



I am Maj. Gen. Charles W. Sweeney, United States Air Force, Retired. I am the only pilot to have flown on both atomic missions. I flew the instrument plane on the right wing of General Paul Tibbets on the Hiroshima mission and 3 days later, on August 9, 1945, commanded the second atomic mission over Nagasaki. Six days after Nagasaki the Japanese military surrendered and the Second World War came to an end.

## History is Our Teacher

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Full text of Major General Charles W. Sweeney's hearing before the Committee

*"...Unlike the Germans who acknowledged their guilt, the Japanese persist in the fiction that they did nothing wrong, that they were trapped by circumstances..."*

*"One can only forgive by remembering. And to forget, is to risk repeating history." ...*

The soul of a nation, its essence, is its history. It is that collective memory which defines what each generation thinks and believes about itself and its country.

In a free society, such as ours, there is always an ongoing debate about who we are and what we stand for. This open debate is in fact essential to our freedom. But to have such a debate we as a society must have the courage to consider all of the facts available to us. We must have the courage to stand up and demand that before any conclusions are reached, those facts which are beyond question are accepted as part of the debate.

As the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki missions approaches, now is an appropriate time to consider the reasons for Harry Truman's order that these missions be flown. We may disagree on the conclusion, but let us at least be honest enough to agree on basic facts of the time, the facts that President Truman had to consider in making a difficult and momentous decision.

As the only pilot to have flown both missions, and having commanded the Nagasaki mission, I bring to this debate my own eyewitness account of the times. I underscore what I believe are irrefutable facts, with full knowledge



that some opinion makers may cavalierly dismiss them because they are so obvious - because they interfere with their preconceived version of the truth, and the meaning which they strive to impose on the missions.

This evening, I want to offer my thoughts, observations, and conclusions as someone who lived this history, and who believes that President Truman's decision was not only justified by the circumstances of his time, but was a moral imperative that precluded any other option.

Like the overwhelming majority of my generation the last thing I wanted was a war. We as a nation are not warriors. We are not hell-bent on glory. There is no warrior class - no Samurai - no master race.

This is true today, and it was true 50 years ago.

While our country was struggling through the great depression, the Japanese were embarking on the conquest of its neighbors - the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. It seems fascism always seeks some innocuous slogan to cover the most hideous plans.

This Co-Prosperity was achieved by waging total and merciless war against China and Manchuria. The Japanese, as a nation, saw itself as destined to rule Asia and thereby possess its natural resources and open lands. Without the slightest remorse or hesitation, the Japanese Army slaughtered innocent men, women and children. In the infamous Rape of Nanking up to 300,000 unarmed civilians were butchered. These were criminal acts.

#### THESE ARE FACTS.

In order to fulfill its divine destiny in Asia, Japan determined that the only real impediment to this goal was the United States. It launched a carefully conceived sneak attack on our Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor. Timed for a Sunday morning it was intended to deal a death blow to the fleet by inflicting the maximum loss of ships and human life.

1,700 sailors are still entombed in the hull of the U.S.S. Arizona that sits on the bottom of Pearl Harbor. Many if not all, died without ever knowing why. Thus was the war thrust upon us.

The fall of Corregidor and the resulting treatment of Allied prisoners of war dispelled any remaining doubt about the inhumanness of the Japanese Army, even in the context of war. The Bataan Death March was horror in its fullest dimension. The Japanese considered surrender



to be dishonorable to oneself, one's family, one's country and one's god. They showed no mercy. Seven thousand American and Filipino POW's were beaten, shot, bayoneted or left to die of disease or exhaustion.

#### THESE ARE FACTS.

As the United States made its slow, arduous, and costly march across the vast expanse of the Pacific, the Japanese proved to be ruthless and intractable killing machine. No matter how futile, no matter how hopeless the odds, no matter how certain the outcome, the Japanese fought to the death. And to achieve a greater glory, the strove to kill as many Americans as possible.

The closer the United States came to the Japanese mainland, the more fanatical their actions became.

Saipan - 3,100 Americans killed, 1,500 in the first few hours of the invasion

Iwa Jima - 6,700 Americans killed, 25,000 wounded

Okinawa - 12,500 Americans killed, total casualties, 35,000

These are facts reported by simple white grave markers.

Kamikazes. The literal translation is DIVINE WIND. To willingly dive a plane loaded with bombs into an American ship was a glorious transformation to godliness - there was no higher honor on heaven or earth. The suicidal assaults of the Kamikazes took 5,000 American Navy men to their deaths.

The Japanese vowed that, with the first American to step foot on the mainland, they would execute every Allied prisoner. In preparation they forced the POW's to dig their own graves in the event of mass executions. Even after their surrender, they executed some American POW's.

#### THESE ARE FACTS.

The Potsdam Declaration had called for unconditional surrender of the Japanese Armed Forces. The Japanese termed it ridiculous and not worthy of consideration. We know from our intercepts of their coded messages, that they wanted to stall for time to force a negotiated surrender on terms acceptable to them.

For months prior to August 6, American aircraft began dropping fire bombs upon the Japanese mainland. The wind created by the firestorm from the bombs incinerated whole cities. Hundreds of thousands of Japanese

died. Still the Japanese military vowed never to surrender. They were prepared to sacrifice their own people to achieve their visions of glory and honor - no matter how many more people died.

They refused to evacuate civilians even though our pilots dropped leaflets warning of the possible bombings. In one 3-day period, 34 square miles of Tokyo, Nagoya, Kobe and Osaka were reduced to rubble.

THESE ARE FACTS.

And even after the bombing of Hiroshima, Tojo, his successor Suzuki, and the military clique in control believed the United States had but one bomb, and that Japan could go on. They had 3 days to surrender after August 6, but they did not surrender. The debate in their cabinet at times became violent.

Only after the Nagasaki drop did the Emperor finally demand surrender.

And even then, the military argued they could and should fight on. A group of Army officers staged a coup and tried to seize and destroy the Emperor's recorded message to his people announcing the surrender.

THESE ARE FACTS.

These facts help illuminate the nature of the enemy we faced. They help put into context the process by which Truman considered the options available to him. And they help to add meaning to why the missions were necessary.

President Truman understood these facts as did every service man and woman. Casualties were not some abstraction, but a sobering reality.

Did the atomic missions end the war? Yes...they...did.

Were they necessary? Well that's where the rub comes.

With the fog of 50 years drifting over the memory of our country, to some, the Japanese are now the victims. America was the insatiable, vindictive aggressor seeking revenge and conquest. Our use of these weapons was the unjustified and immoral starting point for the nuclear age with all of its horrors. Of course, to support such distortion, one must conveniently ignore the real facts of fabricate new realities to fit the theories. It is no less egregious than those who today deny the Holocaust occurred.

How could this have happened?

The answer may lie in examining some recent events.

The current debate about why President Truman ordered these missions, in some cases, has devolved to a numbers game. The Smithsonian in its proposed exhibit of the Enola Gay revealed the creeping revisionism which seems the rage in certain historical circles.

That exhibit wanted to memorialize the fiction that the Japanese were the victims - we the evil aggressor. Imagine taking your children and grandchildren to this exhibit.

What message would they have left with?

What truth would they retain?

What would they think their country stood for?

And all of this would have occurred in an American institution whose very name and charter are supposed to stand for the impartial preservation of significant American artifacts.

By canceling the proposed exhibit and simply displaying the Enola Gay, has truth won out?

Maybe not.

In one nationally televised discussion, I heard a so-called prominent historian argue that the bombs were not necessary. That President Truman was intent on intimidating the Russians. That the Japanese were ready to surrender.

The Japanese were ready to surrender? Based on what?

Some point to statements by General Eisenhower years after the war that Japan was about to fall. Well, based on that same outlook Eisenhower seriously underestimated Germany's will to fight on and concluded in December, 1944 that Germany no longer had the capability to wage offensive war.

That was a tragic miscalculation. The result was the Battle of the Bulge, which resulted in tens of thousands of needless Allied casualties and potentially allowed Germany to prolong the war and force negotiations.

Thus the assessment that Japan was vanquished may have the benefit of hindsight rather than foresight.

It is certainly fair to conclude that the Japanese could have been reasonably expected to be even more fanatical than the Germans based on the history of the war in the Pacific.

And, finally, a present-day theory making the rounds espouses that even if an invasion had taken place, our casualties would not have been a million, as many believed, but realistically only 46,000 dead.

ONLY 46,000!

Can you imagine the callousness of this line of argument? ONLY 46,000- as if this were some insignificant number of American lives.

Perhaps these so-called historians want to sell books.

Perhaps they really believe it. Or perhaps it reflects some self-loathing occasioned by the fact that we won the war.

## Maj. Gen. Charles W. Sweeney

was born in Lowell, Mass., in 1919. He graduated from North Quincy High School (Mass.) in 1937. After graduating from high school, he attended evening classes at Boston University and also at Purdue University.

Charles Sweeney joined the Army Air Corps as an aviation cadet on April 28, 1941, receiving his commission as a pilot in the Army Air Corps in December 1941. Lieutenant Sweeney then spent



two years at Jefferson Proving Grounds, Ind.

From the proving grounds in 1943, Charles Sweeney, now a captain, moved to Eglin Field, Fla., where he served as an operations officer and also a test pilot.

In 1944 he was promoted to the rank of major in

the Army of the United States. At this time he was acting as a B-29 pilot instructor at Grand Island, Neb. Later in the same year, Major Sweeney was reassigned to Wendover Field, Utah, and it was here that he began working in the "Silver Plate" project, the code name of the pilot and crew training program for the coming World War II atomic missions.

On May 4, 1945 (at the age of 25 and with the rank of major) Charles Sweeney became commander of the 393rd Bombardment Squadron, a B-29 unit, which seven weeks later flew to a base on Tinian in the Mariana Islands.

It was during August 1945 that Major Sweeney flew the history-making missions and dropped the bomb which brought World War II to a close.

In November 1945, Major Sweeney and the 393rd Bombardment Squadron returned home to Roswell Air Force Base, N.M. His mission at Roswell was to train aircrews for a third atomic mission -- a peacetime experiment on Bikini. Just a few months later on June 28, 1946, he was discharged from active duty with the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Colonel Sweeney, on Feb. 21, 1956, was appointed wing commander by Governor Christian A. Herter. Also in 1956, the unit was again re-

designated as the 102nd Air Defense Wing, and on April 6, 1956, Colonel Sweeney received his promotion to the rank of brigadier general. In 1958 the wing received its designation as the 102nd Tactical Fighter Wing. He retired in 1976 as a major general in the Air National Guard.

General Sweeney is a command pilot with more than 5,000 military flying hours and he is the holder of the Silver Star, Air Medal, National Defense Medal, American Theater Service Medal, Asiatic-Pacific Service Medal with two bronze stars, World War II Victory Medal, Occupation of Japan Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Armed Forces Reserve Medal, Air Force Longevity Medal and the Massachusetts Military Service Medal.

### UNUSUAL EXPERIENCES

General Sweeney is the man who piloted a B-29 Superfortress bomber deep into the heart of Japan to drop, in military combat, the world's second atomic bomb. This was the nuclear blast that brought the warlords to their imperial knees and closed the last active chapter of history's most destructive war.

It all began on Aug. 6, 1945, when 25 year old General Sweeney, then a major, piloted a photographic and observer B-29 close beside the now legendary B-29 "Enola Gay" (itself flown by General Sweeney's close friend, Colonel Paul W. Tibbetts Jr.).

On this mission, the first epochal A-Bomb decimated Hiroshima.

Due to the reluctance of the Japanese to surrender, despite this destructive blow, it was decided that the second bomb should be dropped on Aug. 9, Major Sweeney was named to pilot the second B-29 atomic bomber, this time over Nagasaki.

On the second raid, Major Sweeney not only had weather problems, but mechanical trouble prevented him from pumping gas to his engines from special bomb-bay tanks. Only his special training on how to squeeze every possible mile from his initial supply kept the plane aloft.

Despite the unfortunate incidents, the mission was completed. Through a break in the heavy cloud formations, the deadly missile hurtled to pinpoint accuracy into history, destroying 60 percent of Nagasaki. These two historic missions virtually and effectively ended the war against Japan, and with it the Second World War.

—US Air Force

Whatever the reason, the argument is flawed. It dissects and recalculates events ideologically, grasping at selective straws.

Let me admit right here, today, that I don't know how many more Americans would have died in an invasion - AND NEITHER DOES ANYONE ELSE!

What I do know is that based on the Japanese conduct during the war, it is fair and reasonable to assume that an invasion of the mainland would have been a prolonged and bloody affair. Based on what we know - not what someone surmises - the Japanese were not about to unconditionally surrender.

In taking Iwo Jima, a tiny 8 square mile lump of rock in the ocean, 6,700 marines died - total casualties over 30,000.

But even assuming that those who now KNOW our casualties would have been ONLY 46,000 I ask

Which 46,000 were to die?

Whose father?

Whose brother?

Whose husband?

And, yes, I am focusing on American lives.

The Japanese had their fate in their own hands, we did not. Hundreds of thousands of American troops anxiously waited at staging areas in the Pacific dreading the coming invasion, their fate resting on what Japanese would do next. The Japanese could have ended it at any time. They chose to wait.

And while the Japanese stalled, an average of 900 more Americans were killed or wounded each day the war continued.

I've heard another line of argument that we should have accepted a negotiated peace with the Japanese on terms they would have found acceptable. I have never heard anyone suggest that we should have negotiated a peace with Nazi Germany. Such an idea is so outrageous, that no rational human being would utter the words. To negotiate with such evil fascism was to allow it even in defeat a measure of legitimacy. This is not just some empty philosophical principal of the time - it was essential that these forces of evil be clearly and irrevocably defeated - their demise unequivocal. Their leadership had forfeited any expectation of diplomatic niceties. How it is, then, the history of the war in the Pacific can be so soon forgotten?

The reason may lie in the advancing erosion of our history, of our collective memory.

Fifty years after their defeat, Japanese officials have the temerity to claim they were the victims. That Hiroshima and

Nagasaki were the equivalent of the Holocaust.

And, believe it or not, there are actually some American academics who support this analogy, thus aiding and giving comfort to a 50-year attempt by the Japanese to rewrite their own history, and ours in the process.

There is an entire generation of Japanese who do not know the full extent of their country's conduct during World War II.

This explains why they do not comprehend why they must apologize-

- for the Korean comfort women.

- for the Medical experimentation on POW's which match the horror of those conducted by the Nazi's.

- for the plan to use biological weapons against the United States by infecting civilian populations on the West Coast.

- for the methodical slaughter of civilians.

- and for much more.

In a perverse inversion, by forgetting our own history, we contribute to the Japanese amnesia, to the detriment of both our nations.

Unlike the Germans who acknowledged their guilt, the Japanese persist in the fiction that they did nothing wrong, that they were trapped by circumstances. This only forecloses any genuine prospect that the deep wounds suffered by both nations can be closed and healed.

One can only forgive by remembering. And to forget, is to risk repeating history.

The Japanese in a well-orchestrated political and public relations campaign have now proposed that the use of the term "V-J Day" be replaced by the more benign "Victory in the Pacific Day". How convenient.

This they claim will make the commemoration of the end of the war in the Pacific less "Japan Specific".

Maj Gen Charles W. Sweeney, USAF (Ret)

May 11, 1995

**Editor's Note:** Sweeney's remarks are as relevant today as in 1995.

Today the issue of Japanese re-armament is frightening with imminent return to its Imperial policies. The heightened collaboration between the US and Japanese military is in contradiction to "Peace".

