Invasion of Nanking

In December of 1937, the Japanese Imperial Army marched into China's capital city of Nanking and proceeded to murder 300,000 out of 600,000 civilians and soldiers in the city. The six weeks of carnage would become known as the Rape of Nanking and represented the single worst atrocity during the World War II era in either the European or Pacific theaters of war.

The actual military invasion of Nanking was preceded by a tough battle at Shanghai that began in the summer of 1937. Chinese forces there put up surprisingly stiff resistance against the Japanese Army which had expected an easy victory in China. The Japanese had even bragged they would conquer all of China in just three months. The stubborn resistance by the Chinese troops upset that timetable, with the battle dragging on through the summer into late fall. This infuriated the Japanese and whetted their appetite for the revenge that was to follow at Nanking.

After finally defeating the Chinese at Shanghai in November, 50,000 Japanese soldiers then marched on toward Nanking. Unlike the troops at Shanghai, Chinese soldiers at Nanking were poorly fed and loosely organized. Although they greatly outnumbered the Japanese and had plenty of ammunition, they withered under the ferocity of the Japanese attack, then engaged in a chaotic retreat. After just four days of fighting, Japanese troops smashed into the city on December 13, 1937, with orders issued to "kill all captives."

Their first concern was to eliminate any threat from the 90,000 Chinese soldiers who surrendered. To the Japanese, surrender was an unthinkable act of cowardice and the ultimate violation of the rigid code of military honor drilled into them from childhood onward. Thus they looked upon Chinese POWs with utter contempt, viewing them as less than human, unworthy of life.

The elimination of the Chinese POWs began after they were transported by trucks to remote locations on the outskirts of Nanking. As soon as they were assembled, the savagery began, with young Japanese soldiers encouraged by their superiors to inflict maximum pain and suffering upon individual POWs as a way of toughening themselves up for future battles, and also to eradicate any civilized notions of mercy. Filmed footage and still photographs taken by the Japanese themselves document the brutality. Smiling soldiers can be seen conducting bayonet practice on live prisoners, decapitating them and displaying severed heads as souvenirs, and proudly standing among mutilated corpses. Some of the Chinese POWs were simply mowed down by machine-gun fire while others were tied-up, soaked with gasoline and burned alive.

After the destruction of the POWs, the soldiers turned their attention to the women of Nanking and an outright animalistic hunt ensued. Old women over the age of 70 as well as little girls under the age of 8 were dragged off to be sexually abused. More than 20,000 females (with some estimates as high as 80,000) were gang-raped by Japanese soldiers, then stabbed to death with bayonets or shot so they could never bear witness.

Throughout the city of Nanking, random acts of murder occurred as soldiers frequently fired their rifles into panicked crowds of civilians, killing indiscriminately. Other soldiers killed shopkeepers, looted their stores, then set the buildings on fire after locking people of all ages inside. They took pleasure in the extraordinary suffering that ensued as the people desperately tried to escape the flames by climbing onto rooftops or leaping down onto the street.
Invasion of Nanking

The incredible carnage - citywide burnings, stabbings, drownings, strangulations, rapes, thefts, and massive property destruction - continued unabated for about six weeks, from mid-December 1937 through the beginning of February 1938. Young or old, male or female, anyone could be shot on a whim by any Japanese soldier for any reason. Corpses could be seen everywhere throughout the city. The streets of Nanking were said to literally have run red with blood.

After this period of unprecedented violence, the Japanese eased off somewhat and settled in for the duration of the war. To pacify the population during the long occupation, highly addictive narcotics, including opium and heroin, were distributed by Japanese soldiers to the people of Nanking, regardless of age. An estimated 50,000 persons became addicted to heroin while many others lost themselves in the city's opium dens.

In addition, the notorious Comfort Women system was introduced which forced young Chinese women to become slave-prostitutes, existing solely for the sexual pleasure of Japanese soldiers.

News reports of the happenings in Nanking appeared in the official Japanese press and also in the West, as page-one reports in newspapers such as the New York Times. Japanese news reports reflected the militaristic mood of the country in which any victory by the Imperial Army resulting in further expansion of the Japanese empire was celebrated. Eyewitness reports by Japanese military correspondents concerning the sufferings of the people of Nanking also appeared. They reflected a mentality in which the brutal dominance of subjugated or so-called inferior peoples was considered just. Incredibly, one paper, the Japan Advertiser, actually published a running count of the heads severed by two officers involved in a decapitation contest, as if it was some kind of a sporting match.

In the United States, reports published in the New York Times, Reader's Digest and Time Magazine, were greeted with skepticism from the American public. The stories smuggled out of Nanking seemed almost too fantastic to be believed.

Overall, most Americans had only a passing knowledge or little interest in Asia. Political leaders in both America and Britain remained overwhelmingly focused on the situation in Europe where Adolf Hitler was rapidly re-ar ming Germany while at the same time expanding the borders of the Nazi Reich through devious political maneuvers.
The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima

At 2:45 a.m. on Monday, August 6, 1945, a B-29 bomber, the Enola Gay, took off from Tinian, a North Pacific island in the Marianas, 1,500 miles south of Japan. The twelve-man crew were on board to make sure this secret mission went smoothly. Colonel Paul Tibbets, the pilot, nicknamed the B-29 the "Enola Gay" after his mother. Just before take-off, the plane's nickname was painted on its side.

On a hook in the ceiling of the plane, hung the ten-foot atomic bomb, "Little Boy." Navy Captain William S. Parsons ("Deak"), chief of the Ordnance Division in the "Manhattan Project," was the Enola Gay's weaponeer. Since Parsons had been instrumental in the development of the bomb, he was now responsible for arming the bomb while in-flight. Approximately fifteen minutes into the flight (3:00 a.m.), Parsons began to arm the atomic bomb; it took him fifteen minutes.

"Little Boy" was created using uranium-235, a radioactive isotope of uranium. This uranium-235 atomic bomb, a product of $2 billion of research, had never been tested. Nor had any atomic bomb yet been dropped from a plane. Some scientists and politicians pushed for not warning Japan of the bombing in order to save face in case the bomb malfunctioned.

There had been four cities chosen as possible targets: Hiroshima, Kokura, Nagasaki, and Niigata (Kyoto was the first choice until it was removed from the list by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson). The cities were chosen because they had been relatively untouched during the war. The Target Committee wanted the first bomb to be "sufficiently spectacular for the importance of the weapon to be internationally recognized when publicity on it was released."

On August 6, 1945, the first choice target, Hiroshima, was having clear weather. At 8:15 a.m. (local time), the Enola Gay's door sprang open and dropped "Little Boy." The bomb exploded 1,900 feet above the city and only missed the target, the Aioi Bridge, by approximately 800 feet. Staff Sergeant George Caron, the tail gunner, described what he saw: "The mushroom cloud itself was a spectacular sight, a bubbling mass of purple-gray smoke and you could see it had a red core in it and everything was burning inside... It looked like lava or molasses covering a whole city..." The cloud is estimated to have reached a height of 40,000 feet.

Captain Robert Lewis, the co-pilot, stated, "Where we had seen a clear city two minutes before, we could no longer see the city. We could see smoke and fires creeping up the sides of the mountains." Two-thirds of Hiroshima was destroyed. Within three miles of the explosion, 60,000 of the 90,000 buildings were demolished. Clay roof tiles had melted together. Shadows had imprinted on buildings and other hard surfaces. Metal and stone had melted.

Unlike many other bombing raids, the goal for this raid had not been a military installation but rather an entire city. The atomic bomb that exploded over Hiroshima killed civilians and children in addition to soldiers. Hiroshima's population has been estimated at 350,000; approximately 70,000 died immediately from the explosion and another 70,000 died from radiation within five years.

A survivor described the damage to people:
"The appearance of people was... well, they all had skin blackened by burns... They had no hair because their hair was burned, and at a glance you couldn't tell whether you were looking at..."
The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

them from in front or in back. . . . They held their arms bent [forward] like this . . . and their skin - not only on their hands, but on their faces and bodies too - hung down. . . . If there had been only one or two such people . . . perhaps I would not have had such a strong impression. But wherever I walked I met these people. . . . Many of them died along the road - I can still picture them in my mind -- like walking ghosts.

A dense column of smoke rises more than 60,000 feet into the air over the Japanese port of Nagasaki, the result of an atomic bomb, the second ever used in warfare, dropped on the industrial center. (August 9, 1945)

The Atomic Bombing of Nagasaki
While the people of Japan tried to comprehend the devastation in Hiroshima, the United States was preparing a second bombing mission. The second run was not delayed in order to give Japan time to surrender, but was waiting only for a sufficient amount of plutonium-239 for the atomic bomb. On August 9, 1945 only three days after the bombing of Hiroshima, another B-29, Bock's Car left Tinian at 3:49 a.m.

The first choice target for this bombing run had been Kokura. Since the haze over Kokura prevented the sighting of the bombing target, Bock's Car continued on to its second target. At 11:02 a.m., the atomic bomb, "Fat Man," was dropped over Nagasaki. The atomic bomb exploded 1,650 feet above the city.

Fujie Urata Matsumoto, a survivor, shares one scene:
"The pumpkin field in front of the house was blown clean. Nothing was left of the whole thick crop, except that in place of the pumpkins there was a woman's head. I looked at the face to see if I knew her. It was a woman of about forty. She must have been from another part of town -- I had never seen her around here. A gold tooth gleamed in the wide-open mouth. A handful of singed hair hung down from the left temple over her cheek, dangling in her mouth. Her eyelids were drawn up, showing black holes where the eyes had been burned out . . . She had probably looked square into the flash and gotten her eyeballs burned."

Approximately 40 percent of Nagasaki was destroyed. Luckily for many civilians living in Nagasaki, though this atomic bomb was considered much stronger than the one exploded over Hiroshima, the terrain of Nagasaki prevented the bomb from doing as much damage. Yet the decimation was still great. With a population of 270,000, approximately 70,000 people died by the end of the year.

"I saw the atom bomb. I was four then. I remember the cicadas chirping. The atom bomb was the last thing that happened in the war and no more bad things have happened since then, but I don't have my Mummy any more. So even if it isn't bad any more, I'm not happy."
--- Kayano Nagai, survivor
Holocaust

Holocaust was the systematic, state-sponsored murder of Jews and others by the Nazis during World War II (1939-1945). The Nazi dictator Adolf Hitler wanted to eliminate all Jews as part of his aim to conquer the world. By the end of the war, the Nazis had killed about 6 million Jewish men, women, and children—more than two-thirds of the Jews in Europe.

In addition to Jews, the Nazis systematically killed millions of other people whom Hitler regarded as racially inferior or politically dangerous. The largest groups included (1) Germans with physical handicaps or mental retardation, (2) Roma (sometimes called Gypsies), and (3) Slavs, particularly Poles and Soviet prisoners of war. Nazi victims also included many homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, priests and ministers, members of labor unions, and Communists and other political opponents. Historians estimate that perhaps as many as 11 million people were killed, including the Jews. Many of the Holocaust victims were killed in specially constructed gas chambers, and their bodies were then burned. The word holocaust means a sacrificial offering that is completely burned.

"The Final Solution." After World War II began in 1939, Germany's powerful war machine conquered country after country in Europe. Millions more Jews came under German control. The Nazis killed many of them and sent others to concentration camps. The Nazis also moved many Jews from towns and villages into city ghettos. They later sent these people, too, to concentration camps. Although many Jews thought the ghettos would last, the Nazis saw ghetto confinement as only a temporary measure. Sometime in early 1941, the Nazi leadership finalized the details of a policy decision labeled "The Final Solution of the Jewish Question." This policy called for the murder of every Jew—man, woman, and child—under German rule.

The slaughter began with Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941. Special squads of Hitler's SS (Schutzstaffel) troops accompanied advancing German forces. These killing squads, called Einsatzgruppen, rounded up Jews, Roma, and Soviet leaders, and shot them to death one by one. The face-to-face killing became difficult for the killers, and the Nazis soon sought a more impersonal and efficient method of genocide (extermination of an entire people). They began using sealed vans. The prisoners choked to death on exhaust fumes as the van traveled to a burial pit.

At the Wannsee Conference, held in Berlin in January 1942, Nazi leaders further systematized the killing. They decided that Jews throughout German-occupied territory would be evacuated to concentration camps in eastern Europe. These camps would become centers for slave labor and extermination.

The camps. The first Nazi concentration camps were organized in 1933, shortly after Hitler came to power. By the late 1930's, the facilities held tens of thousands of political prisoners arrested by the Nazis. In the early 1940's, several new camps were established, with specially constructed gas chambers disguised as showers. For the Jews who had been confined in ghettos, the next step was what the Nazis called deportation. The Nazis herded the Jews into railroad freight cars to be taken to the camps.

When the Jews arrived at a camp, an SS physician singled out the young and able-bodied. The others were sent directly to the gas chambers. The guards seized the belongings of those who were to die. As many as 2,000 prisoners were sent into the gas chambers at one time. SS
Holocaust

personnel poured containers of poison gas down an opening. Within 20 to 30 minutes, the new arrivals were dead. The guards shaved the heads of the corpses and removed any gold teeth from their mouths. Then they burned the bodies in crematoriums or open pits.

The able-bodied prisoners had their heads shaved and their belongings seized. Camp personnel tattooed a number on the arm of each person. From then on, the prisoners were identified by number instead of by name. These prisoners were forced to work long hours under cruel conditions. When they were too weak to work any longer, they too were killed or left to die. There were six death camps, all in German-occupied Poland—Auschwitz, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor, and Treblinka. Auschwitz was the largest and most notorious. It was a slave labor camp as well as a killing center. About 1 1/4 million people were murdered there.

Hundreds of other concentration camps operated in Germany and German-occupied territories during the war. None of these camps was established solely for killing, but the conditions in all of them were so harsh that hundreds of thousands of prisoners died of starvation and disease. In some camps, a number of inmates—many of them children—died after Nazi physicians performed cruel medical experiments on them.

In the last months of the war, the Allied forces, including American, British, and Soviet troops, swept through Europe. The Nazis hastened to empty some camps to remove witnesses to their cruelty. They crowded camp inmates into boxcars or forced the prisoners to walk to other camps behind the lines. The forced marches, made in winter with few provisions, claimed so many victims that they were known as death marches.

Resistance. During the Holocaust, the Nazis kept their actions as secret as possible, and they deceived their victims in many ways to prevent resistance. Initially, the Jews in the ghettos either were not aware of the slaughter planned for them or simply could not believe it was happening. Some tried to pacify the Nazis, hoping they would be left in peace. Others tried sabotage or escape.

Armed resistance was not the first response of the Jews. They tried to thwart the Nazis by nonviolent means. Also, it was difficult and dangerous for the Jews to obtain weapons. Little help was available to them. Anti-Semitism was widespread, and Jewish resistance did not have popular support. Jewish fighters could not disappear among the population because non-Jews might betray them. Jewish leaders in the ghettos knew that the Nazis could kill everyone in the ghetto in revenge for the actions of a few resisters. But many Jews who managed to escape the ghettos joined secret bands of fighters against the Nazis. And some non-Jewish individuals risked their lives to smuggle Jews to safety.

Some Jews in ghettos, slave labor camps, and death camps did fight. In 1943, for example, thousands of Jews revolted in the ghetto in Warsaw, Poland. Although the Jews were surrounded and poorly armed, they held out for about four weeks. But the Nazis either killed or sent to death camps all of the 60,000 Jews in the ghetto. In 1943, uprisings took place at the Treblinka and Sobibor death camps. In 1944, prisoners at Auschwitz revolted and set fire to a crematorium. A few prisoners escaped during each uprising, but most were killed. Such revolts were often acts of desperation. They erupted when the Jews understood Nazi intentions and had abandoned hope of surviving.
The Bataan Death March

The Battle of Bataan ended on April 9, 1942, when U.S. General Edward P. King surrendered to Japanese General Masaharu Homma. At that point 75,000 soldiers became Prisoners of War: about 12,000 Americans and 63,000 Filipinos. What followed was one of the worst atrocities in modern wartime history—the Bataan Death March. During the Battle of Bataan, the American and Filipino soldiers of General Douglas MacArthur’s United States Army Forces in the Far East (USAFFE) had held out for four months against the Imperial Japanese Army, while every other island and nation in the Pacific and Southeast Asia fell to the Japanese. By March 1942, Japan controlled all of the Western Pacific except the Philippines.

General MacArthur’s plan was to hold his ground on the Bataan Peninsula and Corregidor Island in the Philippines until the U.S. Navy could bring reinforcements and supplies from the United States. Once the reinforcements arrived, he planned to attack north from Bataan, defeat the Japanese Army, and push onward to the Japanese islands and victory. But with the U.S. Navy in shambles after the attack on Pearl Harbor, there were no ships capable of bringing the needed reinforcements to Bataan.

The Japanese Navy blockaded Bataan and nearby Corregidor, and prevented any food, ammunition or medicine from reaching the U.S. troops. For months the soldiers on Bataan lived on half rations in the hot, tropical jungle. Nevertheless, they fought back against Japanese attacks and defeated the Japanese Army at battles along the Bataan defense line and along the rugged coastline of the peninsula. But without supplies they could barely hold out. By the first of April, 1942, most of the starving men had lost as much as thirty percent of their body weight and they became so weak that they could barely lift their weapons. As medical supplies ran out, malaria, dysentery and other tropical diseases ravaged their ranks. 10,000 men were confined to the two open-air jungle hospitals for wounds and illnesses, and less than half of the remainder could be considered “combat effective”—defined as a man who could walk 100 yards without staggering and still have enough strength left to fire his weapon.

On April 3, 1942 the Japanese Army launched its final assault on Bataan. Although the starving American and Filipino soldiers fought as best they could, they were no match for the fresh troops the Japanese brought in for the attack. As General Homma’s army rolled back the front line on Bataan, General Edward King, the American field commander, made a fateful decision—on April 9 he surrendered rather than see any more of his starving, diseased men slaughtered by the advancing Japanese Army.

Once the surrender went into effect, the Japanese rounded up the American and Filipino soldiers and gathered them into groups of 100 on the only paved road that ran down the Bataan peninsula. The Japanese assigned four guards to each group. They lined the men up four abreast, and they began marching them north toward Camp O’Donnell in Tarlac Province, sixty-five miles away.
As the emaciated men proceeded north up the highway in the blistering heat, the Japanese guards summarily shot or bayoneted any man who fell, attempted to escape, or stopped to quench his thirst at a roadside spigot or puddle. The men were given little water or food for the entire length of the Bataan Death March, which took about five days for each group to complete. The guards chased off, bayonet ed or shot any Filipino civilian who tried to give water or bits of food to the passing lines of prisoners. At various points along the route of the March they singled out prisoners, sometimes in groups, tied them to trees or fences, and shot them to death as examples to the others. The Japanese guards killed between 7,000 and 10,000 men on the Death March—they kept no records and no one knows the exact number. If a man fell, it was certain death unless another could pick him up and support him.

When they got to their prison camp, Camp O’Donnell, conditions were even worse. Camp O’Donnell was a former Philippine Army camp designed to accommodate about 10,000 men. The Japanese crammed 60,000 survivors of the Death March into the camp. There was little running water, sparse food, no medical care, and only slit trenches along the sides of the camp for sanitation. The heat was intolerable, flies rose out of the latrines and covered the prisoner’s food, and malaria, dysentery, beriberi and a host of other diseases swept through the crowds of men. They began to die at the rate of four hundred per day. It got so bad that by July, 1942, the Japanese replaced the camp commander, moved the American prisoners to another camp, Cabanatuan, and decided to parole the Filipino prisoners.

From September through December 1942, the Japanese gradually paroled the Filipino soldiers to their families and to the mayors of their hometowns, who would be held personally responsible for each man’s conduct. To be paroled a soldier had to sign an oath that he would not participate in guerrilla activity, and he had to be well enough to walk. Anyone who was too sick to walk was simply held in camp until he either got well or died. By the time Camp O’Donnell closed in January 1943, after eight months of operation, 26,000 of the 50,000 Filipino Prisoners of War there had died.

The American prisoners fared no better. Conditions in Cabanatuan were marginally better than Camp O’Donnell, and the prisoner doctors were able to somewhat stem the disease and death rate. However, as U.S. forces pulled closer to the Philippines in 1944, the Japanese decided to evacuate the American prisoners to Japan and Manchuria, to use them as slave laborers in Japanese factories and coal mines. Thousands of men were crammed into the dark holds of cargo ships so tightly that the men could not sit or lay down. Again, food and water were scarce, sanitary facilities were virtually non-existent, and the heat in the closed holds of the ships was unbearable. Men suffocated to death standing up. In some cases, the guards would not even let the dead bodies be removed from the holds. The Japanese ships were unmarked and some of them were attacked by American planes and torpedoed by American submarines. Once they arrived at the slave-labor camps more of the men died of malnutrition and exposure. By the time Japan surrendered and the U.S. Army liberated the Bataan Prisoners of War, two-thirds of the American prisoners had died in Japanese custody.