Hiroshima - a class room experiment?

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On August 6, 1945, at exactly 8:16 a.m., forty-three seconds after falling from the Enola Gay, and having travelled nearly six miles, atomic bomb missed its target, the Aioi Bridge, by eight hundred feet and exploded directly over Dr. Shima's medical clinic in Hiroshima, Japan.

Hiroshima had been exc luded from many other Japanese cities that were fire-bombed by the U.S., because then President Truman wanted a few virgin targets on which to test the recently developed atomic bomb effects.

The generals called the bomb Little Boy. The pilots, who didn't understand the bomb too well, called the Gimmick or the Pumpkin. The scientists, who understood the bomb all too well, called it the Beast. It arrived at the Air Force base under the name of "Bronx Shipments." It was ten feet six inches long and twenty-nine inches in diameter. It had a set of fins on its tail and twelve spikes protruding from it. It weighed 9,000 pounds. Most of its parts were handmade, like a Swiss watch, and its blunt tungsten-steel nose was polished like a mirror.

The Air Force brass handpicked the entire crew for the bombing run. The pilot was Colonel Paul W. Tibbets, who named the B-29 he was to fly after his mother, Enola Gay Haggard. He did this because his mother was the only person in his family who had encouraged him to be a pilot; everyone else had wanted him to be a doctor. When co-pilot Bob Lewis saw the words "Enola Gay" on the fuselage (Tibbets secretly had them painted on during the night), he was furious, but it was too late to do anything about it.

The decision to use the bomb was made on July 25, 1945. After President Truman's ship sailed out of Potsdam, he met with the press on the deck on August 3 and told them, "Well, boys, I'm going to scoop you again. We're going to drop an atom bomb on Japan." He put the directive to bomb Japan into effect twenty-four hours before an unconditional surrender warning was issued to the Japanese Cabinet.

There were two other planes on the Hiroshima mission. One was named the *The Great Artiste* because that was pilot Captain Kermit "Tex" Beahan's nickname. It was filled with scientists and measuring instruments. The other was a weather plan piloted by Captain Claude Eatherly, the squadron playboy. Eatherly was described by his friends as "tall and wickedly handsome." His plane bore the name *Straight Flush*. Eatherly went mad after his mission and had to be committed to the mental ward of a Veterans' Administration hospital.

When Hiroshima residents saw the instruments parachutes dropping from *The Great Artiste* they cheered—they thought the plane was in trouble. Captain Lewis wrote in his log: "There will be a short intermission while we bomb our target."

The crewmen wore adjustable Polaroid sunglasses, except for the bombardier, who had trouble sighting with them on. When the bomb's blinding purplish light exploded, none of the pilots noticed any sound. Oddly neither did most of Hiroshima's residents. Copilot Lewis screamed either "My God! What have we done?" or "My God! Look at the son of a bitch go!"

When asked later, he couldn't remember which.

The bomb exploded in the air directly over the Shima Surgical Hospital. The tail gunner gave an oddly culinary description of the holocaust: "Fires are springing up everywhere, like flames shooting out of a huge bed of coals....It's like a mass of bubbling molasses. The mushroom is spreading out." Lewis said, "I looked out and saw a city boiling." Bob Caron, the "tail-end Charlie" of the *Enola Gay,* wanted to take his own pictures of the "mess down over the city"; he shouted to Colonel Tibbets to turn the bomber a couple of degrees to the right so he could get better shots.

When the pilots got back to their Pacific base at Tinian, they found a mammoth welcome party had been prepared for them. The 2,000 men of the 509th Composite Group were allotted "4 bottles of beerper man, no ration tickets needed." Events included a softball game, a jitterbut contest, "hot music," and "novelty acts". The party ended with a showing of the 1945 movie *It's a Pleasure*, staring Sonja Henie.

By some estimates, 300,0]00 of the 344,000 inhabitants of the city were killed (the Hiroshima city government conservatively estimates 200,000). It was possible to tell where the people near Ground Zero had been standing by the thin circles of white ash on the ground or the faintly greasy gray spots on surfaces like tile and stone. The amount of matter converted into energy by Little Boy weighed about as much as a small coin.

After the bombing Truman elliptically announced, "The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East." When Oppenheimer



told Truman, "I feel I have blood on my hands," Truman told a companian, "Don't let that fellow near me again. After all, he only built the bomb—I'm the guy who shot it off." Einstein, when he heard about Hiroshima, was heard to softly exclaim, "Oy, vey!"

The crewmen of the *Enola Gay* later made various remarks:

Lieutenant Jeppson, the on-board bomb scientist, said, "Jesus Christ, if people knew what we were doing, we could have sold tickets for a hundred thousand dollars."

Ted Van Kirk, the navigator, said, "You always give some thought to the people on the target. But we were not bombing people, we were bombing military targets."

Bob Lewis, the copilot, said, "In one way I feel guilty for all those deaths because ... well, they were people with lives to live. But probably some of them, a certain percentage, had done something that deserved punishment, had started wars or harmed others." He added, "Maybe I'm a cockeyed optimist, but ... without the idea of splitting the atom to use as a weapon, it might have taken mankind many decades to make of fission and fusion and any more than a series of fascinating laboratory experiments."

Paul Tibbits, the pilot, said Hiroshima "offered a classroom experiment on being able to determine bomb damage." He remarked to a newsreel reporter, "It was a perfectly unexciting and routine thing."

The survivors of the Japanese atomic bombings are called Hibakusha. Takeshi Koga was twenty-three years old and working in a factory in Nagasaki. He avoided serious injury. His wife, who received secondary radiation poisoning when she visited Hiroshima soon after bombing, lost sight in both eyes during the birth of their first daughter. Their second daughter was born with boils covering her back, which have never healed. Their sun was born with skin connecting the toes on both feet.

Hiroshima is officially listed in Atomic Energy Commission records as "Test #2 2" (Trinity was #1; Nagasaki #3). In October 1976 Colonel Paul Tibbits, flying a restoresd B-29, simulated his mission at a Texas air show. U.S. Army engineers rigged up explosives to form a mushroom-shaped cloud when he passed over. On Hiroshima Day 1981, Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger announced that the United States would begin manufacture of the neutron bomb.

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