

Except for a few buildings, Hiroshima today has been completely rebuilt—that is, on a sort of overnight basis. In the photograph at the left the new Peace Memorial can be seen with the sign “No More Hiroshimas.” Also at the

Hiroshima—

—HIROSHIMA.

THIS is about a visit to Hiroshima. It is about people who survive atomic catastrophe, how they go about restoring their lives, and, even more important, how they go about restoring their faith in the human race and their faith in themselves. It is about those who came limping back to a smashed city to clear away the atomic wreckage and start their lives all over again. It is not a story of despair. For Hiroshima today is alive. It is vital. The citizens plan to make Hiroshima one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

As I write these notes, I am sitting on one of the levees that line the seven rivers of Hiroshima. At my back, about seventy-five feet away, is the small inn at which I am staying. In front of me, across the river, I can see perhaps six square miles of the city, stretching along the banks of the river and sprawling out beyond. The city itself is fairly flat, built on sea level. Hiroshima is a seaport, though from this vantage point it seems completely surrounded by a ring of mountains. The hurry-up, improvised quality of the wooden buildings on the other side of the river gives the city something of the appearance of an American mining town in the West a century ago. This resemblance is even stronger because of the mountains in the background.

From where I sit, I can see the general area hit hardest by the atomic bomb; I can see what is now the most famous landmark of the atomic explosion—the dome, or what used to be a dome, of the old Industrial Exhibition Hall. It's hollowed out now, but just enough of the curved steelwork is left so you can tell it was a dome. Then there's another four- or five-storey structure off to the left a few hundred yards away that shows evidence of considerable damage, but apart from these two buildings Hiroshima

today has been completely rebuilt—rebuilt, that is, on a sort of overnight basis. The homes, the stores, the industrial buildings were thrown up very hastily. But the greatest difficulty hasn't been putting up the new buildings and shacks. The greatest difficulty has been clearing away the rubble.

The river is at low tide and you can walk across its full width of about 500 feet without getting your ankles wet. You look out across the river and you see the streets clearly marked out; you see electric and telephone poles; you see very little open area; and you see no rubble or evidence of the bomb whatsoever, except for the old dome skeleton.

Of course, when you actually walk through the streets, when you get into the heart of the city, you can see many wounds that are still open. You see the gutted foundations of the concrete buildings, even though four years of weeds and grass do a great deal to smooth over and conceal the old ruins. Right next to the small inn where I am staying is the wreckage of what was once a fairly large two-storey stone home. All that is left is part of a well, the large concrete gateposts, and the iron gate itself—most of it twisted out of shape. I went poking around behind the wall yesterday and came across a family of five living under a piece of canvas, propped up by boards, and using the stone wall as the principal inside wall surface. Right in front of this home, if you want to call it that, which measures about seven feet by seven feet, the family has cleared away the rubble and planted a vegetable garden.

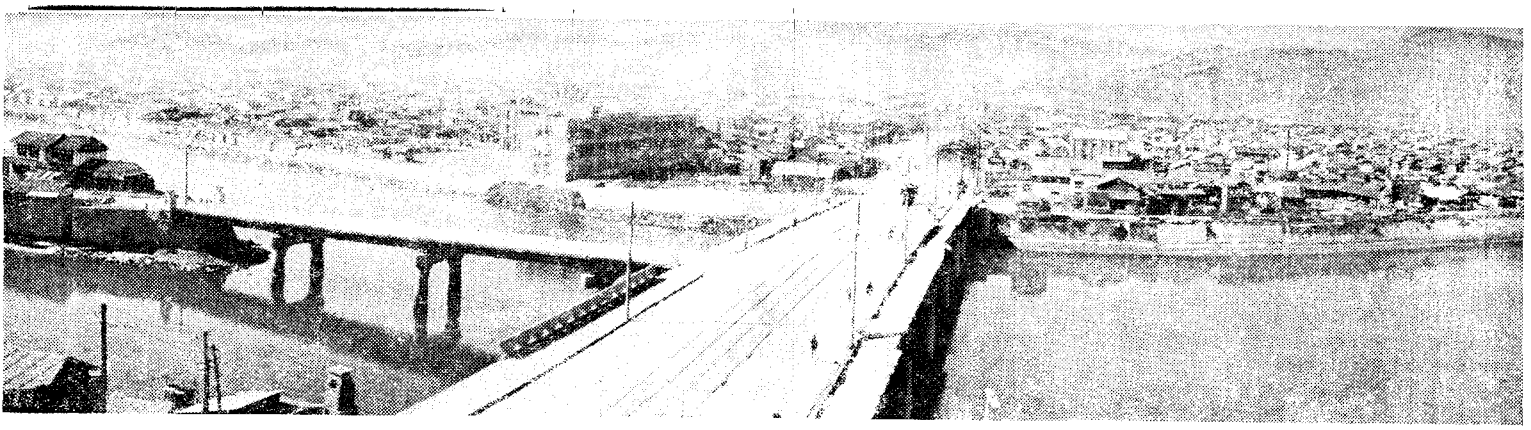
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YESTERDAY, at noon, I stood at the spot which is believed to mark the center of the atomic explosion. Directly in front of me were two fairly thick and round stucco columns or

gate-posts on a very small plot raised about one foot off the ground level as a marker and memorial.

These columns were all that was left of Dr. Shima's hospital, which was right under the atomic burst. A new hospital has been built right in back of the old gateposts. It is a two-storey affair, painted white. Patients waved to us from the windows.

As you stand at the center of the atomic explosion, it's difficult to describe the thing you feel. Here, four years ago, there was a flash of heat which at the split second of fission was many times the surface temperature of the sun. And suddenly, even before a stop watch could register it, the heart of a city was laid open with a hot knife. I've talked to dozens of people who were in it—dozens who were crippled and burned and suffering from diseases of radioactivity—and the story is very much the same. The sudden flash of light brighter than the morning sun—much shorter, much more intense than lightning, much more intense than any light ever seen before on this earth. If you lived through that second, you found that your clothes were on fire, and your arms and legs and face were on fire, and you rushed out into the street and ran, for everyone else was running—no one knew where. And everything was now blazing, and you were inside the fire, trying to run somewhere. Then someone yelled, “Run for the river!” and you threw yourself into the river and thousands of others did the same thing and you wondered what happened to your family, to your children or your parents. No one knew where anyone was, but there were people all around you, and other people were jumping from the bridges into the river, and the dead bodies were all around you in the river, but you could hardly hear the people crying out because the blaze was like rolling thunder sweeping over you.



left (center) is the famous landmark of the atomic explosion, the hollowed-out dome of the old Industrial Exhibition Hall. As may be observed in photograph above, only small sections of the stone bridge railings were left erect by the bomb.

Four Years Later

And all day and night the fire ate your city and burned your dead, and all night you stayed in the river to cool your burns, but the tide ran out and you buried yourself as deeply in the mud as you could and prayed for the tide to come back in again with the water from the sea to cool your fevered body, even though it was salt water and threw knives into your burns, but at least they were cool knives. The hours passed slowly and you searched the sky for the light of morning, but the city was a torch and it was difficult to see the sky. But then morning came and you joined the thousands of others running through the black smoke, stumbling over the wreckage of the buildings, the sounds of the dying and the damned all around you. You were too much in a hurry to notice you had no clothes; it was hard to see that others had no clothes either, for their bodies were like charcoal.

THIS then was Hiroshima in the first hours of the Atomic Age. It was something new in the solar system—getting at the heart of matter and ripping it apart, and causing the smallest units of nature to smash each other and set off a flash as though a piece of the sun itself had broken away, and sending out strange rays that went through the bones and did things to the composition of human blood that had not been done before or dreamt of before. This was the triumph of mind over matter in the ultimate and most frightening sense.

As you stood in front of the large stone columns from the old hospital gateposts, and you reached over and felt the rough, raised surface of the stone, its composition altered because the surface had been melted by the explosion, you wondered why people would ever come back to the city again—not merely Hiroshima but any city—any city that man ever built, for

by this bomb he had placed a curse on every city everywhere. You wondered what the lure could be that could bring people out from the hills and back to this place of compressed agony. You wondered but you didn't have very far to look for the answer, for the answer was all around you. You could see it in the faces of the people who passed on the street. You could see it in the brisk, life-loving walk of the young people. You could hear it in the full laughter of children. You could see it in the eagerness of young boys and young men playing ball with each other wherever there was a place to play ball. The answer you found was that there are deeper resources of courage and regeneration in human beings than any of the philosophers had dared to dream. The answer you found was that the greatest force on this earth—greater than any device yet conjured up in the laboratories—is the will to live and the will to hope.

As you looked around you in Hiroshima, you saw a young woman of about twenty-four or -five with a baby strapped to her back. She was wearing Western dress though she had on Japanese wooden shoes. There was nothing defeatist about this girl. She was starting out to raise a family; she was going to do it in Hiroshima, and nowhere else; she believed in life, and nothing could change it. And as she passed you, you looked at the back of her neck and down her left arm, you saw the seared and discolored flesh that is the badge of citizenship in Hiroshima today. The girl stepped to one side to allow a modern bus to pass—it was a bus filled with Japanese baseball players in uniform, for baseball has become the national pastime in Japan to an extent not approached even in America. The baseball players were singing, some of them, and you thought you saw, but couldn't be quite sure—you thought you saw the famil-

iar atomic burns on one or two arms or faces.

Another thing you wondered about was what the people themselves thought about the bomb and about America. You spoke to them about it, and it was hard to believe that what they said was the way people can or should feel after having lived through an atomic explosion. There was no bitterness, except in one or two cases. They said, most of them, that if it hadn't been Hiroshima it would have been another city and they had no right to ask exemption at the expense of their fellows. They said, most of them, that they had taken part in something that would save the lives of millions, for they believe, most of them, that Hiroshima, in the words of the Mayor, Shinzo Hamai, was an exhibit for peace, a laboratory that had demonstrated the nature of the new warfare so dramatically that it would destroy war itself. They believed, most of them, that two years of blinding, grinding warfare were squeezed into a single bomb and that the smashing of Hiroshima made it possible for many millions of Japanese to stay alive, for they then knew by this bomb that the war was forever lost to them. Some of them, of course, said things they thought you wanted to hear, but their voices and their eyes would frequently give them away. And then, as counterbalance perhaps, you would find a woman—a woman barber who took over the shop after her husband died in the explosion—who would turn her head and say that she never wanted to look at any American, for she was afraid he would see the hate she had in her heart for the people who could stain their honor as Americans did by dropping such a bomb. She lost her husband and two children and when it pained her heart to think about it she would think of America and know that such evil could only come from evil people. Then

there were some who blamed it on the Japanese Government, who said that when Japan first bombed China they were certain that God would visit the crime on the Japanese a thousandfold. Some blamed it on the Japanese Government because it had converted Hiroshima into a military base and shipping point, and they were certain that America would find this out and destroy the city.

This was the first I had heard about Hiroshima as a city of military importance. As I spoke to people and questioned them, the picture began to take shape. When a girl of nineteen told me about her experience in the bombing, she spoke of all the soldiers running past her house on the way from the barracks near the old Castle. When the photographer who took films for me told about his experience during the bombing, he spoke of his sensation while riding a train two miles away from Hiroshima on his way to work. He said that when he heard the explosion he thought the large ammunition supply center near the old Parade Grounds had been blown up, for the explosion was too loud for even the largest bomb. Others on the outskirts of the city spoke of the same feeling. I spoke to one man who operated a bus to the ammunition dump; he gave me some idea of its size and said that many thousands worked there during the war.

IT WAS freely admitted, once you referred to it, that Japan was divided into two main military zones, and that the headquarters for the North was in Tokyo, and the headquarters for the South in Hiroshima.

Later that evening I discussed with Mayor Hamai the military importance of Hiroshima during the war. He spoke freely and fully. Hiroshima had been Japan's chief port for sending soldiers overseas. It had housed large ammunition supply depots.

I asked the Mayor whether it was true, as I had heard in some of my conversations, that as many as 60,000 soldiers had been stationed in Hiroshima at the time of the bombing. He was familiar with the reports but believed that the number may have been closer to 40,000. Then I learned for the first time something I had seen in no report about Hiroshima since the end of the war. I learned that 30,000 soldiers had died in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and that this figure had been suppressed by the Japanese police, then under orders from the Japanese Government to conceal the military death toll and the military importance of Hiroshima as well as to minimize the general damage and civilian death toll. Japan had been taken completely by surprise and didn't

want the United States to know how effective the weapon had been, so that what little bargaining power she had at the peace table might not have been further reduced; and that, once having announced the figures originally, Japan was reluctant to embarrass itself by giving out the true ones.

I learned that the only figures since used by the American Government about Hiroshima have been supplied by Japanese sources, and that the original figures supplied by the Japanese police had never been corrected. I further learned from Mayor Hamai, who was in charge of rationing in Hiroshima during the war and who was given the responsibility for issuing new certificates after the bombing, that the population of Hiroshima had decreased 110,000 when a check was made three months after the bombing—and that this figure did not include 30,000 military personnel or the many thousands of volunteers from outside the city brought in to construct fire-retention barriers, or the thousands who have died since. The city's own estimate today of its dead, said Mayor Hamai, is 210,000 to 240,000. The highest previous figure made public was 100,000.

The following day, Mayor Hamai took me on a tour of Hiroshima's hospitals. It was an experience difficult to put out of your mind, and you tried hard to put it out of your mind because you saw things that whatever sanity you may have had cried out against. You saw beds held together with slabs of wood; nowhere did you see sheets or pillows; you saw dirty

bandages and littered floors and rooms not much larger than closets with four or five patients huddled together. You thought back to what you saw in the D. P. camps in Germany and you knew that nothing you have seen in Germany or anywhere else put human pride to such a strain.

YOU looked in on an operating room that seemed little better than a crude abattoir. You saw rooms where whole families have moved in with the patient. You saw all this with unbelieving eyes and then you had some idea of what Mayor Hamai meant when he said that Hiroshima needed America's help to take care of its sick. For all the hospitals in Hiroshima were destroyed or gutted or severely damaged by the bomb, and hospital facilities in Japan are not easy to come by. People can throw up shacks to live in inside a week or two, but a hospital is nothing to be thrown together. Everything is needed that makes a hospital a hospital, Mayor Hamai said: surgical equipment and rubber gloves for operations and sterilizers and X-ray equipment and beds and pots and pans.

As he spoke, I thought of the millions of dollars being spent by the United States in Hiroshima in the work of the Atomic Bomb Casualty Commission—excellent work and important work, for it can tell what happens to people in atomic warfare. Nothing of those millions goes to treat the victims of the atomic bomb. The Casualty Commission only examines patients; it doesn't treat them. And

(Continued on page 30)



At the Hiroshima railway station, just before returning to Tokyo. Left to right: Mayor Shinzo Hamai; American-born Harry Uneda, the Mayor's assistant; Norman Cousins, and Mrs. Kiyoshi Tanimoto, whose husband (now in the U. S.) was one of the persons whose experiences were described in John Hersey's "Hiroshima."

Fiction. No American writer knows more about the Civil War in Greece than George Weller, correspondent and novelist. "The Crack in the Column," dramatically interprets the agony of a people split apart by power politics. That the author does not agree with British and American policy will not interfere with the reader's enjoyment of a distinguished novel. The fantasy world of the mental hospital is again revealed in a first novel by Fritz Peters, which with some reason might be called a male "Snake Pit." "The World Next Door" is the story of a war veteran whose courage alone saved his reason and restored him to human decency. On the lighter side, Helen MacInnes's "Rest and Be Thankful," a cheerful story of Eastern intellectuals in Wyoming, and Robert Nathan's conventionally charming fantasy, "The River Journey," reviewed, respectively, on pages 14 and 13, are recommended without reservation.

The Mind in Torment

THE WORLD NEXT DOOR. By Fritz Peters. New York: Farrar, Straus & Co. 362 pp. \$3.

By HOLLIS ALPERT

THIS is a magnificent novel. It is a first book, it is probably largely autobiographical, but no qualifications are necessary because of either of these facts. To my mind it is the best piece of fiction yet produced by a veteran of the recent war. Proceeding from a documentary base (the setting is a Veterans Administration mental hospital) Fritz Peters takes off into untrodden areas of the mind in a devastatingly moving account of a young man's journey through delusion.

I have the fear that its subject matter may set some too hastily against this book. For others have explored similar ground pretty thoroughly before this, and even the movies—the line extends from "The Eternal Mask" through some rather horrible examples of ineptness to the relatively dignified "The Snake Pit"—have documented the mind in torment. But all that has come before fails to cast a shadow over the remarkable freshness of Mr. Peters's novel. Here is a glowing proof, if one was ever needed, that no subject becomes fictionally stale, no matter how much it has been kicked around previously, so long as a gifted writer goes to work upon it.

Almost all of the action occurs within the confines of the hospital, and all is seen, heard, and felt through the sick mind of David Mitchell. This constantly maintained focus results in a sometimes excruciating and sustained intensity that carries the reader along like a ride on a nightmarish roller-coaster. Yet it is remarkable how quickly and strangely oriented one

becomes to Mitchell's fantasy world, how through sheer verbalization of the abstract unreality takes on a stronger, sharper, more painful quality than reality. Mitchell's first shock treatment is one awesomely vivid example of this. Unreality merges, from time to time, with reality, until that last electrical bolt crashes through him and he finds himself once more in the "pack room" for violent cases, and

begins to grope his way toward his eventually firm hold on the tangible.

Thankfully, Mr. Peters has avoided using the psychiatric and psychoanalytic jargon which might have clouded his acute perceptions. Nor has he done much delving into the case-history aspects of Mitchell's personality. The story is primarily that of a disoriented mind fighting valiantly through the delusional maze back to the boundaries of normality. Certainly there are glimpses enough of Mitchell's past life, indications of a tangled mother relationship, war experiences, a homosexual phase, and perhaps even hereditary factors, to sense the contributions to his breakdown. But Mr. Peters is most interested in that mirage-like area lying between reality and the world on the other side of the mind's threshold. What is the uncontrolled escape into fantasy like? And what are the emotions that accompany the painfully regained contact with the self and the environment? The answers, in richly dramatic terms, are given as they never have been given before. All is evoked in a wonderfully clear style, with the controlled imagery always conveying with infallible precision the mood and the feeling. I have come across no contemporary novel in a long time that, in terms of the writing alone, is so effective. There

THE AUTHOR: To understand psychoses, "it's necessary, of course, to know that your mother hit you over the head with a frying pan when you were a child," concedes Fritz Peters, a lanky, blond, engaging young man. "But you're no longer a child. Face it, and go on from there!" "The World Next Door" (the mental wards of a Veterans Administration hospital) is 60 per cent personal history, 40 per cent fiction. "It wasn't the violence of war alone that unbalanced these people," he says. "I was as much the adjustment to our nervous society." The author's own brief breakdown occurred about a year after his discharge from the Army, with which he was in Europe thirty-seven months as regimental stenographer, interpreter and translator, section general's secretary, and claims officer. "As an excess technical sergeant I would have had to go to Japan," he laughs, "so they made me a second lieutenant." Wisconsin-born and Paris-educated, before the war he worked variously for gas stations and bars, the British Purchasing Commission and Colgate-Palmolive Peet—the last as French translator. Meanwhile for about fifteen years he has been writing and tearing up MSS. Within three months after returning to the States he turned out a juvenile—bought by Harper—and a batch of stories, of which he sold his first to Harper's Bazaar Editor Mary Louise Aswell—since last June Mrs. Peters. ("I type very fast," he explains.) They've just left their Santa Fé home to spend the winter abroad while he winds up his next book. "I felt much freer doing 'The World Next Door' as fiction than as a series of crusading articles," he says. Not that the novel is meant as such, except perhaps with reference to GI disability claims, which boomerang against the claimee. "The way it is, too many inmates' families keep them committed just to cash the compensation checks. Something will have to be done about that some day."

—R. G.

