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**Excerpt from *The Ultimate Weapon:
The Race to Develop the Atomic Bomb* by Edward T. Sullivan**

Weapons of Mass Destruction

"My God, what have we done?"
-Captain Robert Lewis, *Enola Gay* co-pilot-

A film crew surrounded Colonel Paul W. Tibbetts as he stepped from the truck onto the runway. He was warned there would be "a little publicity," but all the cameras and lights made the scene look more like an epic Hollywood production. Awed by the circus-like atmosphere, the *Enola Gay* B-29 bomber crew found themselves being treated like movie stars. The situation was all the more surreal given that the *Enola Gay* was taking part in one of best kept secrets in military history. The crew knew the mission they were flying this morning was unlike any other they had undertaken. Two days before at a briefing, Navy Captain William Parsons explained: "The bomb you are about to drop is something new in the history of warfare. It is the most destructive weapon ever produced. We think it will knock out almost everything within a three-mile area." What the *Enola Gay* crew did that day would forever change the nature of warfare. When the publicity shoot finished, the crew went to work prepping the bomber for takeoff.

Enola Gay and two escort planes departed from the small Pacific island of Tinian at 2:45 A.M. local time on Monday, August 6, 1945. On board the *Enola Gay* was "Little Boy," a uranium-fueled atomic bomb. The target was Hiroshima, a city in Japan home to approximately 320,000 people.

The weather was perfect. By 8:13 A.M., when Japan's Chugko Regional Army issued the alert that three large enemy planes were spotted heading west from Saijo, *Enola Gay*

had a clear straight attack run of approximately four miles. At 8:15 A.M., from an altitude of 31,600 feet, Major Tom Ferebee pressed a switch to release "Little Boy" and watched it fall toward Hiroshima. Less than sixty seconds later, there was a blinding flash of light that grew into a purple fireball. Two shock waves hit the plane and a massive cloud, rolled up more than 40,000 feet high forming a giant mushroom. The two escort bombers snapped photographs as they and *Enola Gay* flew back to Tinian. The planes did not lose sight of the enormous atomic mushroom cloud until they were 363 miles away. Sergeant Bob Caron, *Enola Gay's* tail gunner, was the only crewmember looking directly at the bomb when it exploded.

A column of smoke is rising fast. It has a fiery red core. A bubbling mass, purple gray in color with that red core. It's all turbulent. Fires are springing up everywhere, like flames shooting out of a huge bed of coals. I am starting to count the fires. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten . . . it's impossible. There are too many to count. Here it comes, the mushroom shape . . . It's coming this way. It's like a mass of bubbling molasses. The mushroom is spreading out. It's maybe a mile or two wide and a half mile high. It's growing up and up and up. It's nearly level with us and climbing. It's very black, but there is a purplish tint to the cloud. The base of the mushroom cloud looks like a heavy undercast that is shot through with flames. The city must be below that. The flames and smoke are billowing out, whirling out into the foothills. The hills are disappearing under the smoke.

On the ground, a schoolboy named Shintaro Fukuhara was watching his little brother try to catch a red dragonfly when he was blinded by a flash of light. His body burned as if it had been thrown into a furnace. Blood poured from deep cuts on five shivering schoolboys. Their skin turned deep red, the color of cooked lobsters.

Colonel Tibbetts radioed Tinian: "Mission successful."

The destructive power of "Little Boy" was stunning. Everything within two square miles of ground zero was cremated. More than ninety-six percent of the buildings in Hiroshima were either destroyed or heavily damaged. The Japanese estimated that 71,000

people, the majority of them civilians, were dead or missing. Sixty-eight thousand were injured. Thousands more died a short time later from radiation poisoning.

Three days following the bombing of Hiroshima, on August 9, 1945, the United States executed an equally devastating nuclear attack city of Nagasaki. The B-29 bomber *Bock's Car* dropped plutonium-fueled "Fat Man" atomic bomb leaving the city in ruins and killing more than 73,000 people. Thousands more died in the years following the attack from radiation poisoning. It was the second and last time an atomic bomb, the most destructive weapons ever used, was unleashed against an enemy in warfare.

The purpose of dropping the bombs was to bring to a swift end the bloodiest and most destructive conflict of the twentieth century, World War II. The plan worked. On August 15, 1945, Emperor Hirohito announced the unconditional surrender of Japan. World War II was over.

The creation of the atomic bomb was the culmination of an extraordinary three-year race against Germany involving more than 100,000 civilian and military personnel who worked seven days a week around the clock in an environment shrouded in intense secrecy and tight security. Known as the Manhattan Project, this effort paved the way for the future development of even more powerful nuclear weapons like the hydrogen bomb with the ability to completely destroy the world and everyone and everything living in it.

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