

(Up in the air, the B-29's co-pilot scribbled in his log:

"The flash was terrific. About 25 seconds after the flash we felt two very distinct slaps on the ship. We then turned the ship so that we could observe the results, and there in front of our eyes was without a doubt the greatest explosion man has ever witnessed: the city was nine-tenths covered with smoke of a boiling nature, which seemed to indicate buildings blowing up, and a large column of white cloud which in less than three minutes reached 30,000 feet and then went to at least 50 - 60,000 feet. I am certain the entire crew felt that this experience was more terrifying than any human being had ever thought possible. It seemed impossible to comprehend. Just how many Japanese did we kill? I honestly have the feeling of groping for words to explain this, or I might say Oh God! What have we done? If I live a hundred years, I'll never quite get these few minutes out of my mind.")

According to a report written by John Hersey, out of 150 doctors in the city, 65 were dead. Of 1,780 nurses, 1,654 were so badly burned, they were helpless or were dead. In a large Red Cross hospital, only 6 out of 30 doctors were able to help. And, out of 200 nurses there, only 10 nurses were available to render aid. The only doctor at the Red Cross hospital that was unhurt was a Dr. Sasaki. Many of the sick showed symptoms of overdoses of x-rays. Many were given extract blood transfusions and vitamins, especially B1 that helped. When the allied armies came in after the surrender, they found that plasma and penicillin to be very effective.

Rev. John A. Siemes, professor of philosophy at Sophia University in Tokyo and his students left Tokyo for the safety at that time of a Jesuit Novitiate, Hiroshima. It was located about 2 1/2 miles from the epicenter from the bomb explosion. His most famous account is found in THE ATOMIC BOMBINGS OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI assembled under the Manhattan Engineer District. One of his earliest information pieces appeared in the magazine *Jesuit Missions*, March 1946, vol 20, #2. He resided in a novitiate in a suburb called Nagat-suka, halfway up a side of a mountain overlooking the valley which stretched down to the sea. On my web site is his entire interview as appeared in a special report. Below is an excerpt in PDF format for the benefit of your listeners. This is a special report, condensed from the original of 1946 issued by the Manhattan engineer District, however, it begins with 2 paragraphs from the *Jesuit Missions*.

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT: THE ATOMIC BOMBINGS OF HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI)

by The Manhattan Engineer District, June 29, 1946

Hiroshima—August 6th, 1945

by Father John A. Siemes, professor of modern philosophy at Tokyo's Catholic University

“Up to August 6th, occasional bombs, which did no great damage, had fallen on Hiroshima. Many cities roundabout, one after the other, were destroyed, but Hiroshima itself remained protected. There were almost daily observation planes over the city but none of them dropped a bomb. The citizens wondered why they alone had remained undisturbed for so long a time. There were fantastic rumors that the enemy had something special in mind for this city, but no one dreamed that the end would come in such a fashion as on the morning of August 6th.

“August 6th began in a bright, clear, summer morning. About seven o'clock, there was an air raid alarm which we had heard almost every day and a few planes appeared over the city. No one paid any attention and at about eight o'clock, the all-clear was sounded. I am sitting in my room at the Novitiate of the Society of Jesus in Nagatsuke; during the past half year, the philosophical and theological section of our Mission had been evacuated to this place from Tokyo. The Novitiate is situated approximately two kilometers from Hiroshima, half way up the side of a mountain, overlooking the bright valley which stretches down to the sea. From my window, I have a wonderful view down the valley to the edge of the city.

“Suddenly, the time is approximately 8:14, the whole valley is filled by a garish light which resembles the magnesium light used in photography, and I am conscious of a wave of heat. I jump to the window to find out the cause of this remarkable phenomenon, but I see nothing more than that brilliant yellow light. As I make for the door, it doesn't occur to me that the light might have something to do with enemy planes. On the way from the window, I hear a moderately loud explosion which seems to come from a distance and, at the same time, the windows are broken in with a loud crash. There has been an interval of perhaps ten seconds since the flash of light. I am sprayed by fragments of glass.

The entire window frame has been forced into the room. I realize now that a bomb has burst and I am under the impression that it exploded directly over our house or in the immediate vicinity.

“I am bleeding from cuts about the hands and head. I attempt to get out of the door. It has been forced outwards by the air pressure and has become jammed. I force an opening in the door by means of repeated blows with my hands and feet and come to a broad hallway from which open the various rooms.

Everything is in a state of confusion. All windows are broken and all the doors are forced inwards. The bookshelves in the hallway have tumbled down. I do not note a second explosion and the fliers seem to have gone on. Most of my colleagues have been injured by fragments of glass..

“The blast of air had penetrated the entire house from the southeast, but the house still stands.

“Down in the valley, perhaps one kilometer toward the city from us, several peasant homes are on fire and the woods on the opposite side of the valley are aflame. A few of us go over to help control the flames. While we are attempting to put things in order, a storm comes up and it begins to rain. Over the city, clouds of smoke are rising and I hear a few slight explosions. I come to the conclusion that an incendiary bomb with an especially strong explosive action has gone off down in the valley. A few of us saw three planes at great altitude over the city at the time of the explosion. I, myself, saw no aircraft whatsoever.

“Perhaps a half-hour after the explosion, a procession of people begins to stream up the valley from the city. The crowd thickens continuously. A few come up the road to our house. We give them first aid and bring them into the chapel, which we have in the meantime cleaned and cleared of wreckage, and put them to rest on the straw mats which constitute the floor of Japanese houses. A few display horrible wounds of the extremities and back.

“Toward noon, our large chapel and library are filled with the seriously injured. The procession of refugees from the city continues. Finally, about one o'clock, Father Kopp returns, together with the Sisters. Their house and the entire district where they live has burned to the ground. Father Kopp is bleeding about the

head and neck, and he has a large burn on the right palm. He was standing in front of the nunnery ready to go home. All of a sudden, he became aware of the light, felt the wave of heat and a large blister formed on his hand. The windows were torn out by the blast.

“Soon comes news that the entire city has been destroyed by the explosion and that it is on fire. What became of Father Superior and the three other Fathers who were at the center of the city at the Central Mission and Parish House? We had up to this time not given them a thought because we did not believe that the effects of the bomb encompassed the entire city.

“Father Stolte and Father Erlinghagen go down to the road which is still full of refugees and bring in the seriously injured who have sunken by the wayside, to the temporary aid station at the village school.

“Abandoned on the bridge, there stand with sunken heads a number of horses with large burns on their flanks. On the far side, the cement structure of the local hospital is the only building that remains standing. Its interior, however, has been burned out. It acts as a landmark to guide us on our way.

“At the far corner of the park, on the river bank itself, we at last come upon our colleagues. Father Schiffer is on the ground pale as a ghost. He has a deep incised wound behind the ear and has lost so much blood that we are concerned about his chances for survival. The Father Superior has suffered a deep wound of the lower leg. Father Cieslik and Father Kleinsorge have minor injuries but are completely exhausted.



Father Hugo Lassalle, S.J.
Superior of the Rectory
and Church



Father Hubert
Schiffer, S.J.



Father John (Johannes) A.
Schiffer, S.J.

“While they are eating the food that we have brought along, they tell us of their experiences. They were in their rooms at the Parish House—It was a quarter after eight, exactly the time when we had heard the explosion in Nagatsuke, when came the intense light and immediately thereafter the sound of breaking windows, walls and furniture. They were showered with glass splinters and fragments of wreckage. Father Schiffer was buried beneath a portion of a wall and suffered a severe head injury. The Father Superior received most of the splinters in his back and lower extremity from which he bled copiously. Everything was thrown about in the rooms themselves, but the wooden framework of the house remained intact.

“They had the same impression that we had in Nagatsuke: that the bomb had burst in their immediate vicinity. The Church, school, and all buildings in the immediate vicinity collapsed at once. Beneath the ruins of the school, the children cried for help. They were freed with great effort. Several others were also rescued from the ruins of nearby dwellings. Even the Father Superior and Father Schiffer despite their wounds, rendered aid to others and lost a great deal of blood in the process.

“In the meantime, fires which had begun some distance away are raging even closer, so that it becomes obvious that everything would soon burn down.

“The transportation of our own wounded is difficult. It is not possible to dress their wounds properly in the darkness, and they bleed again upon slight motion. As we carry them on the shaky litters in the dark over fallen trees of the park, they suffer unbearable pain as the result of the movement, and lose dangerously large quantities of blood. We were fortunate to have a rescuing angel who saved us - a Japanese Protestant pastor [Rev. Kiyoshi Tanimoto of the Hiroshima Methodist Church, according to John Hersey in a *New York Times* article] came by in a boat and insisted on taking our wounded upstream to safety. He has brought up a boat and offers to take our wounded to a place where progress is easier. First, we lower the litter containing Father Schiffer into the boat and two of us accompany him. We plan to bring the boat back for the Father Superior. The boat returns about one-half hour later and the pastor requests that several of us help in the rescue of two children whom he had seen in the river. We rescue them. They have severe burns. Soon they suffer chills and

die in the park.

“More than thirty hours had gone by until the first official rescue party had appeared on the scene. We find both children and take them out of the park: a six-year old boy who was uninjured, and a twelve-year old girl who had been burned about the head, hands and legs, and who had lain for thirty hours without care in the park. The left side of her face and the left eye were completely covered with blood and pus, so that we thought that she had lost the eye. When the wound was later washed, we noted that the eye was intact and that the lids had just become stuck together. On the way home, we took another group of three refugees with us. They first wanted to know, however, of what nationality we were. They, too, feared that we might be Americans who had parachuted in. When we arrived in Nagatsuka, it had just become dark.

“We took under our care fifty refugees who had lost everything. The majority of them were wounded and not a few had dangerous burns. Father Rektor treated the wounds as well as he could with the few medicaments that we could, with effort, gather up. He had to confine himself in general to cleansing the wounds of purulent material. Even those with the smaller burns are very weak and all suffered from diarrhea. In the farm houses in the vicinity, almost everywhere, there are also wounded. Father Rektor made daily rounds and acted in the capacity of a painstaking physician and was a great Samaritan. Our work was, in the eyes of the people, a greater boost for Christianity than all our work during the preceding long years.

“Three of the severely burned in our house died within the next few days. Suddenly the pulse and respirations ceased. It is certainly a sign of our good care that so few died. In the official aid stations and hospitals, a good third or half of those that had been brought in died. They lay about there almost without care, and a very high percentage succumbed. Everything was lacking: doctors, assistants, dressings, drugs, etc. In an aid station at a school at a nearby village, a group of soldiers for several days did nothing except to bring in and cremate the dead behind the school.

“During the next few days, funeral processions passed our house from morning to night, bringing the deceased to a small valley nearby. There, in six places, the

Father Wilhelm Kleinsorge, S.J.



dead were burned. People brought their own wood and themselves did the cremation. Father Luhmer and Father Laures found a dead man in a nearby house who had already become bloated and who emitted a frightful odor. They brought him to this valley and incinerated him themselves. Even late at night, the little valley was lit up by the funeral pyres.

“The magnitude of the disaster that befell Hiroshima on August 6th was only slowly pieced together in my mind. I lived through the catastrophe and saw it only in flashes, which only gradually were merged to give me a total picture. What actually happened simultaneously in the city as a whole is as follows: As a result of the explosion of the bomb at 8:15, almost the entire city was destroyed at a single blow. Only small outlying districts in the southern and eastern parts of the town escaped complete destruction. The bomb exploded over the center of the city. As a result of the blast, the small Japanese houses in a diameter of five kilometers, which compressed 99% of the city, collapsed or were blown up. Those who were in the houses were buried in the ruins. Those who were in the open sustained burns resulting from contact with the substance or rays emitted by the bomb. Where the substance struck in quantity, fires sprang up. These spread rapidly.

“The heat which rose from the center created a whirlwind which was effective in spreading fire throughout the whole city. Those who had been caught beneath the ruins and who could not be freed rapidly, and those who had been caught by the flames, became casualties. As much as six kilometers from the center of the explosion, all houses were damaged and many collapsed and caught fire.

“How many people were a sacrifice to this bomb? Those who had lived through the catastrophe placed the number of dead at at least 100,000. Hiroshima had a population of 400,000. Official statistics place the number who had died at 70,000 up to September 1st, not counting the missing, and 130,000 wounded, among them 43,500 severely wounded. Estimates made by ourselves on the basis of groups known to us show that the number of 100,000 dead is not too high. Near us there are two barracks, in each of which forty Korean workers lived. On the day of the explosion, they were laboring on the streets of Hiroshima. Four returned alive to one barracks and sixteen to the other. 600 students of the Protestant girls' school worked in a factory, from which only



thirty to forty returned.

Of the professors of the University, thirty-two were killed or severely injured.

Especially hard hit were the soldiers. The Pioneer Regiment was almost entirely wiped

out. The barracks were near the center of the explosion.

“The following anecdote indicates the spirit of the Japanese: A few days after the atomic bombing, the secretary of the University came to us asserting that the Japanese were ready to destroy San Francisco by means of an equally effective bomb. It is dubious that he himself believed what he told us. He merely wanted to impress upon us foreigners that the Japanese were capable of similar discoveries. In his nationalistic pride, he talked himself into believing this. The Japanese also intimated that the principle of the new bomb was a Japanese discovery. It was only lack of raw materials, they said, which prevented its construction. In the meantime, the Germans were said to have carried the discovery to a further stage and were about to initiate such bombing. The Americans were reputed to have learned the secret from the Germans, and they had then brought the bomb to a stage of industrial completion.

We have discussed among ourselves the ethics of the use of the bomb. Some consider it in the same category as poison gas and were against its use on a civil population. Others were of the view that in total war, as carried on in Japan, there was no difference between civilians and soldiers, and that the bomb itself was an effective force tending to end the bloodshed, warning Japan to surrender and thus to avoid total destruction. It seems logical to me that he who supports total war in principle cannot complain of war against civilians. The crux of the matter is whether total war in its present form is justifiable, even when it serves a just purpose. Does it not have material and spiritual evil as its consequences which far exceed whatever good that might result? When will our moralists give us a clear answer to this question?