

Foreword

Steven Leeper

*I*n 1984, I moved to Hiroshima and have been involved with this city ever since. I translated for the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum for over twenty years, including countless accounts of the A-bomb tragedy. I suspect that no one alive has heard, translated, or interpreted the testimony of more A-bomb survivors than I have, with the likely exception of my wife. I know or knew personally many of the survivors Charles Pellegrino mentions in the book you are about to read. From April 2007 to 2013, I served as the first non-Japanese chairman of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation, the organization that manages the Hiroshima Museum, and I now teach Hiroshima Studies at Hiroshima Jogakuin University.

I am not a scientist who can speak authoritatively about the inner workings of the bomb or its physical or medical effects. Nor am I a World War II historian who can say with scholarly assurance what led to the war or the bombings. But I have a comprehensive understanding of how the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki experienced, remember, and talk or write about the atomic bombs.

I have attempted to establish my credentials as a person who knows Hiroshima—and above all the survivors and their stories—because I want it to mean something to you when I say that *To Hell and Back: The Last Train from Hiroshima* is by far the most insightful and powerful book I have ever read on the subject of the bombings. The horrors Pellegrino presents are accurate, based on eyewitness accounts supported by knowledgeable and reasonable guesses about the unknown (for example, what happened to people who vanished at the hypocenters). No book I know has articulated more fully, more accurately, and more effectively the essential nature of the atomic bombings, the experience of the people, and the endless aftermath. And, as all survivors

will be quick to point out, the reality was vastly more horrific than even the talented Pellegrino can convey. With the world entering into a new era of nuclear weapons escalation, a book of this kind is needed now, more than ever.

As the filmmaker/engineer James Cameron has pointed out, “The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki have always been controversial and are seen very differently through different cultural and national perspectives.”[★] As an example of how perspective and even agenda can re-color history, in the first edition of *Last Train* (2010), Pellegrino was tricked by one informant. He believed an American veteran’s well-documented, convincingly presented story that turned out to be false. When presented with new evidence, Pellegrino quickly admitted his mistake and corrected the book. Nevertheless, he and his book were attacked as if he had deliberately fabricated the evidence and, therefore, could never again be trusted. Obviously, the false Joseph Fuoco story (which added up to only five pages of the entire first edition) was not the cause of this rage. The fury became, Cameron concluded, “an example of how the strong emotions surrounding this subject are still coloring people’s ability to see history clearly, when a relatively minor research error (a result of a fraudulent or self-deluded witness—and immediately corrected once exposed) could blaze up into a firestorm of controversy and invective almost seven decades after the event.”

Last Train aroused such fury in 2010 because Pellegrino accurately depicted the cruelty of the weapon and, simultaneously, the humanity of those exposed to it. Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as they appeared in *Last Train*—and now in *To Hell and Back*—were cities full of people; real, admirable, often lovable human beings whose lives were destroyed or filled with suffering as a result of the atomic bombings. Thus, even though Pellegrino expressly refuses to address the issue of whether or not the bombs were justified, the sheer horror he describes makes the bombings and, by extension, the United States (and even humanity itself) look bad. This book elicits guilt, defensiveness, and rage because it transports readers, to the extent we are willing to go, into a world that is more frightening and painful than that of any “true story” we have ever been told. And it is a continuing story of survivor suffering seven decades later.

The Fuoco furor, the attendant ad hominem attacks against the author himself, and the kowtowing of an American publisher leading to the 2010 recall and pulping of the first *Last Train* drove Pellegrino to extend his research and write an even better book, more complete, more accurate, and more effective. In fact, history actually owes a debt to the more extremist critics. For example, their wild attacks led Kenshi Hirata to step forward from a half-century of trying to stay out of history’s way and to tell, for

[★]James Cameron, July 2014, in support of a Japan young adult edition, *Ghosts of Hiroshima*, explaining his perspective on what had happened four years earlier in America.

the first time, the rest of his family's story. Having traveled aboard that "last train" from Hiroshima to Nagasaki and been exposed to both atomic bombs, he was among the dozens of survivors who came forth after 2010 to counter reports in the American press that asserted, "Hiroshima did not happen that way." Were it not for false claims that the survivors in the book should be regarded as possibly having never existed, Hirata would otherwise have taken his own story to the grave in 2013. Ironically, Fuoco's false story helped bring much truth to light.

At the deepest level, I suspect the main reason Pellegrino was attacked so intensely is that in 2010 *Last Train* was, and *To Hell and Back* is even more so now, a potential game changer in the struggle to eliminate nuclear weapons. Pellegrino worked with filmmaker James Cameron on *Titanic* and *Avatar*. He introduced Cameron to the late Tsutomu Yamaguchi, the most famous of the survivors of both the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs, and Yamaguchi secured from Cameron a promise to make a film about the bombings. If Cameron were to apply his full genius and arsenal of filmmaking skills to a film based on *To Hell and Back*, it would help make nuclear weapons public enemy number one and herald the end of the nuclear age. In the context of the current "humanitarian impact movement" (a movement led by Switzerland to reveal the true consequences of any use of nuclear weapons), such a film would forcefully bring to light the bizarre logic that continues to dominate strategic planning and make it impossible for any politician to both advocate for nuclear weapons and get elected.

With the revised and expanded second and third editions of *Last Train* published to acclaim in more than twenty countries, the languages of the world's two nuclear superpowers (English and Russian) are among the very few major ones in which this book has not been printed in the nearly five years since its first, briefly available English edition.

As Pellegrino has often said, the crucial meaning of the atomic bombings lies in the future, not the past. The future of our civilization hinges on what we decide to do now, based on what we know of the past. *To Hell and Back* is an astute, powerful, and positive contribution to that process.

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