The Bombing of Hiroshima, 1945

The United States concealed its project to develop an atomic bomb under the name “Manhattan Project”. It carried out the first successful explosion on July 16, 1945, in a deserted area near Alamagordo, New Mexico. This was used as a test of the atomic bomb.

On August 6, at 2:45 AM local time, the Enola Gay (named after the pilot’s mother), a B-29 bomber loaded with an atomic bomb, took off from the US air base on Tinian Island in the western Pacific. Six and a half hours later, at 8:15 AM Japan time, the bomb was dropped. It exploded a minute later over central Hiroshima.

The Hiroshima bomb, nicknamed “Little Boy”, killed 140,000 people, or roughly half the city. Three days later, a second atomic bomb, nicknamed “Fat Man”, was detonated over Nagasaki, killing 70,000.

An atomic bomb discharges three deadly forces: heat, blast, and radiation. In the months after the bombings, survivors had to deal not only with the burns from the heat and wounds from the blast, but also the effects of radiation exposure: fatigue, headaches, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, abnormally low white blood count, anemia, and loss of hair. Prolonged effects of exposure included keloids (massive scar tissue on burned areas), leukemia, and other cancers.

August 6, 1945 - the sun rose into a clear blue sky over the city of Hiroshima, Japan promising a warm and pleasant day. Nothing in the day’s dawning indicated that this day would be any different from the ones before it. But this day would be different, very different. This day would change the world. On this day a single bomb dropped by a single airplane destroyed the city, leading to the end of World War II and introducing mankind to the Atomic Age.

Dr. Michihiko Hachiya lived thorough that day and kept a diary of his experience. He served as Director of the Hiroshima Communications Hospital and lived near the hospital approximately a mile from the explosion’s epicenter. His diary was published in English in 1955

Suddenly, a strong flash of light...

"The hour was early; the morning still, warm, and beautiful. Shimmering leaves, reflecting sunlight from a cloudless sky, made a pleasant contrast with shadows in my garden as I gazed absently through wide-flung doors opening to the south."

Clad in drawers and undershirt, I was sprawled on the living room floor exhausted because I had just spent a sleepless night on duty as an air warden in my hospital.

Suddenly, a strong flash of light startled me - and then another. So well does one recall little things that I remember vividly how a stone lantern in the garden became brilliantly lit and I debated whether this light was caused by sparks from a passing trolley.

Garden shadows disappeared. The view where a moment before had been so bright and sunny was now dark and hazy. Approximately 80,000 people lost their lives in the blast. The fire bombing on Tokyo took a greater toll, but the devastation at Hiroshima was the result of one bomb and one plane.
Through swirling dust I could barely discern a wooden column that had supported one corner of my house. It was leaning crazily and the roof sagged dangerously.

Moving instinctively, I tried to escape, but rubble and fallen timbers barred the way. By picking my way cautiously I managed to reach the roka [an outside hallway] and stepped down into my garden. A profound weakness overcame me, so I stopped to regain my strength. To my surprise I discovered that I was completely naked. How odd! Where were my drawers and undershirt?

What had happened?

All over the right side of my body I was cut and bleeding. A large splinter was protruding from a mangled wound in my thigh, and something warm trickled into my mouth. My check was torn, I discovered as I felt it gingerly, with the lower lip laid wide open. Embedded in my neck was a sizable fragment of glass which I matter-of-factly dislodged, and with the detachment of one stunned and shocked I studied it and my blood-stained hand.

Where was my wife?

Suddenly thoroughly alarmed, I began to yell for her: 'Yaeko-san! Yaeko-san! Where are you?' Blood began to spurt. Had my carotid artery been cut? Would I bleed to death? Frightened and irrational, I called out again 'It's a five-hundred-ton bomb! Yaeko-san, where are you? A five-hundred-ton bomb has fallen!'

Yaeko-san, pale and frightened, her clothes torn and blood stained, emerged from the ruins of our house holding her elbow. Seeing her, I was reassured. My own panic calmed, I tried to reassure her.

'We'll be all right,' I exclaimed. 'Only let's get out of here as fast as we can.'

She nodded, and I motioned for her to follow me."

It was all a nightmare...

Dr. Hachiya and his wife make their way to the street. As the homes around them collapse, they realize they must move on, and begin their journey to the hospital a few hundred yards away.

"We started out, but after twenty or thirty steps I had to stop. My breath became short, my heart pounded, and my legs gave way under me. An overpowering thirst seized me and I begged Yaeko-san to find me some water. But there was no water to be found. After a little my strength somewhat returned and we were able to go on.

I was still naked, and although I did not feel the least bit of shame, I was disturbed to realize that modesty had deserted me. On rounding a corner we came upon a soldier standing idly in the street. He had a towel draped across his shoulder, and I asked if he would give it to me to cover my nakedness. The soldier surrendered the towel quite willingly but said not a word. A little later I lost the towel, and Yaeko-san took off her apron and tied it around my loins.

Our progress towards the hospital was interminably slow, until finally, my legs, stiff from drying blood, refused to carry me farther. The strength, even the will, to go on deserted
me, so I told my wife, who was almost as badly hurt as I, to go on alone. This she objected
to, but there was no choice. She had to go ahead and try to find someone to come back for
me.

Yaeko-san looked into my face for a moment, and then, without saying a word, turned away
and began running towards the hospital. Once, she looked back and waved and in a
moment she was swallowed up in the gloom. It was quite dark now, and with my wife gone,
a feeling of dreadful loneliness overcame me.

I must have gone out of my head lying there in the road
because the next thing I recall was discovering that the clot
on my thigh had been dislodged and blood was again
spurting from the wound.

I pressed my hand to the bleeding area and after a while the bleeding stopped and I felt
better

Could I go on?

I tried. It was all a nightmare - my wounds, the darkness, the road ahead. My movements
were ever so slow; only my mind was running at top speed.

In time I came to an open space where the houses had been removed to make a fire lane.
Through the dim light I could make out ahead of me the hazy outlines of the
Communications Bureau's big concrete building, and beyond it the hospital. My spirits rose
because I knew that now someone would find me; and if I should die, at least my body
would be found. I paused to rest. Gradually things around me came into focus. There were
the shadowy forms of people, some of whom looked like walking ghosts. Others moved as
though in pain, like scarecrows, their arms held out from their bodies with forearms and
hands dangling. These people puzzled me until I suddenly realized that they had been
burned and were holding their arms out to prevent the painful friction of raw surfaces
rubbing together. A naked woman carrying a naked baby came into view. I averted my
gaze. Perhaps they had been in the bath. But then I saw a naked man, and it occurred to
me that, like myself, some strange thing had deprived them of their clothes. An old woman
lay near me with an expression of suffering on her face; but she made no sound. Indeed,
one thing was common to everyone I saw - complete silence.

All who could were moving in the direction of the hospital. I joined in the dismal parade
when my strength was somewhat recovered, and at last reached the gates of the
Communications Bureau."

References:
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An atomic bomb releases three deadly forces: heat, blast, and radiation. In the months after the bombings, survivors had to deal not only with the burns from the heat and wounds from the blast, but also the effects of radiation exposure: fatigue, headaches, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, abnormally low white blood count, anemia, and loss of hair. Prolonged effects of exposure included leukemia and other cancers.

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Moving without thinking, I tried to escape, but rubble and fallen timbers blocked the way. By picking my way cautiously I managed to reach the roka [an outside hallway] and stepped down into my garden. A profound weakness overcame me, so I stopped to regain my strength. To my surprise I discovered that I was completely naked. How odd! Where were my pants and undershirt?

What had happened?

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I was still naked, and although I did not feel the least bit of shame, I was disturbed to realize that I did not care that I was naked. After turning a corner we saw a soldier standing in the street. He had a towel draped across his shoulder, and I asked if he would give it to me to cover my nakedness. The soldier gave me the towel quite willingly but said not a word. A little later I lost the towel, and Yaeko-san took off her apron and tied it around my private area.
Our progress towards the hospital was very slow, until finally, my legs, stiff from drying blood, refused to carry me farther. The strength to go on deserted me, so I told my wife, who was almost as badly hurt as I, to go on alone. This she did not want to do, but there was no choice. She had to go ahead and try to find someone to come back for me.

Yaeko-san looked into my face for a moment, and then, without saying a word, turned away and began running towards the hospital. Once, she looked back and waved and in a moment she was swallowed up in the gloom. It was quite dark now, and with my wife gone, I began to feel very lonely.

I must have gone out of my head lying there in the road because the next thing I remember was discovering that the wound on my thigh had been opened and blood was again spurting from the wound.

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Could I go on?

I tried. It was all a nightmare - my wounds, the darkness, the road ahead. My movements were ever so slow; only my mind was running at top speed.

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All who could were moving in the direction of the hospital. I joined in the dismal parade when my strength was somewhat recovered, and at last reached the gates of the Communications Bureau.

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Wearing pants and an undershirt, I was lying on the living room floor because I was so tired from working at the hospital all night.

Suddenly, a strong flash of light scared me - and then another. I thought the light was caused by sparks from a passing car.

The sky was now dark and hazy. Through dust I could barely make out a wall that had supported one comer of my house. It was leaning crazily and the roof hung off.

Moving without thinking, I tried to escape, but rubble blocked the way. By walking very carefully, I was able to get outside and stepped down into my garden. I began to feel very, very tried. To my surprise I discovered that I was completely naked. How weird! Where were my pants and undershirt?

What had happened?
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**It was all a nightmare...**

*Dr. Hachiya and his wife make their way to the street. As the homes around them fall down, they realize they must move on and they start walking to the hospital.*

"We started out, but after twenty or thirty steps I had to stop. I was just too tired and thirsty to keep walking.

I was still naked but I didn't care. After turning a corner we saw a soldier standing in the street. He had a towel, and I asked if he would give it to me to cover my nakedness. The soldier gave me the towel but said not a word.

We were walking very slowly to the hospital. Finally, my legs began to hurt too much to keep walking. I told my wife to go on without me. She didn't want to, but finally she agreed. She would send someone back for me.

Yaeko-san looked into my face for a moment, and then turned away and began running towards the hospital. Once, she looked back and waved and in a moment she was swallowed up in the gloom. It was quite dark now, and with my wife gone, I began to feel very lonely.

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All who could were moving in the direction of the hospital. I joined in the sad parade when I felt stronger, and at last reached the gates of the hospital."
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