

Interview with Harold Steele

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Interviewer: Mark DePue

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DePue: The other incident I wanted to talk to you about, that I'm sure you recall, is hearing the news of the atomic bomb in August and shortly thereafter, obviously, the end of the war in the Pacific as well. But what was your reaction hearing the news about the atomic bomb?

Steele: Yes it was there in France, there at the tent camps, when that news came. I thought, What is an atomic bomb? There were pictures of the plume and the Stars and Stripes. I thought, Jeez, jeez, boy. And I thanked the President, because we knew he had to give the okay. Thank you, President Truman, thank you. We're not going to have to go there and fight another one. Because I'd heard lots of stories about the trauma of jungle warfare and I thought I'd been lucky to go to Europe.

DePue: No doubt in your mind that he had made the right decision?

Steele: Oh, no doubt. No doubt at all.

DePue: Had any cause to rethink that in the years afterwards?

Steele: I've thought of it several times, and I come even more proud of a president that had the courage, the conviction. But also, he'd been a battery commander in the artillery in World War I. He knew what combat was. He knew what war was. And that helped him make that decision without probably thinking too long. Get this sucker over. Because he knew the Japanese quite likely would have been just like Hitler. We're fighting to the last blood, the last person! And all indications were the Japanese were of the same mind. The kamikaze {in Japanese, "Divine Wind": pilots taught to fly their planes directly into targets, especially U. S. Navy ships} pilots and all the other factors brought into being that were not even considered that a person was very important. So the Japanese citizen quite likely wasn't any more important than the kamikaze pilot to the last person. So I thought, Jeez, thank you, thank you, Mr. President.

