Chapter 12
Pearl Harbor and After

Writing about one war led, again, to another. I had been involved in one that in many ways was a continuation of World War II. Much of the gear we used in Korea, and many of the seasoned officers and non-commissioned men, had origins in the long war that had become a sudden reality for Americans in 1941. With the 50th anniversaries approaching for Pearl Harbor in 1991 and the end of World War II in 1995, I began research for both books, opportunistically, while promoting *Victoria* abroad.

My narrative strategy for *Long Day’s Journey into War* (1991) was to evoke what December 7, 1941 was like worldwide—every hour it was that date somewhere around the globe. In his Declaration of War address to Congress, President Roosevelt had called it “a date that will live in infamy.” The day, and date, would open where days begin—at the International Date Line in the mid-Pacific, west of Pearl Harbor, and end where December 7, east of the line, becomes the next day. Following Rodelle’s suggestion, four clocks representing simultaneous worldwide time in zones significant in the hour-long chapters headed each one—rather light for AM, shaded for PM.

In April and May 1988, we circled the globe for data, using worldwide publicity for *Victoria* to help secure media attention. We began in Hawaii, where we had lived during my Visiting Professor stint in 1973. The curator of the Pearl Harbor Memorial at the Visitors Center and platform at the sunken *Arizona* took us further, to the

Fig. 34 With statue of Victoria while on Victoria tour in Australia, 1988
Pearl Harbor and After

little-known hulk of the aged battleship Utah, which had only a small docking area and was almost forgotten by history, including by the state’s two senators. Commissioned before the earlier world war, the Utah was no longer viable for action in 1941, and had become a target ship, its decks covered by planks to absorb dummy bombs. The Japanese may have thought from the air that the planks resembled flight decks and holed the Utah with air-launched torpedoes. It was not in the harbor as a decoy but by being there the ship had protected others from the explosives it absorbed.

Pearl Harbor had remained an iconic event for conspiracy seekers and for publishers who exploit the conspiracy-minded. I knew I had to deal with the controversies. “There was a Winds message. It meant War—and we knew it meant war,” Laurence Safford, the former Head of the Navy’s codebreaking section claimed to a Joint Congressional Committee (of many) investigating Pearl Harbor. The hunt for corroboration of a coded weather forecast found no “Winds” message picked up anywhere before Pearl Harbor. Historian John Toland claimed that sailors he interviewed overheard radio messages from Kido Butai, the massive Japanese strike force. His informants would claim later that they were misinterpreted. And we know from documentary evidence that the enemy fleet traveled under complete and well-disciplined radio silence. James Rusbridger precipitated a press sensation with his assertion, in Betrayal at Pearl Harbor, that pre-Pearl Harbor the British were reading JN 25, the Japanese naval code, and that Churchill withheld foreknowledge of the attack to draw the U.S. into the war. The source cited by Rusbridger was the unpublished memoir of his late co-author, the Australian code-breaker Eric Nave. It turned out that the memoir, placed by Nave with service authorities in Canberra, included no such claim. Rusbridger had simply invented his reality. There were hints enough through 1941 that Japan would attack somewhere, but Pearl Harbor had been discounted as an ocean too far.

Although conspiracy theories, however dramatic, had no substance, there was incompetence in spades almost everywhere. High-level Japanese negotiators parleying in Washington and seeking a Munich-like agreement condoning imperial expansion were obviously dragging out, on orders from Tokyo, unacceptable compromises which gained time for the inevitable war. American intelligence was unaware that the Bank
of Tokyo was printing and storing occupation currency, including in
the Philippines. A waiter at the Peruvian embassy in Tokyo overheard
talk at a diplomatic function of preparations to attack Pearl Harbor,
but American officials dismissed the report as an empty boast. Hawaii
was too far from Japan to be considered seriously as a target. At home,
isolationist flying hero Charles Lindbergh, seeing no reason to prepare
for a Pacific war, downplayed Japanese air power, for their pilots, he
claimed, had weak eyes and couldn’t fly a straight course. “No nation
in Asia,” he told a pacifist America First rally at Yale without mention-
ing Japan directly, “had developed aviation sufficiently to be a serious
menace to the United States.” Kindred experts observed that Japanese
weaponry had to be shoddy and ineffective: look at the cheap toys they
exported. Overheard radio signals from Japanese carriers, which were
faked to confuse listening posts, suggested, to undermine readiness, a
southward strategy away from American bases.

Suspicious nevertheless, Army chief of staff George Marshall, on
November 27, issued to all Pacific stations a “war warning” that at-
tacks might be imminent anywhere, but commanders from Manila to
the Canal Zone did little to heed it. General MacArthur was awakened
from a sound sleep for a telephone call about Pearl Harbor. He found
it difficult to believe but reached for his Bible for irrelevant solace.
At Pearl Harbor, weekend reconnaissance patrols had been curtailed
to save fuel. After all, the Japanese couldn’t reach there anyway. The
primitive radar installation on Oahu was shut down on Sundays, and
the Navy continued its wholesale weekend leaves into rowdy Honolulu.
On “battleship row,” capital ships were anchored safely side-by-side
to become sitting ducks, and at Army Air Corps bases, heeding Mar-
shall’s war warning, senior officers parked warplanes (many of them
obsolete) wing-to-wing, to deter possible sabotage from local Japanese
who proved completely loyal. Having reported to Washington “a sur-
plus of 3,344 [air]men with no assigned duties,” Lieutenant General
Walter Short (in command of all military installations in Hawaii) pre-
scribed infantry training as busywork. Underscoring their blind confi-
dence, Vice Admiral Husband Kimmel (Commander in Chief of the
U.S. Pacific Fleet) and General Short arranged a golf game for eight
o’clock on Sunday morning December 7. Unseen and unheard until
their carrier-borne aircraft made landfall, the Japanese began attacking
at 7:53 AM.
In Washington, petty partisanship and penny-pinching in Congress had slowed the massive modernization and rearmament crucial for readiness. The re-authorization of the peacetime draft in October, after a personal appeal by George Marshall, had passed by only one vote.

As I collected more examples, the sweeping incompetence and imperceptiveness amazed and appalled me. It more ways than one, it had been a long day’s journey into war.

Invited, because of Victoria, to be on radio and television in New Zealand, Australia and Hong Kong, I had mentioned my World War II projects on the air and received letters from veterans and their civilian counterparts, often sent to the stations and forwarded to me. I would receive Flying Officer Richard Allanson’s memories of Malaya, and many others about Penang, Kuala Lumpur and other places seized by the Japanese; Christopher Briggs’s memories from Hong Kong and Emily Hahn’s about her imprisonment there; and J. G. Ballard’s about his novelistic Empire of the Sun (afterward a striking film) and the reality of wartime Shanghai. The war museum in Auckland had a diary extricated from the personal effects of a dead Italian in North Africa. At the Australian Defence Forces Academy in Canberra, I spoke to cadets, from my Korean experience, about prisoner of war issues, and explored its archives. In Sydney, the Australian War Memorial Museum had the diary of a Japanese soldier who had landed on Guam on the first day of the war—which was his last. Also displayed were copies of the Tobruk Truth, printed by soldiers besieged in Libya.

As I had written on Queen Victoria, a museum guide showed me a new acquisition—a brass Christmas box embossed with her regal head, distributed to troops in the South African War in 1899. The chocolates once inside were gone, the attendant deplored as she slid open the glass door of the exhibit case. The granddaughter of the lady who rediscovered the box in her attic had opened it and, with no ill effects, eaten all the eighty-eight-year-old sweets. The brass gift box would echo in a later book, Silent Night. The Story of the 1914 Christmas Truce (2001), as the morale-boosting example had been repeated at the time of the first Christmas of the Great War.

In Hong Kong, we were invited, as seemingly appropriate, to dinner at the Hotel Victoria to meet residents with long memories, and to dine, warily, on “drunken” shrimp, writhing in brandy—ostensibly
to cleanse them of locally polluted waters. We were not amused. Local authorities escorted us to the former prison camp at Shamshuipo. Because of its dilapidation, it had become the setting for a film about Vietnam, but briefly, for the day it was a festive reunion venue for POW survivors of the Japanese. I asked questions and Rodelle took notes. The British Navy—as Hong Kong had not yet been returned to the Chinese—took us to Stonecutter’s Island, a coast artillery site battered by the Japanese invaders on the first day of the invasion. On Hong Kong radio I discussed *Victoria* and mentioned the future Pearl Harbor book. As the interview concluded, the telephone in the studio rang. It was Molly Soltay, the daughter of Eugenia Foyn, a White Russian, who told Rodelle about her family’s experience in fleeing the Japanese in Manchuria.

Singapore was familiar territory to me, as I had been there twice before, once as a Visiting Professor at the National University, which had published a talk I gave on writing biography—a problem in a sultry atmosphere only two degrees above the equator, because little of its history had survived the punishing climate, especially personal papers. I had urged listeners to use every opportunity to record the oral reminiscences of Singaporeans then in their later years. Our friend Edwin Thumboo, a poet and then a department head (and dean), made his good offices available, and I interviewed survivors of 1941, explored the new archives holdings, and collected material for a later article on the bridge on the River Kwai as fiction, film and fact.2

A senior professor and his wife took us to what was described as an authentic Chinese eatery, which did use cheap oilcloth rather than table linen. As we were conferring with a waiter, a rat ran out of the kitchen. Rodelle screamed, and another waiter with a broom raced out and chased it back. Soon the rat reappeared. Rodelle screamed again, arose and began exiting, telling our hosts that we were going elsewhere. We escaped to the venerable Raffles Hotel and ordered restorative martinis.

Irate, Rodelle wrote to the Department of the Environment to report on the rat incident as damaging to Singapore’s reputation. On the morning we were to depart the Hotel Negara the telephone in our room rang. It was the Minister for the Environment, who explained to Professor Weintraub—Rodelle in this case—that she had ordered the
restaurant closed until its sanitation deficiencies had been corrected. However authoritarian—its parliament then had one Indian opposition member for show—Singapore was efficient.

We had landed at the huge and still expanding, new Changi airport on the eastern edge of the island, which on an earlier visit had been offshore. The long runways had been reclaimed with landfill and seafill. A tree-lined highway, also largely reclaimed, took traffic into central Singapore. Changi was a familiar name. We drove by the grim walls of Changi Prison nearby, which had housed three thousand civilian prisoners of the Japanese, about five times its prewar capacity, and by Serrang Barracks, which the Japanese had turned into a brutal POW camp for fifty thousand, and also the headquarters of the Kempeitai secret police, notorious everywhere in the wartime East for torture. Changi Prison would be demolished, finally, in 2000. A land-poor island only twenty-five miles wide, west to east, the city-state needed the space.

We flew next to the Philippines. In the Manila airport, as we walked toward passport control and baggage claim, a stocky man in a barong and shorts materialized, holding a sign, “Professor Weintraub.” When I identified myself he said: “Give me your passports and follow me.” I assumed it was a plainclothes security check, but he waved us past the passenger queues, ordered someone to recover our luggage, and escorted us to a shabby, unmarked car of uncertain vintage. “I’m the security chief here,” he said, sending us off with an aide. “Señora Lopez waits for you at the Manila Hotel!”

She was a magic name in Manila. Her late husband had been Speaker of the House in the Philippines when the war erupted, and she, a retired opera diva, had sung for the Japanese occupiers. Collaboration had been common and aborted few political careers or curtailed social climbing then or after. At the hotel check-in desk was the formidable lady herself. Her daughter was the wife of a professorial friend then at Penn State. Señora Lopez had already booked a room for us at the legendary hotel, its penthouse floor once General MacArthur’s suite. It had been burned by the departing Japanese and since rebuilt. “You have a room on a low floor,” she said, “for safety. We have earthquakes. And so you don’t have to change any currency, here is some for walking around.” She extracted an envelope from her bag that was bulging with Philippine bills.
Before we could express either gratitude or astonishment, she said that she knew from her daughter that I was interested in interviewing people who remembered the beginning of the war, which because of the Date Line was December 8, 1941 in Manila. To assist she had arranged a luncheon the next afternoon in a hotel banquet room and invited a dozen guests with useful memories. She would see us tomorrow. She retrieved her bag, turned and left. (At the luncheon hosted by Señora Lopez, Rodelle would go from guest to guest with a tape recorder as they told of their memories.)

The suite booked for us, the only one on its floor, was small and gloomy, and next to the busy hotel laundry room. Wondering what to do, I sat down on the bed as Rodelle was wiping away tears. A grand hotel, and we were stuck next to the laundry.

Suddenly the room shook. Ceiling plaster crumbled and fell on the sheets and the lamp dangling from a chain swung. Rodelle turned from alarm into her managerial mode. “Wait here;” she said, and headed down to the lobby. The hotel director was solicitous. “Little tremors happen all the time in the Philippines,” he said. “Not to worry.”

Hardly satisfied, Rodelle explained that I was a well-known author working on a book about World War II that would include his hotel, as General MacArthur lived there until the Japanese came. Should he write about the laundry floor? The director picked up his phone. We were reassigned to room 1502 on the club floor in the hotel’s tall new annex building, at no additional charge. He would send to 1502 The Manila Hotel, a book about the Waldorf of the Philippines. An attendant came with a luggage cart and moved us. We went to the club bar and saluted Señora Lopez.

Soon another attendant escorted us to the sixth-floor penthouse suite occupied by General and Mrs. MacArthur and their young son, Arthur. Its seven bedrooms had been reduced to three, but the rest of the residence, and surrounding balconies, were a facsimile of its prewar luxury, even to replicas of its furniture. Resplendently framed on the drawing room wall were copies of MacArthur’s medals from two wars. Accompanying us with our guide was another guest, a tall American in suit and tie despite the climate. As he gazed upon the wall of gleaming medals his eyes filled with tears. We wondered why. “I’m to play the
general in a tv drama,” he claimed. “I’m overwhelmed.” We never saw the biopic.

Over two weeks in the Philippines we researched through much of Luzon, often by chauffeured car, sometimes by battered taxi—but never by Jeepney, the colorful elongated army-surplus jeeps, which chugged along the narrow streets. Taking time away from the war we visited Malacañan Palace and Imelda Marcos’s confiscated and appalling collections of shoes and perfume bottles. We discovered that MacArthur’s defensive preparations for war were negligible at best, although to Washington he had confidently claimed readiness. Harbor mines were defective, as were his three-inch anti-aircraft guns set up to interdict 1930s-vintage biplanes. He had christened himself Field Marshal of the Philippine Army, which then was little more than a troop of mature, poorly armed boy scouts.

We were ferried out into Manila Bay to Corregidor, the decimated fortress of last resort on Luzon. The huge mortars hidden in Corregidor’s hollows which gave the island its false reputation of impregnability were embossed, when one looked closely, with an identity of manufacturer and date which must have made its defenders feel less sanguine about their survival chances—Bethlehem Steel, 1898.

When we flew to Japan we realized that little or nothing useful about the first day of the war could be gleaned in the islands, but our friend Junko Matoba, at a Tokyo women’s college, had prepared a translation for us of the diary of Marquis Kido, Emperor Hirohito’s adviser and confidant. I had first been in Japan on my way to Korea, when prostrate but recovering Tokyo was the province of American soldiery and the city did not have a single traffic light. Now Tokyo was bustling and traffic clogged. As a major Japanese publisher had issued *Victoria* as well as *Beardsley*, I was able to use its good offices to arrange, before our arrival, a visit to General MacArthur’s former headquarters. During the Occupation and into the Korean War, from 1945 into 1951, the general surveyed Japan from a sixth-floor office in the modernist, white Dai Ichi Building, overlooking the Emperor’s Hibiya palace grounds. The building had apparently survived the firebombing of Tokyo because of its proximity to the Imperial Palace, which bombers were instructed, if possible, to bypass, but malicious rumor had it that MacArthur had ordered the Dai Ichi spared because he wanted to occupy it—an obvi-
ous falsity in that he had no authority over the army’s air forces striking the Home Islands from bases in the western Pacific.

The Dai Ichi (“Number One”) Mutual Life Insurance Company, evicted for MacArthur’s GHQ, had now returned, and the general’s effective yet benevolent shogunate had protected the Emperor while much of national tradition had survived with him. The Japanese were showily grateful and kept his spartan office as a sort of shrine, complete to bronze commemorative plaque on the wall in the corridor outside.

A black Toyota limousine from my publisher, Chuokoron Sha, took us from our hotel to the Dai Ichi, where a vice president of the company, bowing in greeting, ushered us into an elevator and up to the top floor. The sunny office had a desk with a green leather armchair behind it, a few framed landscapes, and little else. Behind his desk the windows looked out, beyond the palace moat, on Hibiya Park. The general had an in-and-out box for papers, but he had spurned a telephone. I was motioned to try out his chair, and slipped into it, surprised at how worn the leather was—not only cracked in places but worn down to its brown base. Obviously in the nearly forty years since the Supreme Commander, Far East, had used the executive chair, I was far from the first to receive the VIP treatment.

As I seated myself, the Dai Ichi official whipped out a small Polaroid camera and snapped my picture. As soon as it developed he handed it to me. Minutes later I was courteously escorted out, and down to the waiting limousine. Yet I remembered the office overlooking the palace grounds when I wrote about MacArthur’s year guiding, and misguiding, the response to the North Korean invasion of the South in *MacArthur’s War* (2000).

Two years earlier, after a conference we attended in Osaka and a lecture I gave at Kobe University, where students deficient in English tape-recorded me for later translation, we had taken the Shinkansen bullet train to Hiroshima, by then a modern, rebuilt city. There we saw the skeletal remains of a domed building left to remember the day of the Bomb in August 1945. Children played in the green, once rubble-strewn swale. Displayed in the Bomb museum was the awesome “Thinking Man.” On the steps of a bank entrance, someone had been obliterated by the flash of the bomb, which imprinted his shadow on the stone wall in the posture of *The Thinker* of Rodin.
Like all Japanese cities, Hiroshima had been home to a host of household Buddhas, impassive and friendly, large and small. Like the city’s flesh-and-blood inhabitants, Buddhas by the tens of thousands—wood, stone, ceramic, bronze—had been incinerated, pulverized, glassified, blistered, liquefied, fused. They had not protected Japan from payback for Pearl Harbor, and more.

The Peace Memorial Museum made little reference to what had happened before August 6, 1945, implying that the obliteration of Hiroshima was the shocking beginning and end of the war. Only in 1994, when the planning for the fiftieth anniversary of the Bomb began, did world opinion compel another look. “Some of us believe” the mayor, Takashi Hiroka, conceded, “that when we think about the bomb, we should think about the war, too.” Hiroshima and its environs were not innocent bystanders. The new look would result in an annex connected by a skywalk that would portray, uncomfortably, the years of war and the city’s considerable military role. Those fixed in denial could bypass the new structure.

The Occupation and after had rebuilt and modernized a once-militarist Japan. There was now no question in my mind about a sequel to the Pearl Harbor volume. Evoking the beginning—the date of Pearl Harbor—would be followed by the end—for Japan the last, desperate, month of the war. The experimental blast of a plutonium device at Alamogordo, New Mexico, would presage the surrender of an empire bent on suicidal resistance to invasion. Yet it would take devastation by two atomic bombs to convince all but the die-hards that Japan was otherwise doomed.

At the National Archives, guided by elderly John Taylor, who knew where everything was without accessing a file or a catalog, we pored over, and photocopied, the detailed plans for the invasion of Japan, code-named Downfall. I thought it was the perfect title for the other bookend, but in the end Mac Talley, my editor, vetoed it, claiming that it would be a “downer” in the marketplace. He was, as editors often are, utterly wrong. Someone else would later exploit Downfall. Talley insisted, after the book was delivered, on a title that was not even accurate, not the first, nor the last time in my experience.

The invasion strategy code-named each landing site on southern Kyushu, the beaches curiously christened by an unidentified vehicle
aficionado in the Pentagon. Some, like Locomobile, Franklin, Winton, Stutz, Maxwell, Dusenberg, Essex and Overland, recalled automobiles no longer manufactured. I reproduced the “Operation Olympic” layout on a two-page spread in the book, now retitled *The Last Great Victory. The End of World War II* (1995). There was no last great victory by any definition of the term, but publishers are not bothered by reality.

The reality came in the pages themselves. Dozens of informants furnished me with graphic documentation, one of them my friend and neighbor in Boalsburg, Hays Gamble, who lent me his diary. Flying B-29s of the 315th Bombardment Wing out of Guam, his unit’s mission was to degrade Japanese synthetic fuel plants, as blockade and submarine attacks kept Indonesian oil from the Home Islands. Gamble’s thirteenth mission was to hit Ube, at the southern tip of Honshu, after dark from 10,200 feet. Flaming oil lit up the sky as he veered away from the rising smoke. Dikes holding back the sea from the reclaimed land on which the installation was built were breached, and the sprawling factory and its storage tanks slipped into the waves. A photo-interpreter from the 315th, Gamble wrote, radioed Admiral Nimitz: “This target destroyed and sunk.”

The strategic goal was to weaken the enemy’s ability to resist invasion, with the first phase, “Olympic,” scheduled for November 1. The Japanese were stockpiling suicide planes, fuel, and troops for confronting the armadas and attempting to deny a successful landing. The horrific casualties already exacted on Iwo Jima and Okinawa proved the need to target key installations. Hiroshima, also on the southern edge of Honshu and the closest big city to Kyushu, where the invasion was expected, was the headquarters of the Second Army. The Mitsubishi Heavy Industries shipyard there turned out big warships while other war plants, some underground, constructed other military hardware. It would be the first target of the first atomic bomb to be deployed in warfare, on August 6, 1945. Hiroshima was pulverized, and fatalities, military and civilian, were immense.

Assuming that result, the Pentagon had Henry Smyth, a Princeton physics professor, prepare in advance for the press a dispassionate report about the construction and expected effect of a nuclear explosion. Sometimes historic remarks, however colorful, seem in questionable taste for print, and this has been such a matter of concern over
the years that statements are often prepared in advance, as with the
detailed Smyth Report and Neil Armstrong’s laconic reaction to his
first steps on the Moon in 1969. Captain Robert Lewis, co-pilot of the
*Enola Gay*, had been deputed to keep a log for *New York Times* news-
man W. L. Laurence, who would be permitted on the Nagasaki flight
with “Fat Man” but not on the deployment of “Little Boy.” From his
unobstructed view Lewis watched the bright purple flash of the explo-
sion metamorphose into a thousand suns as the B-29 pulled away in
a tight climb, and he wrote down, “My God!” For public release he
expanded that for Laurence as “My God, what have we”—that implied
mankind—“done?” Over the intercom aboard, however, he was heard
as saying: “My God, look at that son-of-a-bitch go!” Since it was not an
unprintable obscenity I chose the unsanitized reality.

The event could not be hidden and overcame censorship in shock-
ing the Japanese. Still, the military clique that continued to pursue the
unwinnable war was unconvinced that the Bomb could be followed by
another. Hopefully, it was only an experiment. The “suicide of a hun-
dred million” was still on. When further conventional bombing mis-
sions were postponed for a day to gauge Japanese reaction, the crews
of Hays Gamble’s wing convened a bull session. “I believe,” he wrote
afterwards, “that if [another] bomb is not used, war will be over by De-
cember 21, ’45”—following the expected invasion—“and if it is [used,]
by August 21, ’45. A lot of boys believe it will be over by the end of this
week.” Since the 509th Wing deploying the A-Bomb flew from Tinian
rather than Guam, the airmen had only guesses as to when and if there
would be another “big sweat.”

The Japanese had been attempting everything possible to avert cata-
strophe, from trying to build a rocket-powered *Shusui*—shining blade—
plane from blueprints brought by submarine from Germany before its
surrender, to equipping and training conscripted housewives with bam-
boo lances. With classes canceled, schoolgirls were constructing, under
strict guidance, balloons of thirty-three to forty feet in diameter, made
from tatami-sized sheets of mulberry pulp paper, to which incendiary
bombs were attached, to travel through the jet stream across the Pacific
and do what damage they could. Launched from beaches on Honshu,
beginning in March 1945, some of the nine thousand balloons touched
down from Alaska to Mexico and as far east as Michigan. Censorship

When, led by Joe Paterno, a fund-raising drive was initiated to build a large addition to Penn State’s Pattee Library, a TV cassette inducement was planned to send to potential donors. I was asked to be the faculty spokesman on camera for the values of a research library. A young woman then a graduate student in Geography was asked to represent students, and Paterno would come on last, so that viewers would stick out the brief presentation to the end. Each of us was to display a library book that was meaningful for our work and lives. With my 1945 project ongoing, I spoke about the desperate but primitive Japanese bombs, as each limited-edition Mikesh volume included, bound in, a fragment of a paper balloon that had floated across on the jet stream. For dramatic effect I could have the camera focus on the vivid reality of the *fusen bakudan*.3

One bomb, by then deflated, which landed in a quiet forest in Oregon, was discovered by the family of the Rev. Archie Mitchell, out on a picnic. He shouted, too late: “Don’t touch it!” His wife and five children died in the explosion—the only civilian casualties by enemy action in the continental United States. What I did not know at the time was that another armed balloon had landed in Hanford, Washington, the site of the huge plant working on isolating plutonium for nuclear bombs. Only enough uranium had been extracted from rare ore for a single usable bomb, the device dropped on Hiroshima. The Japanese balloon (with its incendiary attachment) that in a striking coincidence had reached Hanford had not landed on the structure housing the nuclear reactor but on a high-tension line carrying power to it. The damage was carefully unreported. There was just enough time for repairs. Work on the weapon continued with little interruption.

A plutonium device was exploded at Alamogordo, and “Fat Man,” its successor after the Hiroshima uranium bomb, was deployed over Nagasaki. Its dire effects caused Emperor Hirohito to declare that his armed forces, to whom he had deferred through increasingly painful years of war, would have to “bear the unbearable.” The war ended much as the fliers of the 314th had predicted.
**Long Day’s Journey into War. December 7, 1941** was, late in 1991, a Book-of-the-Month main selection. It earned a plethora of rewarding reviews—from “dazzling” and “captivating” to “riveting” and “unfailingly fascinating.” It also became an audiobook and went into many paperback reprints.

I was swamped with radio and TV invitations, especially “phoners,” radio interviews via my home phone, which I had to limit each day, for as they proliferated I could hardly remember what I had said from one to the next. My most memorable experience, for all the wrong reasons, was my interview in Washington by Larry King. Sitting at his side, at first transfixed by his trademark red suspenders, I hadn’t realized that he hadn’t read the book but depended on his own memories of the Sunday of Pearl Harbor. As an announcer did the introductions, he quickly scanned the dust-jacket flap for information, found a question to ask, and then another. When a commercial break followed, Larry whispered to me: “What should I ask you next?”

We continued in that softball manner for an hour between commercials and had a spirited, largely one-way, interchange. Then he closed by announcing that listeners could obtain a signed copy of my book by mailing a check or credit-card code to Larry King. He furnished an address, and repeated it. When we signed off, I asked him, puzzled, how can you do that? This is a hefty book, over 700 pages. You have a big audience. Will a truck-with-trailer pull up at my house?”

“Oh, no,” he said. “Once we have a count, in a week or ten days, we’ll send you a box of “Larry King” gummed bookplates. You just sign your name on each, and send them back.”

A large box with return postage affixed duly arrived—curiously, from Minneapolis. I spent a day signing bookplates, and purchasers received autographed labels inside books I had never seen nor touched.

The sequel on the close of World War II was contractually titled *Downfall*, the code collectively given to the invasion of Kyushu on November 1, 1945 and if necessary the invasion of Honshu on or about April 1, 1946. During production Mac Talley altered it to something allegedly more marketable: *The Last Great Victory. The End of World War II. July/August 1945*. It made no difference that there was no “last great victory” other than the immolation of two Japanese cities—events that
had forced the reluctant surrender of the Japanese. It was published in mid-1995, timed for the fiftieth anniversary of the end.

In the media the book was called “stunning” and “gripping”—and “narrative history at its best.” Possibly Stephen Ambrose in his front-page review in the *Washington Post*’s “Book World” section said it best, and he would be quoted on the back cover of the paperback edition:

> It is the special triumph of Stanley Weintraub’s *Last Great Victory* that through the technique of taking us inside the Japanese, American, and Soviet governments and walking through the events of July-August 1945 day by day, sometimes hour by hour, he shows how nearly impossible it was to get Japan to quit without destroying the nation…. He takes us from the conference table at Potsdam [in mid-July] to the preparation of the *Enola Gay* for its fateful flight, to a prison camp in Manchuria, to the sinking of the *Indianapolis*, to a kamikaze base, to MacArthur’s headquarters. The research is prodigious and much of it new. It all makes for gripping reading, with a richness of detail that can only be hinted at here…. This is a brilliant book, recommended without reservation.

Some of the “new” included my attempt to evoke how ordinary Japanese responded to the reality of war now brought home to them, and to imminent defeat. They represented a substantial element of the population, which kept no diaries; wrote few letters, if any; and lived an unrecorded emotional life—but for one cultural fact. Whatever one’s class and however limited in education, people for centuries had brushed, rather than penned, *tanka*—thirty-one syllable poems that limned their lives. I found many of them, and while I could not turn the originals into thirty-one English syllables, I did my best to record through them how city dwellers and country folk felt at the close. Wearily, Iwane Kawanami wrote:

> In a room streaked by faint morning light,
> I am dead tired with Tokyo still aflame in my eyes.

Survivors of the nuclear blasts wrote poignantly of the moment, as did Shinoe Shoda, searching the ruins of a school for her child:

> Clustered with numerous small head bones
> Is a big bone, probably that of their teacher;

and Taira Yamazaki mourned:

> Alas, my child has finally returned to me,
> His remains only a few strands of black hair.
When the Red Army exploited imperial helplessness and invaded Manchuria, which the Japanese had been colonizing and from which they were now fleeing, Tomoichi Yamamoto anguished:

Fearing Soviet troops closing in,
My wife holds our child tight,
Realizing that she cannot kill herself.

And, after the Emperor’s recorded voice was heard on radio for the first time, declaring, too late, that Japan was compelled by catastrophe to surrender, and the dread news then appeared in print, Kōtarō Takamura in Hanamaki, far north of Tokyo, wrote:

...heard that broadcast.
Sitting upright, I was trembling.
Japan was stripped bare....

And Tatsuichiro Akizaki composed a bitter tanka:

While I read the Emperor’s rescript that came too late,
Atomic bomb victims writhe on the scorched ground.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the war’s end, the Air and Space Museum on the Mall in Washington displayed memorabilia of the atomic bombings, including (it was a tight fit) the forward fuselage of the Enola Gay, the B-29 which targeted Hiroshima. A furor quickly erupted when many veterans and historians bridled at the pacifist and anti-Bomb choice of exhibits, which suggested that the nuclear deployments were barbaric and unnecessary and that Japan was already on the verge of surrender. Changes, most of them made reluctantly, occurred, and changes in the administration of the museum would follow.

Revisionism, with its self-guilt, seemed also to infect media coverage. I was asked by NPR to debate, on the air, Martin Sherwin, historian and future author of A World Destroyed: Hiroshima and Its Legacies, who condemned “the worshipful embrace of atomic destruction.” He brushed aside the evidence of continued Japanese command intransigence, the horrific casualties resulting from the landings on Iwo Jima and then Okinawa, the training of civilians (including women and children) in suicidal resistance to invasion, and the astronomical deaths likely on both sides if an invasion of the Home Islands had to be launched. I noted that the hundreds of thousands of Purple Heart medals prepared
for the anticipated “Olympic” casualties would still be used as late as Vietnam.

Sherwin’s response was that invasion was unnecessary. It might take many months, but blockade would eventually degrade Japan’s ability to resist. That the Japanese still controlled much of the Pacific Rim, and the millions of non-Japanese civilians were trapped there, as well as tens of thousands of starving and brutalized Allied prisoners of war who were dying every day the war went on, was of no consequence to Sherwin. The Bomb was more evil.

I was also invited by transatlantic telephone to participate in a more curious, even more naïve, radio hookup. BBC World Service planned a debate at noon on Sunday August 6, London time, the anniversary date of Hiroshima, featuring me, in Pennsylvania, and revisionist historian Gar Alperovitz, who was charging at every opportunity that the A-Bombs were punitive, political in intent—to keep Stalin from rushing in—and an unnecessary atrocity. Alperovitz, a political economist on the far Left (America Beyond Capitalism), had just published his shrill doorstop of a book, The Decision to Use the Atomic Bomb. He had flown to Hiroshima to personally apologize, allegedly on behalf of the United States, for the incineration of the city and its people. Would I take the pro-Bomb side? I said that I was an historian interested in the facts, not in an agenda. But the BBC spokesman had read my book and concluded that I would disagree dramatically with Alperovitz.

On Saturday the fifth, Rodelle and I were away from home, returning to find a message written down by Rodelle’s mother, then living with us in her last years, that the BBC had telephoned to cancel the debate. That was disappointing, but it meant not having to be alert at seven in the morning, our time. I didn’t set the alarm clock. Sunday was for sleep-ins.

At five minutes to eight the phone rang. It was the BBC in London. Was I ready to go? My mother-in-law had misheard the message, which was that the program had been re-scheduled for an hour later. Rodelle rushed to the kitchen and returned with a glass of orange juice for me. The broadcast went on.

Our triangular hookup had a BBC coordinator in London and Alperovitz and me far apart in geography—and views—in Hiroshima and in Happy Valley. On the air, we agreed on nothing about the likely
progress of the war if the nuclear episodes had not intervened. The Japanese leadership, I observed from the evidence, was determined on suicidal resistance. The issue came down to Alperovitz’s fantasy that if the American military had demonstrated to Japanese officials, perhaps over an expanse of open ocean, the devastating potential of the Bomb once we knew what that was, the enemy, awed by the power of the blast and its towering mushroom cloud, would have ended the war rather than risk a nuclear impact on the Home Islands. Thousands would not have died horrific deaths. Peace would have ensued.

I scoffed. The intransigent military regime would have permitted no one to observe such a demonstration and would have laughed at our wasting a crucial and perhaps unique weapon. In any case, the regime’s higher-ups, rejecting submission, were stubbornly determined upon mass death. Tokyo radio had broadcast warnings of “the suicide of a hundred million” in confronting invasion—although there were fewer that eighty million Japanese. Besides, I said, we had only one uranium bomb—the one dropped on Hiroshima. We were preparing the first of our plutonium bombs for deployment, the predecessor of which, detonated in the New Mexico desert, had been set off by a land-bound wire. The bombs to be used on Japan had to be triggered by proximity fuses from high-altitude aircraft. We did not even know whether the Hiroshima bomb would work. If the uranium device were used as an illustration and failed to explode into a fireball, we would have lost a crucial device, and the war would have continued with increased fury. The Imperial War Council in emergency session had speculated hopefully that the Bomb was indeed unique.

“Oh,” said Alperovitz, the non-scientist, about a nuclear trigger mechanism that took years of extravagant technological research to produce, “it was a very simple device.” While I could not see the sardonic smiles creasing the faces of disbelieving listeners across the global time zones, I could imagine them. Whatever he believed, I noted as our time was running out, the Hiroshima bomb did not end the war. It was the Nagasaki plutonium bomb which conveyed the unthinkable to the Emperor and the War Council: that more nuclear fireballs could follow. The war was lost, and only immediate surrender would save Japan itself.
To mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Nagasaki bomb, an ABC-TV team came to Happy Valley to tape an interview with me for airing on the evening of August 9. To them, in my study at home, I contended that deploying a second bomb was a necessary mission. Only after it, and the evident likelihood of further such catastrophes, did Emperor Hirohito, desperately stepping out of his supine, demigod role, order his Supreme War Council to end the war.

The next morning I took a call from an ABC spokesman who claimed, implying a technical matter, that something about the taping seemed unsatisfactory for the telecast. Would I be willing to come to Washington at their expense to do a re-shoot—not at the ABC studios, but at a hotel arranged for me? That seemed an opportunity to take in the reconstituted Air and Space Museum exhibits.

A new TV crew came to my hotel room, claiming that they were pressed for studio space at ABC. It was the anniversary day of the Nagasaki bomb. After they set up their cameras we went through much the same questions, but it became increasingly obvious to me that instructions coming into their headphones from someone at ABC, probably Peter Jennings, who would ostensibly conduct the interview without encountering me, were to try to tweak my responses toward revisionism. They urged me to acknowledge that even if the first bomb was necessary, the second—on Nagasaki—was only to try out plutonium’s explosive effect, as the Hiroshima bomb was a uranium device. No, I said. The test explosion set off in the New Mexico desert utilized plutonium, as over Nagasaki. It was neither an experiment nor an atrocity but an end-the-war mission. We knew exactly what it could do—and it ended the war.

That evening we listened to Peter Jennings condemning the Nagasaki bombing. Despite two crews at two locations, my segment was not aired. Call it covert censorship.

I was reminded of my talks with C. P. Snow, who had recruited scientists for the atomic project and been knighted for wartime services, later becoming Baron Snow. No one, Charles had told me, would deny that the “Manhattan Project” had added a new horror to war. The Germans, we knew, from bugging the rooms of captured atomic physicists, would not have denied themselves the opportunity to exploit fission, but had failed. They had perpetrated unspeakable other horrors, as had
the Japanese, who were also rushing futile work on a nuclear device, as our own succeeded. But for our own physicists, especially émigré scientists driven from Nazified Europe, obliterating Germany, and Hitler’s willing executioners, would not have evoked moral qualms. President Roosevelt had even called General Leslie Groves, coordinator of the widespread but secret atomic laboratories, to the White House in mid-December 1944 during the desperate Battle of the Bulge to ask whether a nuclear bomb could be deployed over Berlin.4

Since the Bomb only became available as Japan seemed tottering, and the Japanese were allegedly a docile people misled by militarists, using it on Japan seemed to revisionists less about forcing a surrender than trying out an expensive device we had bought and paid for in the billions. In his novel The New Men (1954), C. P. Snow had portrayed the ethical dilemma among some anguished scientists who contended that not only was the Nagasaki bombing a sequel, and perhaps unnecessary, but that the radioactive components were different. “If anyone had tried to defend the first bomb,” says the radicalized (and fictional) physicist Walter Luke, “then I might have listened to him. But if anyone dares to defend the second, then I’ll see him in hell before I listen to a single word.”

“The only point of dropping the second,” agrees his agonized, leftist colleague Martin Eliot, “must have been for purposes of comparison.” Yet after Alamogordo, another plutonium blast was not needed to furnish physicists with calculations. A second radical contention with even less credibility further sickens Martin. “There was a good deal of discussion,” he tells his brother, Lewis Eliot, a Whitehall bureaucrat (and Charles’s fictional alter ego), “about how to drop it with maximum results. One ingenious idea was to start a spectacularly pretty flare a few seconds before the bomb went off.”

“Why?”

“To make sure all were blinded.”

A close cousin to conspiracy theories, such breast-beating allegations, in which fiction becomes inseparable from fact, would fuel the atomic debate into the next century.
Endnotes

1. After touring the remains of the *USS Utah*, Stan contacted the offices of both U.S. senators from Hawaii and suggested they take action to encourage the National Park Service to recognize the importance of the *USS Utah* by including it as part of the Pearl Harbor Memorial accessible to the public. The senators took no interest in his inquiry and neither took any action. The Pearl Harbor Memorial does mention the *USS Utah* on their website, describing it as one of two ships that were “not on Battleship Row.” Commissioned in 1911 and demilitarized in 1931, it was used until late 1941 not only for target practice but for anti-aircraft gunnery training. When destroyed by the bombing of Pearl Harbor, 58 crew members died. The wreck of the *USS Utah*, including the bodies of the lost sailors, remain in place where it sank. The *USS Utah* Memorial on Ford Island is only open to visitors with a military ID card, and so remains largely forgotten by the public. —David A. Weintraub and Michel W. Pharand, Coeditors


3. Joe Paterno read from a rare early translation of Virgil’s *Aeneid*.