


Tale of Two Cities - 1946

Video:  Tale of Two Cities
1946

Transcript:

Audio Transcript

Narrator (00:21)

This tale of two cities... a desert morning... atomic age is born. A scientific thunderbolt gives a preview of its destructive force.

(00:49) From the instant of that first blast until Hiroshima vanished from the list of living cities, closely guarded plants in New Mexico, Tennessee, and the state of Washington continued their work to shorten the war. Hiroshima, one of Japan's arsenal cities, was selected as the first to feel the weight of atomic power.

(01:13) Twenty-one days after the New Mexico dress rehearsal, a lone B-29 was over Hiroshima carrying an atomic bomb. At 8:15 in the morning of August 6th, Japanese time, the first atomic bomb hit an enemy target. The bomb was aimed to explode above zero point, a spot in the city at the junction of the Motoyisu and Ota rivers. The bomb was intentionally set to explode well above the zero point to dissipate its radioactivity. Here is the pictorial record of the result at zero point directly beneath the explosion. The soldier in the scene is pointing at the spot from which all damage to the surrounding area was measured in terms of distance from the center of the blast.

(01:58) Within a mile of zero point, the devastation speaks for itself. But in these very ruins, army cameramen have found and filmed pictorial evidence that tells in twisted steel and stone the effect of death-dealing atomic power. For example, this was the site of the main Japanese military headquarters. There were approximately 20,000 Japanese military personnel stationed here. They are among the missing. A lone concrete smokestack indicates where a bustling factory once stood. Reinforced concrete buildings seem to have withstood the explosion fairly well, the damage varying with their distance from zero point. Within an area of a mile to a mile and a half, this type of building was the only type to withstand complete demolition and destruction. Here's a building that was actually knocked side-wise, giving you an idea of the force of the blast. The direction of the blast is graphically told by the slant of this parapet, a concrete wall.

(03:09) Etched in the stone base of what was the Russo-Japanese War Memorial are tell-tale lines, atomic handwriting for all to read. Another signpost of the direction and force of the explosion is blasted in the polished granite face of this statue. The light surface indicates the angle of the blast, two-tenths of a mile from zero point. Many of the shattered windows pointed like skeleton fingers the direction of the atomic wind of death, on one side blown in, on the other, blown out, with atomic, tornado force. Inside, the flash burns on the chairs give eloquent testimony on the heat of the blast a mile from zero point, which singed the mohair upholstery like a blow-torch.

(03:57) Hiroshima's city hall, which stood at an angle of 45 degrees to the direction of the explosion had its doors and windows blown in, but suffered much less damage than buildings squarely in the path of the blast. The windows and doors offer mute evidence of the way the blast swept in to the structures. The destructive circle within a mile from zero point had a few notable exceptions, mainly reinforced concrete. On the edge of the area of greatest damage was a landmark, a Red Cross hospital which never ceased functioning, although it sustained damage. Today it dominates the desert of a debris that was Hiroshima. Another notable exception to the general demolition was the Higaski railroad station in east Hiroshima, a mile and a half from the center of the blast. This building, however, suffered extensive damage. The twisted steel beams and concrete walls show the effects of the tremendous concussion.

(05:02) What's left of the commercial museum within two-tenths of a mile of zero point also gives indication of the tremendous push of the explosion. The downward force of the blast turned the roof of the commercial museum into a reservoir. Amazingly enough, bridges did not suffer too badly at Hiroshima. This steel-rail bridge, one mile from zero point, had the side toward the explosion virtually blasted by flying particles, which removed almost all the paint. But the side away from the explosion did not need a new paint job. Roads in the area fared better than buildings or bridges. Shortly after the fires died down, traffic was resumed. Today these highways through the ruins are again in use. Beside our military traffic trudged the survivors of vanished Hiroshima, the first city in history to be atom-bombed into oblivion. Even four miles away, the effects of the atomic blast were felt. Although a hill between the Novitiate of the Jesuits and zero point lessened the intensity, windows of the main building were shattered. A group of priests witnessed and survived the Hiroshima blast. One of them, Father John Simas, tells what he actually saw. An eye-witness account.

John Simas (06:26)

I was in my room, which faces the valley, and suddenly I saw a light, like magnesium light, flash light, which filled the whole valley. And looking out of my window to find out the reason for this peculiar phenomena, I saw nothing besides this light. And turning from the window to the door of my room, I heard a crash, it may be, it may have been ten seconds, after seeing the light, the flash light. And immediately I was covered with splinters of the window frames, and glass sticking into the walls, and actually my flesh itself. After a while, we saw a procession of people coming from the outskirts of the city up the valley. Many of them, most of them, were wounded, especially the part of the body which were not covered by clothes, like hands, feet, back. All of us who lived through this experience, at the spot, estimate the numbers of deaths at least at 100,000.

Reporter (07:58)

What is your opinion as to the story that the ruins of the city emit deadly rays?

John Simas (08:02)

Well I think that it's just a rumor because I myself and others of us have worked in the city itself immediately after the explosion for several hours, and we felt no ill effect at all.

Narrator (08:19)

After Hiroshima, Tokyo wondered when the next atom bomb would fall. They did not wonder long, because the president delivered an ultimatum. Surrender or face complete destruction. The Japanese ignored the ultimatum. It was evident that atomic power to break the enemy must become the tale of two cities. Nagasaki was selected to become target city number 2. Exactly three days after Hiroshima, a B-29 set out for Nagasaki.

(08:50) Instructions were precise. To the north, Japan's greatest torpedo plant. To the south, steel and arms works were located in the heart of the city. The bomb was aimed midway between the two plants to cause greatest possible damage. Because the plants were located in a valley, surrounding hills shielded most residential areas and concentrated the damage on the industrial section. At 10:58 the morning of August 9th, the bomb was exploded above the city and in the towering mushroom, Japan could read its doom. This was more than a routine bombing. It was the funeral pyre of an aggressor nation. The bomb had been purposely exploded high so that the greatest part of its radioactive material was dissipated in the stratosphere.

(9:42) From the air, the skeletons of the Mitsubishi plants made evident that Nagasaki's war-making power was totally destroyed. For the valley area of little more than three square miles, blast and fire reduced the industrial plants and surrounding buildings to blackened rubble.

(10:06) The Mitsubishi steel and arms works extended almost a mile in length. Before the blast these were modern buildings, constructed like our own American factories. Closer examination of the ruins shows the same complete destruction that characterized the ruins of Hiroshima. Damage to equipment and machinery used in the manufacture of naval rifles, AA guns and heavy artillery was such that even if Japan had determined to commit suicide by continuing resistance, she could not have salvaged much from the ruins. Smokestacks bent but did not break before the blast. And roads were unaffected, people using them without ill effect shortly after the explosion.

(10:49) The ruins revealed beyond doubt the existence of the shadow factories the Japanese had set up in the nearby residential areas of the industrial valley. You have seen the swath of destruction created by atomic power in this tale of two cities. The world's greatest minds in science, state craft, and military matters are wrestling with the problems created by the atom. On this spot, outlined in stone, is a figure representing the average man, regardless of his race or creed. These atomic footprints on the sands of time can never be erased. They point a path which leads to unparalleled progress. Or unparalleled destruction. Just as in the darkness of the desert morning, when the atomic age was born, atomic power puts the question squarely to mankind.

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