

## Commanders Opposed Truman on Hiroshima

From Dwight Eisenhower's *Mandate for Change*: "The Secretary [of War, Stimson], upon giving me the news of the successful bomb test in New Mexico, and of the plan for using it, asked for my reaction, apparently expecting a vigorous assent.

"During the recitation of the relevant facts, I had been conscious of a feeling of depression and so I voiced to him my grave misgivings, first on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary, and secondly because I thought that our country should avoid shocking world opinion by the use of a weapon whose employment, I thought, was no longer mandatory as a measure to save American lives. It was my belief that Japan was, at that very moment, seeking some way to surrender with a minimum loss of 'face.' The Secretary was deeply perturbed by my attitude, almost angrily refuting the reasons I gave for my quick conclusions."

Gen. Douglas MacArthur, who was the commander of the theater in which the bombs were to be used, was *not* consulted. He had already sent his air chief, Gen. George Kenney, to Washington in the Spring of 1945, to report that Japan was on the brink of surrender. MacArthur's sole concern was that the Emperor be allowed to maintain a position in post-war Japan. If the Emperor gave the order to surrender, MacArthur knew, all Japanese troops would surrender. Kenney came back to report to MacArthur that he had not succeeded in convincing his superiors in Washington. On the day after the bombing, MacArthur's pilot, Weldon E. Rhoades, noted in his diary: "General MacArthur definitely is appalled and depressed by this Frankenstein monster. I had a long talk with him today, necessitated by the impending trip to Okinawa. He wants time to think the thing out, so he has postponed the trip to some future date to be decided later."

Years later, MacArthur told *Saturday Review* editor Norman Cousins, that his advice had not been sought. "He saw no military justification for the dropping of the bomb," Cousins reported. "The war might have ended weeks earlier, he said, if the United States had agreed, as it later did anyway, to the retention of the institution of the Emperor."

Herbert Hoover, who had advised Truman against dropping the bomb, met with MacArthur for several hours on a trip to the Pacific in early May 1946: "I told MacArthur of my memorandum of mid-May 1945 to Truman, that peace could be had with Japan by which our major objectives would be accomplished. MacArthur said that was correct and that we would have avoided all of the



*Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the commander of the theater in which the nuclear bombs were used in 1945, was not consulted beforehand by the Executive branch. After the militarily pointless bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, MacArthur was "appalled and depressed by this Frankenstein monster," wrote his pilot.*

losses, the Atomic bomb, and the entry of Russia into Manchuria," Hoover wrote in his diary.

Another prominent opponent was Roosevelt's chief military aide, Adm. William Leahy, who continued to serve under Truman. On June 18, 1945, Leahy had written in his diary: "It is my opinion that at the present time a surrender of Japan can be arranged, with terms that can be accepted by Japan, and that will make fully satisfactory provision for America's defense against any future trans-Pacific aggression." In 1949, Leahy would tell his biographer, Jonathan Daniels: "Truman told me it was agreed they would use it, after military men's statements that it would save many, many American lives, by shortening the war, only to hit military objectives. Of course, then they went ahead and killed as many women and children as they could, which was just what they wanted all the time."

Ernest King, chief of Naval Operations and chief of the U.S. fleet, concurred with the predominant Navy thinking that an invasion would never be needed. In his autobiography (written in the third person), King wrote, "The President, in giving his approval for these attacks, appeared to believe that many thousands of American troops would be killed in invading Japan, and in this he was entirely correct; but King felt, as he had pointed out many times, that the dilemma was an unnecessary one, for had we been willing to wait, the effective naval blockade would, in the course of time, have starved the Japanese into submission through lack of oil, rice, medicines, and other essential elements."

—William C. Jones