

Conclusion of the War

by Jay M. Jones

Seventy-five years ago World War II concluded following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. This is the concluding article in a series highlighting contributions of people from Iron County to the war effort.

Following a long and difficult victory at Okinawa in June of 1945, the United States military forces began preparations for an invasion of Kyushu Island, one of the main islands of Japan.

The battle of Okinawa had cost over 12,000 American lives and 50,000 wounded in 3 months of bitter combat. Japanese losses included an estimated 150,000 lives lost, including many civilians.

Based on the bitter experience at Okinawa, the invasion of the Japanese homeland, if carried out to completion, was projected to cost over 1,000,000 American casualties plus millions of Japanese military and civilian deaths.

The governments of the United States, Great Britain, and China issued a formal warning to Japan, known as the Potsdam declaration, on July 26, 1945. The bottom line: "We call upon the government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces, and to provide proper and adequate assurances of their good faith in such action. The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction."

Japan rejected this ultimatum four days later. That set in motion the final phase for the delivery of a top secret weapon, one that would forever change war and peace and international relations.

During the war years, the United States employed thousands of scientists, technicians, and support staff to work on the development of an atomic bomb in the Manhattan Project. One of the scientists recruited for this work was Reuben Jones, a Cedar City native who had received bachelors and masters degrees in chemistry from the University of Utah and a PhD in chemistry from Iowa State University.

In addition to developing the bomb, transporting and arming the bomb was a challenge.

Corporal Larry Adams of Parowan was a part of the 509th Composite Group that handled the atomic bombs and delivered them to the targets. In total, the 509th came to include 225 officers and 1,542 men. They received specialized training in Wendover, Utah. Larry was a member of a ground crew of the 390th Air Group, which loaded the weapons onto the planes.

Following the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan surrendered and World War II was over.

According to Victor Davis Hanson, nearly 60 million people died as a result of the hostilities of this war. About eighty percent of the fatalities were inflicted by the losing Axis powers, the large majority of whom were unarmed civilians. Japan was responsible for an estimated 15 million civilian deaths in China, the Philippines, Indochina, Indonesia and Korea.

The human costs of the war were staggering. Many local families lost sons, fathers, husbands or brothers. Wounds were sustained that never fully healed. Emotional scars caused suffering for some veterans and their families for decades.

One local World War II veteran reflected that after the war, he was optimistic that the world would enter an enlightened period, led by America's great educational institutions. He believed that the massive suffering and destruction due to war would become a thing of the past. Years later he commented that his optimism had not been supported by reality.

It may be that ordinary people understand the keys to world peace better than the elite.

Iron County soldiers and citizens supplied their share of sacrifice, work, suffering and dedication toward achieving victory over some forms of tyranny which terrorized the world during World War II. Tyranny still exists, and it will take continued vigilance and sacrifice to successfully emerge from today's perils. Good examples from the past can serve as guides to help us navigate through our present dangers.



Manila American Cemetery, location of 17,184 graves of World War II dead. Memorial tablets contain names of an additional 36,286 soldiers missing in action. Wikimedia photo.