representing a scene encountered on August 7, this cryptically annotated picture obviously represents one of the little-known Hiroshima stories: that there were perhaps two dozen or so American prisoners in the city when the bomb was dropped, most of whom survived the bomb but were hauled out and murdered by enraged Japanese.



TAKUMEI  
Kazumi  
15 years  
old in  
August  
1945  
[01\_10]

*“August 7, around 3 p.m.—a foreign youth beaten to death near the approach to Aioi Bridge.” The victim was an American POW who survived the bomb only to be killed by enraged Japanese survivors.*

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Everyone who views these pictures closely will surely be drawn to something that touches a personal chord. There are, however, three additional categories or "patterns" in the recollections of the *hibakusha* that deserve to be singled out. One is the most universal of iconic images: the mother and child, here turned to tragedy. One is "the second fire," when survivors gathered to cremate the dead. And the last is the most difficult question that can be asked of these visuals: can any hope be found here?

Mother with child is, of course, our ubiquitous image of love. The survivors' pictures show us how, at Ground Zero, this was shattered in unbearable ways. A mother clutching an infant against a background of fire may be a question posed (with no answer given by the artist in the form of accompanying text): will one or both survive? Has the rest of the family been lost?

*Mother with  
child running  
from the flames.*

*YAMADA Ikue  
12 years old in  
August 1945  
[01\_13]*



Usually, however, the answer is clear. Mothers attempt to nurse dead babies, or carry a dead child on their back. Infants try to nurse at the breast of a dead or injured mother.



*MATSUMURA  
Kazuo  
32 years old  
in August 1945  
[12\_20]*

*Mother looking for a place to cremate her dead child. The artist's text notes that the child's burned face was infested with maggots, and speculates that the distraught mother "probably picked up the metal helmet as a receptacle for her child's bones."*

Charred corpses of a mother and child lie on the ground (often naked and usually with the mother above the child, as if caught in the final desperate attempt to offer protection).

TANIMOTO  
Hatsuto  
41 years old in  
August 1945  
[13\_26]



*"Parent and child." In the emotional text that accompanies this ink painting, the artist observed that the bodies were so charred that it was not possible to be sure of the gender of either corpse.*

One astonishing ink painting depicts a scene in Hiroshima approximately 1.2 kilometers from the epicenter on the day after the bomb was dropped. Here the charred figure of a mother cradling a child still stands upright, poised in flight. The artist was 17 at the time. She had been at school when the bomb fell, and was making her way back to where her house had stood. The cruel sight was terrifying and unforgettable, she wrote in explaining her picture, and she wondered who the woman might have been.

YAMAGATA  
Yasuko  
17 years old  
in August 1945  
[15\_05]



*Mother cradling her baby. The artist encountered the still-standing charred figures the morning after the bomb was dropped, about 1,200 meters from the hypocenter.*

The "second fires," involving cremation of the dead, took place within a few days. Haste was essential to prevent the spread of disease, and as a consequence the dead were often seen off without formal services.





ISHIFURO  
Tamiki  
35 years old  
in August  
1945  
[15\_45]

*Cremating Naoko. The artist's lengthy text tells of the unspeakable agony of cremating his three-year-old daughter; and never finding the body of her older brother at all. He speaks of Hell, and of the guilt he has felt ever since for having failed to fulfill a parent's responsibility to protect them.*

30 years later, the final, unbearable, unforgettable fire some survivors depicted involved cremating their children or witnessing the collective cremation of classmates, neighbors, or kin.



NAKATA  
Suemi  
33 years old in  
August 1945  
[45\_15]

*Group cremation of student victims of the bomb on August 9. The invocation to the Buddha of the Western Paradise recited by the mourners appears in the lower left-hand corner.*

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## Hope

It may seem difficult to look at these pictures of hell on earth and emerge with hope, but that is presumably what many of the survivors who drew them intended. One picture that was accompanied by a long explanation addressed this directly. The artwork itself depicted a man wearing nothing but shorts, standing by a wall of fire. He was the artist's neighbor, a professor who had been unable to save his trapped wife from the flames. They had been eating breakfast when the bomb fell, and he still held a ball of rice (*onigiri*) in his hand.

"But I wonder how he came to hold that rice ball in his hand," the artist wrote at the end of his commentary. "His naked figure, standing there before the flames with that rice ball looked to me like a symbol of the modest hope of human beings."



*A university professor whose wife has been consumed by the fire stands stunned by the streetcar tracks, clutching a ball of rice in his hand.*

*INOUE Mikio  
40 years old in August 1945  
[14\_08]*

It is this modest hope that helps explain why so many survivors eventually responded to the invitation to share what they personally experienced and witnessed in August 1945. Grief and hope together underlie the philosophy that has developed around Hiroshima and (to a lesser extent) Nagasaki. This is conveyed in the famous lines by the poet Tōge Sankichi that are carved (in English as well as Japanese) on a monument in the "peace park" in Hiroshima:

Give back my father, give back my mother;  
Give grandpa back, grandma back;  
Give me my sons and daughters back.  
Give me back myself.  
Give me back the human race.  
As long as this life lasts, this life,  
Give back peace  
That will never end.

Tōge was a survivor who died in 1957, at the age of 36, from leukemia caused by exposure to the bomb's radiation. His poem is titled "Give Back the Human."

In more abrupt, political language, the intent behind such remembrance has been compressed into the simplest of slogans: *No More Hiroshimas*. What the artwork is intended to do is remind present and future generations of the intimate human experience behind such sloganeering.

As it happens, there is a serendipitous convergence between the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 and traditional Japanese commemoration of the souls of the dead. The Japanese "All Souls Day" is known as Ōbon, and falls either in mid-July or mid-August depending on whether one follows the old (lunar) or new (solar) calendars. Both dates are still observed in Japan, and the practice is both solemn and celebratory. The dead are welcomed back to earth with folk dances and other community activities. When time comes for them to return to the other world, they are seen off late in the evening by floating square paper lanterns lighted with candles on the rivers.

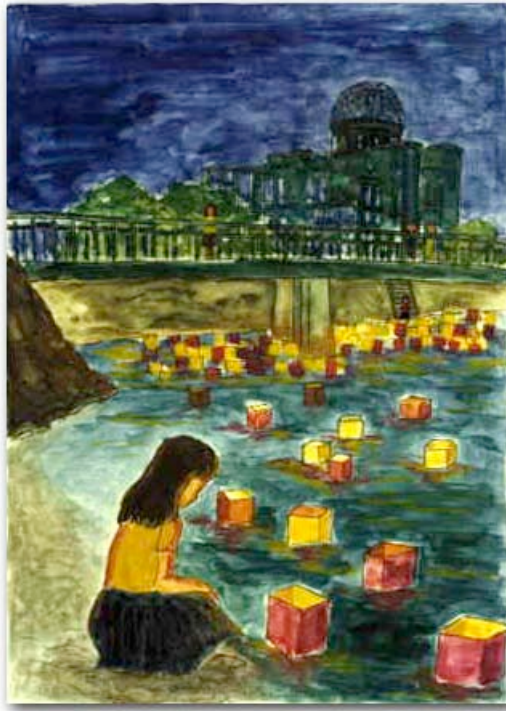
Memorialization of the victims of the atomic bombs overlaps with traditional Ōbon observances. Perhaps because of this (or perhaps the overlap of the calendar is just coincidence), it has become customary in Hiroshima and other places throughout the world to remember the victims of the 1945 bombs by floating lanterns. Usually each participant paints pictures or words on one of them. These are simultaneously prayers for the souls of the dead and prayers for peace.

In Hiroshima, the floating of these lanterns has poignancy beyond the city's experience in August 1945, for the beautiful lighted lanterns are floated on the very same rivers that once were clogged with corpses.

Tucked among the survivors' pictures in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, without any explanation, is an amateur painting of these floating lanterns, with Hiroshima's famous, unreconstructed city-hall dome visible against the evening sky. The brief caption that came with this reads "The lanterns floated and prayers lifted up for the peaceful repose of the A-bomb dead and for peace." The artist was a young woman born 11 years after the end of the war. She was 18 when, in 1974, she responded to the invitation to draw personal memories of the bomb.

*Floating lanterns as a prayer for the souls of the dead and a prayer for peace. The artist was 18 years old in 1974 when she responded to the appeal for pictures recalling the bomb.*

*TAKASHIBA Harue  
Born in 1956  
[17\_30]*



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Pictures by Atomic Bomb Survivors  
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John Hersey. *Hiroshima* (1946). The most famous English-language account of atomic-bomb survivors, originally published in *New Yorker* magazine and frequently reprinted as a short book.

*Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings* (Basic Books, 1981). This voluminous collection, originally published in Japanese in 1979, was compiled by the Japanese "Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki"; the English translation is by Eisei Ishikawa and David L. Swain. Although unwieldy, this book not only brings together the best information about the effects of the bombs available by the 1970s, but also conveys the complexity of the subject by including conflicting data and indicating where this comes from (on such subjects as overall fatalities, the number of Koreans killed by the two bombs, bomb-related diseases, etc.).

Robert J. Lifton. *Death in Life: Survivors of Hiroshima* (Random House, 1967). A pioneer study of the psychological legacies of the bombs on survivors.

Richard Minear, transl. and ed., *Hiroshima: Three Witnesses* (Princeton University Press, 1990). Writings by Hara Tamiki, Ōta Yōko, and Tōge Sankichi.

Kyoko Selden and Mark Selden, eds. *The Atomic Bomb: Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (M. E. Sharpe, 1989).

John W. Dower. "The Bombed: Hiroshimas and Nagasakis in Japanese Memory," *Diplomatic History* 19.2 (Spring 1995), 275-95; reprinted in Michael J. Hogen, ed., *Hiroshima in History and Memory* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 116-42.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Three Narratives of Our Humanity," in Edward T. Linenthal and Tom Engelhardt, eds., *History Wars: The 'Enola Gay' and Other Battles for the American Past* (Metropolitan Books, 1996), 63-96. A shorter, earlier version of this appears as "Triumphal and Tragic Narratives about the War in Asia," *Journal of American History* 82.3 (December 1995), 1124-35.

### Published Visual Materials

*Unforgettable Fire: Pictures Drawn by Atomic Bomb Survivors*. Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK), ed. (Pantheon, 1977). Originally published in Japanese, this collection reproduces over 100 pictures by survivors with English captions.

*Nagasaki Journey: The Photographs of Yosuke Yamahata, August 10, 1945*. Robert Jenkins, ed. (Pomegranate Artbooks, 1995). These photographs were withheld from publication in Japan until the end of the postwar U.S. occupation in 1952.

*Hiroshima-Nagasaki: Document 1961* . A well-known collection of postwar photographs published by the Japan Council Against Atomic & Hydrogen Bombs, with English text. Features photographs by Dōmon Ken and Tōmatsu Shōmei.

*Hiroshima-Nagasaki: A Pictorial Record of the Atomic Destruction* (Hiroshima-Nagasaki Publishing Co., 1978). Published by an ad hoc citizen's group, this contains both photographs and survivors' artwork.

*The Hiroshima Murals: The Art of Iri Maruki and Toshi Maruki* . John W. Dower & John Junkerman, eds. (Kodansha International, 1985). Reproduces the collaborative paintings of a couple whose well-known political artwork began with many murals on the atomic bombs and eventually extended to subjects such as the Rape of Nanking, Auschwitz, and the mercury-poisoning victims of Minamata. [The Marukis' work is also the subject of a documentary film titled *Hellfire: A Journey from Hiroshima* , available through First Run Features.]

*Barefoot Gen: A Cartoon History of Hiroshima* , 3 volumes (1979; republished in 1987 by New Society Publishers). This is an English version of the famous, ultra-realistic *manga* serial *Hadashi no Gen* by Nakazawa Keiji. Drawing on his own experience, Nakazawa depicts the grim life of a feisty orphaned survivor of Hiroshima.

### **WWII Web Sites**

The following sites have been chosen from the numerous resources that exist online for (1) their overview of World War II, and (2) their particular focus on the US-Japan conflict in the Pacific theatre and the decision to use the atomic bomb. For a detailed listing of some 240 sites, see J. Douglas Smith & Richard Jensen, eds., *World War II on the WEB: A Guide to the Very Best Sites* (Scholarly Resources, 2003).

1. This link offers a concise overview of the war in the Pacific from the Japanese hopes of a limited engagement to the events leading up to the US decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

<http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/AMH/AMH/AMH-23.html>

2. This collection of 50 images from the National Archives depicts key events in the Pacific theatre. Many of these are familiar images, but the site does a nice job of sequencing them and giving a brief description of each.

<http://historyplace.com/unitedstates/pacificwar/index.html>

3. Another collection of images from the National Archives, these are mainly photos of Pearl Harbor. The site also includes war propaganda posters encouraging revenge by the US on Japan.

<http://www.ibiblio.org/memory/>

4. This is the website of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, the organization that has generously provided Visualizing Cultures with pictures by survivors of the atomic bombs. The site offers a wealth of information from survivor's accounts to the history of nuclear weapons to nuclear activism in the wake of such a devastating event. This site is dense with information and can be challenging to navigate.

<http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/peacesite/indexE.html>

5. The Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum has also recently made well over a thousand drawings and paintings by survivors available on a website that requires facility in Japanese. <http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/database>

6. A Fordham University graduate student's thesis project, this ambitious site on World War II in general breaks down the war by year and further by European or Pacific theatres. It includes many interesting photographs.

<http://www.worldwar2database.com/html/frame1.htm>

7. This site offers a useful nexus providing links to other sites related to Hiroshima-Nagasaki and atomic history more generally.

<http://www2.gol.com/users/friedman/alinks.html>

8. This site links to basic official US documents pertaining to the decision to use the atomic bombs against Japan.

<http://www.dannen.com/decision/>

9. This is another site that provides access to primary materials related to Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs. Beginning in July 1945, documents include White House minutes, commission reports, letters to and from military leaders on the weapons' use and targeting, official press releases, and entries from Truman's diary.

[http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study\\_collections/bomb/large/index.php](http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/index.php)

10. This fairly comprehensive site of WWII documents is part of a broader initiative at the Yale Law School to collect and publish documents of historical significance on law, war, and diplomacy.

<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/wwii/wwii.htm>

11. This fascinating collection of US poster art from WWII is compiled by the National Archives.

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibit\\_hall/powers\\_of\\_persuasion/powers\\_of\\_persuasion\\_home.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibit_hall/powers_of_persuasion/powers_of_persuasion_home.html)

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