

After 6 long years of fighting World War II was slowly ending but Japan would not surrender under any circumstances. Japan's no surrender policy was evident throughout the war and by the time it was the last nation left standing against the Allied Forces, but the Japanese still wouldn't give in. This prompted America to finally close off this historical conflict with a weapon never seen before. On August 6th, 1945, at 8:15am, during World War II, an American B-29 bomber named Enola Gray flew over the Japanese city of Hiroshima and dropped Little Boy, the world's first nuclear bomb. On detonating, the explosion killed roughly 80,000 people with many more dying later due to radiation poisoning. This sent shockwaves throughout the world. America dropped a second atomic bomb on August 9th at 11:02am. Unlike Little Boy, which was a uranium bomb weighing nearly 4 tons, this bomb, named Fat Man, was a plutonium bomb that was bigger and longer weighing around 4.5 tons. This time it was dropped over the Japanese city of Nagasaki from a B-29 named Bockscar. Despite this bomb being larger, on impact only 40,000 people died. In total, an estimated 150,000-246,000 Japanese civilians died from the impact and effects of the atomic bombings. The massive death toll and destruction in Japan resulted in Emperor Hirohito announcing via radio Japan's surrender on August 15th 1945, which was eventually signed in writing on September 2nd 1945 aboard the USS Missouri, bringing an end to World War II.

The Battle of Okinawa was a military cause of the nuclear bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Fought between the 1st of April to June 22nd 1945, the Battle of Okinawa, was the last major fight and one of the bloodiest in World War II. After America's island-hopping campaign, Okinawa was the last island standing in their way of reaching Japan's shores for a final invasion. Capturing Okinawa would have provided Allied forces with a critical base of operations for the final invasion of Japan. Over the three months that the battle transpired, American forces struggled to make any ground with heavy rain and strong Japanese resistance combatting them every day. The conflict came to an end when Japanese General Ushijima and his Chief of Staff General Isamu Cho committed Seppuku (ritual suicide) as they had realised further fighting would be inconclusive, their deaths showing America that the Japanese would rather die than surrender. The battle was costly for both sides with over ten thousand American soldiers and over one hundred thousand Japanese soldiers dying, with many Okinawan civilians being caught in the crossfire or encouraged to commit suicide rather than be taken by the Americans. After the Allied Forces' high-cost win on Okinawa, they soon realised that a direct invasion of Japan was not worthwhile. On the mainland, over 2 million Japanese soldiers were preparing for them, and they would fight to their death. Allied forces estimated that too many troops would be fatally killed or injured if conventional war was to continue. After Roosevelt's death, Harry Truman became president. Upon receiving this role, he learnt about the Manhattan project. On July 16th, 1945, the Trinity test (the first ever detonation of a nuclear weapon) occurred and was deemed successful. Truman was informed. This led to President Truman's final decision that the bomb was a necessary and effective choice to bring a quick end to the Pacific war without risking America's military. If American soldiers were met with this much resistance on small islands such as Okinawa and Iwo Jima, a full scale invasion of Japan would be very costly. The Battle of Okinawa was a turning point that significantly persuaded America to use nuclear weapons. It was proof that Japan was willing to fight to the end and wouldn't surrender regardless of the cost. This made American leaders fear a mainland invasion of Japan as too much would be lost on both sides as a result. Therefore, the battle was not just a military conflict but played a direct role in the ultimate decision to end the war using the atomic bomb.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour was a cause of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The attack on Pearl Harbor took place on December 7th, 7:55am, 1941, and was one of the most important events in World War II. A Japanese fleet consisting of hundreds of planes, 29 ships, and 5 submarines launched a surprise attack on the United States naval fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor in Oahu, Hawaii. Over 2,400 American soldiers were killed, and numerous ships and aircraft were severely damaged or sunk. The damage and lives lost at this event led to America joining the Allied powers in World War II. US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Day of Infamy" speech describes the attack as "a date which will live in infamy" showing how the attack was perceived as a deliberate strike at America's military and that retaliation was in order. This speech not only expressed the outrage that was felt across America but also made entering the war a necessity for America. By 1945 the memory of Pearl Harbor and the "Day of Infamy" speech still resonated with America and shaped the US decision to bring the war to a quick end. Once the atomic bomb was ready for deployment it was viewed as a way to avoid a costly invasion and as retribution for the attack on Pearl Harbor.

US nuclear testing in the Pacific was a consequence of the nuclear bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Between 1946 to 1962, the US began testing nuclear weapons in the Pacific. The US sought to expand their nuclear weaponry unintentionally, starting an era known as the Nuclear Arms Race against the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Acknowledged as the Pacific Proving Grounds, this was the area where nuclear bombs were dropped, most of the locations being amongst the Marshall Islands. Various operations occurred during this time but the main two were known as Operation Crossroads (the beginning of the nuclear testing in 1946) and Operation Castle (a series of huge bomb tests in 1954). A Senior Navy Officer named Ben Wyatt travelled to Bikini Atoll (an atoll amongst the islands) in 1946 on behalf of the US Army and told the 167 populace they were to leave the island "for the good of mankind". The result of the nuclear testing left local populations devastated, forced to relocate once they returned home due to the damage caused, exposed to radiation, and left with long term health and environmental damage. The US justified this by stating that the tests were necessary for national security.

The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki proved to the world the destructive power that the atomic bomb holds. This sparked the Cold War and the Nuclear Arms race between the USA and the USSR with both sides trying to "out power" the other. After sufficient testing had been done, both countries had the power to severely attack the other but neither side ever did. This is because of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). If one side were to attack, the other would simply fire back with the same amount of power or possibly even more, resulting in both sides being mutually destroyed (hence the name). The damage that occurred in Japan as a result of the nuclear bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki halted either side from attacking as it showed too much damage would transpire from another nuclear attack.

The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were significant to many New Zealanders particularly the military unit known as the J Force (Japan Force). This was a group of just over 4000 New Zealand soldiers who were sent to occupy Japan on March 19th, 1946, seven months after Japan's surrender in WWII. Over a period of two years (1946-1948), over 12,000 New Zealand soldiers served in the J Force and were stationed in or near areas affected by the bombings. Initially, many in New Zealand saw the bombs as a necessary way

to end the war swiftly. However, that changed once they returned home and shared what they had witnessed, slowly altering the public's attitude towards nuclear weapons. It affected J Force soldiers deeply because they observed the human cost and infrastructural damage caused by the bombs. They witnessed things such as radiation sickness, destroyed cities, and traumatised civilians firsthand. Over time, the importance of the bombings to New Zealanders shifted from being a harbinger of peace due to the bombs swift end to the war, to a strong reminder of the dangers of nuclear weapons. This shift helped New Zealand grasp its anti-nuclear identity, which eventually resulted in the country declaring itself nuclear free in 1987. The event continues to effect New Zealanders today, not only because of our relationship to Japan as a key trading partner and ally, but also because of the country's continued commitment to nuclear disarmament and peace.