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Leisure World man recalls first big blast

By Myra Neben
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"The scene of destruction, the awesome power of the atom bomb, the smell, it's all etched in my mind. I shall never forget it."

Seventy-three days after the first atom bomb was dropped on the city of Hiroshima in Japan, Park Dowd walked amidst the rubble of "the dead city."

Dowd, a Leisure World resident now, was then a member of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey team, charged with finding the actual center of the bomb drop, "called ground zero" and determining the amount of destruction caused.

Ground zero was not immediately visible, Dowd explained, since the bomb exploded above ground, therefore not creating a crater.

The beginning of the end

It began of course, with the beginning of World War 2. But, the actual events that led to President Truman making the final decision to drop the first A-Bomb began much later.

It was not until the April 12, 1945 death of President Roosevelt, that Vice President Harry Truman learned of the existence of the Manhattan Project and the A-Bomb, Dowd said.

Eighteen days later, Hitler committed
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DEATH AND DESTRUCTION—Taken by the Japanese just three weeks after the bombing of Nagasaki, this picture shows the view of the Nagasaki shipbuilding yard belonging to Mitsubishi Heavy Industry Co. The picture was taken from the ruins of the medical college. The death toll in

Nagasaki was less than in Hiroshima, where the first atomic bomb was dropped on a populated area two days before, because the bombing crew missed the target and dropped the bomb on a relatively low populated area.

Bomb observer calls for peace in speech to Kiwanis Club

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suicide and eight days after that Germany surrendered. Stalin of Russia said he would soon enter the war against Japan and there was fear Russia would lay claim to Manchuria, Korea and parts of Japan. If the war could be ended quickly, Russia's chances to claim these areas would be lost, Dowd said.

In July 1945 a test bomb was exploded in New Mexico, and Truman headed for the Potsdam Conference. He told Winston Churchill and Stalin of the existence of the bomb and Truman sent Japan an ultimatum. The premiere of Japan turned it down.

Truman gave the order to drop the A-Bomb on Japan.

There was complete radio silence. 8:15 plus 15 second on August 6, 1945. A bomb weighing 5 tons and having the equivalent of 13,500 tons of TNT exploded 1,870 feet over Hiroshima, raining radiation on 250,000 people. "Seventy-eight thousand men, women and children died in a single instant. Those who were still alive had ghastly burns from the rays of the bomb. It killed everyone within a half mile of ground zero. The rays destroyed the body cells."

The day following the bombing, the United States dropped three million leaflets all over Japan. "This is a little known fact," Dowd said, while showing slides of the death and destruction in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Many of the slides were coded with a "classified" designation.

The leaflets said more bombs of greater magnitude would be dropped and Japanese citizens should tell the government to surrender.

Aug. 8, 1945. A new type of bomb using plutonium as the explosive agent, was dropped over Nagasaki. "It missed the target," Dowd said, "missed the large population area and hit in a valley instead. Only 45,000 were killed." A few days later Emperor Hirohito surrendered.

The last part of Dowd's talk to the Saddleback Kiwanis Club was about peace. There now exists a 100 megaton bomb, he explained, with destructive power "beyond human comprehension." It is up to the youth now to maintain peace. "How much longer can the human race go on? It is our duty to develop world resources for the human good," not destruction.