

Great Cities: How Hiroshima rose from the ashes of nuclear destruction

By Justin McCurry, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 05.20.16

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The Genbaku Dome, now the Hiroshima Peace Memorial, was one of the few structures left standing. Photo: US Army/Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. MIDDLE: Area of the Hiroshima blast and fire damage, Photo: U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey. BOTTOM: An image of Hiroshima after the bombing. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

Editor's Note: In August 1945, the U.S. dropped an atomic bomb over Hiroshima, Japan. More than 140,000 people were killed. Six days later, Japan surrendered and World War II ended. Hiroshima has since been reborn. Today it is a place of peace and prosperity.

The people of Hiroshima have an unusual way to describe their city's layout. Places are "about a mile away" or "500 yards north." Nobody says what this means, but everyone knows. Everything in Hiroshima is measured in the distance from ground zero of the world's first nuclear attack.

Visitors arriving by bullet train in Hiroshima might not see the city's history. On a warm spring evening, tourists visit seafood restaurants. Others board pleasure boats to Miyajima Island. They enjoy the wild deer and Shinto shrine. If they look a little, they can find reminders of the city's unique role in history.

Hiroshima did not look like the same city it had been a day before. Wooden homes had been burned to the ground by firestorms; the city's rivers were filled with the corpses of people desperately seeking water before they died. Only a scattering of concrete buildings were still standing.

Keiko Ogura remembers Hiroshima after the attack. She was then an 8-year-old schoolgirl. She returned to the city the day after the attack. "The entire city had been burned to the ground," says Ogura. "None of us could comprehend what had happened ... we kept asking ourselves how an entire city could have been destroyed by a single bomb."

Deadly Attack Left Thousands Of Victims

The blast instantly killed 80,000 of Hiroshima's 420,000 residents. Survivors died of injuries or illnesses due to the bomb's radiation. By the end of the year, the death toll had risen to 141,000.

Yet, despite the horror, evidence has emerged of remarkable acts of courage and resourcefulness. Incredibly, Hiroshima's rebirth began just hours after it was effectively wiped from the map.

Some of the lights came back on the day after the bombing. Power was restored to 30 percent of homes that had escaped fire damage. Three months later, the whole city had power again.

Water pumps were repaired four days after the bombing. The central telephone office was destroyed and all of its workers killed. By the middle of Aug. 14, phone lines were back in operation.

A Difficult Journey

Streetcars and trains returned in days, partly to carry workers and supplies needed to rebuild. A limited streetcar service resumed on Aug. 9. That was the same day Nagasaki was destroyed by a plutonium bomb, killing more than 70,000 people. With the urgent need to move people and supplies into the city, two rail lines started moving again, just days after the bomb fell.



People rebuilding Hiroshima had a tough job to do. The mayor, Senkichi Aways, was among the dead, leaving the city without a leader. Thousands of public servants, teachers and health workers were also among the victims. On Aug. 6, Hiroshima had about 1,000 government workers. The following day just 80 reported for duty.

“They alone had to deal with emergency medical treatment, establish a food supply, and retrieve and cremate corpses,” historian Yuki Tanaka says. “They were incredibly difficult times.” Simply caring for the dying and seriously wounded was nearly impossible: 14 of Hiroshima’s 16 big hospitals no longer existed; 270 of 298 hospital doctors were dead, along with 1,654 of 1,780 nurses. Demand for housing turned the area near the blast into a shantytown of 10,000 homes made from materials found lying around.

City Becomes A Memorial For Peace

Hiroshima might have escaped destruction. U.S. President Harry Truman and his advisers had a list of five cities. However, there are serious reasons why the United States targeted Hiroshima. The city began as a castle town at the end of the 1500s under the rule of the

warlord Mori Terumoto. By the end of the 1800s, it served as a regional headquarters for the Imperial Japanese army. Later, as a major manufacturing center, it helped fuel the Japanese empire's military efforts in the Asia-Pacific.

The idea of transforming a large area of Hiroshima into a memorial to the atomic bomb dead took hold in 1946. That was when a local newspaper ran a competition. Readers were invited to express their visions for the city. First prize was awarded to Sankichi Toge. He imagined a peace plaza memorial, a library, museum and a place where visitors could come from around the world. Toge, who lived through the attack, died in 1953 at the age of 36.

The city government liked Toge's vision, but lacked the money to act. Because the bomb killed so many people, the government had little money. There were not enough people to pay taxes to pay for new buildings. Good news came in 1949. National politicians, recognizing Hiroshima's special place in history, passed the Peace Memorial City Construction Law. Part of it states: "Hiroshima is to be a peace memorial city symbolizing the human idea of the sincere pursuit of genuine and lasting peace."

Quiz

- 1 What are the MAIN ideas of this article?
- (A) The city of Hiroshima used to be important to Japan's history; it was ruined when the atomic bomb was dropped.
 - (B) The city of Hiroshima was ruined by a bomb attack in World War II; the city worked hard to recover and rebuild itself.
 - (C) The city of Hiroshima was harmed when an atomic bomb was dropped on it; many people died or were hurt.
 - (D) The city of Hiroshima is popular with tourists for its restaurants and sites; it is also has a memorial for those killed by the atomic bomb.
- 2 Which detail BEST reflects the city of Hiroshima's main goal today?
- (A) It hopes to find out why the United States dropped the atomic bomb.
 - (B) It hopes to rebuild the buildings that were damaged by the bomb.
 - (C) It hopes to build more restaurants and sites that will bring tourists.
 - (D) It hopes to be a symbol of peace and a memorial to those who died.
- 3 Based on the article, why was World War II so important to Hiroshima's history?
- (A) because the atomic bomb almost ruined the city during World War II
 - (B) because the mayor of Hiroshima was killed during World War II
 - (C) because the United States invaded the city during World War II
 - (D) because the Japanese army had its headquarters there during World War II
- 4 Which section of the article explains HOW the city made plans to rebuild itself?
- (A) Hiroshima Was Destroyed
 - (B) Deadly Attack Left Thousands Of Victims
 - (C) A Difficult Journey
 - (D) City Becomes A Memorial For Peace