

One World or None

by PHILIP MORRISON



WE SAT IN A SMALL open wooden hut, listening to the Japanese General Staff major from Tokyo. Around us the ground was blackened, the trees were strangely bare. An advance American Army mission to study the effects of the atom bomb had come to Hiroshima.

In the rubble of the castle grounds, old headquarters of the Fifth Division, local authorities had arranged a meeting with the men who had lived through the first atomic bomb. The major was very young, very grave. He spoke slowly and carefully, like a man who wants to be properly translated and clearly understood. The story he told is worth hearing—the story of the first impact of the atomic bomb on the structure of a nation.

About 7:15 on Monday morning, August 6, the Japanese radar net had detected enemy aircraft headed for southern Honshu. The alert was given and radio broadcasting stopped in many cities, among them Hiroshima. At nearly 8 o'clock the radar operators determined that the number of planes coming in was probably not more than three, and the alert was lifted. The normal broadcast warning was given to the population that it might be advisable to go to shelter if B-29s were sighted, but that no raid was expected beyond reconnaissance.

At 8:16 the Tokyo control operator of the Japan Broadcasting Corporation noticed that Hiroshima had gone off the air. He tried to use another phone line to re-establish his program, but it too had failed. About 20 minutes later Tokyo realized that the main line telegraph had stopped working just north of Hiroshima. And from some small railway stops within ten miles of that city had come reports of a terrible explosion.

Again and again the air-raid de-

“Calling Hiroshima”

fense headquarters called the army wireless station at the castle in Hiroshima. No answer. Something had happened in Hiroshima. Headquarters was puzzled.

The young General Staff major was ordered to fly to Hiroshima, survey the damage, return to Tokyo with reliable information. The major took off for the southwest. While still 100 miles from Hiroshima he saw a great cloud of smoke from the south. As the plane reached the city the major and his pilot circled in disbelief. A great scar, still burning, was all that was left of the center of a busy city.

About 30 miles south, the major landed at Kure naval base airfield. He was welcomed by naval officers as the first official representative of aid from Tokyo. They had seen the explosion at Hiroshima. Truckloads of sailors had been sent to help the city in this strange disaster, but terrible fires had blocked the roads and the men had turned back. A few refugees had straggled out of the town, clothes and skin burned, to tell near-hysterical stories of incredible violence.

Great winds blew in the streets, they said. Debris and the dead were everywhere. The great explosion had been for each survivor a bomb hitting directly on his house. The staff major, thrown into the grimmest of responsibilities, organized 2,000 sailors into parties. They were the first rescue workers to enter Hiroshima.

The rail line was repaired, and trains came first from Onomichi, 40 miles north, where there was a large naval hospital. Soon the hospital was filled, its supplies exhausted. Then the trains bore the injured still farther north, until there too the medical facilities were used up. Some sufferers were shipped 24 hours by train before they came to a place where they might be treated. Hospital units came from hundreds of miles to set up dressing stations in Hiroshima.

One bomb and one plane had reduced a city of 400,000 inhabitants to a singular position in the war economy of Japan: Hiroshima consumed bandages and doctors, while it produced only trainloads of the burned and the broken. Its story brought terror to all the cities of the islands.