



## To Hell and Back: The Last Train from Hiroshima (Asia/Pacific/Perspectives)

By Charles Pellegrino

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### **To Hell and Back: The Last Train from Hiroshima (Asia/Pacific/Perspectives)** By Charles Pellegrino

Drawing on the voices of atomic bomb survivors and the new science of forensic archaeology, Charles Pellegrino describes the events and the aftermath of two days in August when nuclear devices, detonated over Japan, changed life on Earth forever.

*To Hell and Back* offers readers a stunning, “you are there” time capsule, wrapped in elegant prose. Charles Pellegrino’s scientific authority and close relationship with the A-bomb survivors make his account the most gripping and authoritative ever written.

At the narrative’s core are eyewitness accounts of those who experienced the atomic explosions firsthand—the Japanese civilians on the ground. As the first city targeted, Hiroshima is the focus of most histories. Pellegrino gives equal weight to the bombing of Nagasaki, symbolized by the thirty people who are known to have fled Hiroshima for Nagasaki—where they arrived just in time to survive the second bomb. One of them, Tsutomu Yamaguchi, is the only person who experienced the full effects of both cataclysms within Ground Zero. The second time, the blast effects were diverted around the stairwell behind which Yamaguchi’s office conference was convened—placing him and few others in a shock cocoon that offered protection while the entire building disappeared around them.

Pellegrino weaves spellbinding stories together within an illustrated narrative that challenges the “official report,” showing exactly what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki—and why.

Also available from compatible vendors is an enhanced e-book version containing never-before-seen video clips of the survivors, their descendants, and the cities as they are today. Filmed by the author during his research in Japan, these 18 videos are placed throughout the text, taking readers beyond the page and offering an eye-opening and personal way to understand how the effects of the atomic bombs are still felt 70 years after detonation.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

I have travelled with Pellegrino to Japan to visit survivors of both the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, and to consult with officials and historians there. Among that community he is well respected and considered an important voice for the history of these events. Pellegrino combines intense forensic detail—some of it new to history—with unfathomable heartbreak. The author unflinchingly chronicles these most devastating events in Japan, the only times nuclear weapons have been used against human beings, and begs us to hold hands and to pray that it never happens again. A must read for anyone with a conscience. (James Cameron, director, producer, engineer, and explorer)

By far the best book I have ever read on the subject. . . . No one I know has ever articulated more fully, more accurately, and more effectively the essential nature of the atomic bombings. A great book—a potential game-changer in the struggle to eliminate nuclear weapons. (Steven Leeper, Hiroshima Jogakuin University, former chair of the Hiroshima Peace Culture Foundation)

The book opens with imagery that leaves one speechless. Pellegrino is a poet at heart, a poet with a Japanese soul. (Francis Kakugawa, poet, Hiroshima family member)

Drawing on his considerable scholarly skills as well as his poetic sensibility, Charles Pellegrino has greatly enlarged our understanding of the singular tragedy that was—and is—Hiroshima. The pages themselves seem to weep, drenched as they are in poignancy, passion, and a salutary measure of unbearable truth.

(James Morrow, author of *Shambling Towards Hiroshima* and *This Is the Way the World Ends*)

I just finished reading the book again. Each time I take the journey, the words leave a stronger impression—the most important piece of literature written about the hibakusha (the exposed) since John Hershey's *Hiroshima*. (Paule Savinio, author of *From Above*)

Charles Pellegrino's writings have provided critical information, particularly on the first twenty-four hours after the nuclear explosion in Hiroshima. This information has added significantly [to our] knowledge and understanding about the medical and pathological events of the early period after the nuclear event. In turn, this information has allowed the development of a plan that could potentially save thousands of lives if another nuclear explosion, similar to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, occurs. Our military believes that this is inevitable. (Norman Ende, Professor of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine, Rutgers, New Jersey Medical School)

Pellegrino fills this fascinating work with dark revelations, incredible imagery, and unforgettable characters. With a scientist's eye for detail, the author sets the record straight about what actually happened. So forget what you thought you knew about the August 1945 atomic bombings and their aftermath. This book is the definitive account. (Bill Schutt, American Museum of Natural History)

During my forty years as a senior scientist at Brookhaven National Laboratory, including thirty years of collaboration with Charlie Pellegrino, I have always found him to be a careful, thoughtful, imaginative, and honest researcher. I was involved in R&D on applications of fission and fusion nuclear energy [for] nuclear rockets, and Charlie and I collaborated on a next step: Interstellar probe designs based on anti-matter

propulsion. (James Powell, Brookhaven National Laboratory)

Let's hope this book touches the hearts of the many and that such extreme methods of societal control are finally eliminated. . . . A monumental work. (Roy Cullimore, founder and president, Droycon Bioconcepts)

Charles Pellegrino's unique forensic archaeological approach . . . should be required reading for all those making decisions of war. Despite past attempts to suppress this history, Charles has succeeded in a detailed immortalization of one of the true turning points in human existence. (Tom Dettweiler, NOAA ocean explorer and engineer, US Navy)

Before reading this, I believed we should be prepared to do unto others as they would do unto us and do it first. I was wrong. I did not really know what an atomic bomb does (to the people beneath it). I believe anyone who even considers the first use of a nuclear weapon (or who designs one), has found the unforgivable sin. (Amnon Rosenfeld, forensic anthropologist, Israel Geological Survey)

This can be a powerful wake-up call for some of the younger generation—that rare combination of scientific expertise and profound humanism. (Mark Selden, Asia Pacific Studies, Cornell University)

"The nuclear weapons of today make the ones detonated in 1945 look like firecrackers, and more and more countries possess them or threaten to do so. . . . The virtue of [this book] is the reminder of just how horrible nuclear weapons are." (*The Wall Street Journal*)

On the 70th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Pellegrino's (*Farewell, Titanic: Her Final Legacy*, 2012, etc.) account of the survivors—a book recalled and pulped in 2010 by its original publisher after doubts about the authenticity of the claims made by one of the author's sources—now appears in a revised edition.

After the atomic devastation of Aug. 6, 1945, in Hiroshima, a surviving father told his daughter: "Thank God we have relatives in Nagasaki. We will be safe there." Based on interviews, memoirs, archival research, and new reporting, Pellegrino's narrative is as riveting and powerful as John Hersey's classic *Hiroshima* (1946). Recounting graphically detailed stories of the hibakusha (exposed), including double survivors who experienced the bombings of both cities, the author conjures a hellish landscape: we see "flash-burned" images on roads, people dissolving into gas and desiccated carbon, a man seemingly tap-dancing on footless legs, and men, women, and children "degloved," their skin pulled off by the wind. Much of the focus is on Hiroshima, which "was converted to a lake of yellowish boiling dust, left behind by a billowing red cloud that rose at impossible speed." There, thousands of people "lived on the cusp of instantaneous nonexistence, on the verge of dying before it was possible to realize they were about to die." Others lingered with radiation disease, dying most often from cancer; some survived for many years with nightmares and psychological damage. The second, more powerful bomb actually missed Nagasaki, obliterating an adjacent suburb. As in Hiroshima, some people were vaporized; others, sufficiently sheltered, went unharmed. Concerned mainly with ordinary people whose lives were changed in a "split second catastrophe," Pellegrino also narrates the heartbreaking stories of the U.S. pilots ("My God, what have we done?" wrote one) and the many atomic orphans, as well as the origin of paper cranes fashioned by survivors as messages of hope.

This is horrifying, painful, and necessary reading. (*Kirkus*)

A book that everybody should be reading on the occasion of President Obama's non-apology tour of Hiroshima is Charles Pellegrino's *To Hell and Back*. It's a meticulous reconstruction of the immediate aftermath of Hiroshima and Nagasaki from the perspective of the victims.

It depicts, as the title implies, an utter hellscape of dazed survivors threading their way through the blasted

landscape in ant-like lines to nowhere amid flickering whirlwinds of flame, human ash and bone, rivers of corpses, clouds of flies; and slow death brought on by desperate thirst, blast, burn, and radiation injuries, and the longer term effects of radiation exposure. . . . Indeed, removing memories of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been the top priority, especially for American nuclear denialists who resent detailed reporting of the horrors of the atomic bombings and any implication that the US should feel any qualms about what it did. (*Asia Times*)

#### Review

Sober and authoritative: This is gleaming, popular wartime history, John Hersey infused with Richard Preston and a fleck of Michael Crichton. . . . [Pellegrino] certainly studies every kind of fallout and does not neglect the spiritual variety. He writes about one doctor who recalled that, ‘Those who survived the atomic bomb were, in general, the people who ignored others crying out in extremis or who stayed away from the flames, even when patients and colleagues shrieked from within them. . . . In short, those who survived the bomb were, if not merely lucky, in a greater or lesser degree selfish, self-centered—guided by instinct and not by civilization. And we know it, we who have survived.’ (*New York Times*)

The tragedies and atrocities of World War II now belong to history, while Hiroshima is still part of our world, our continuing present, maybe our dreaded future. . . . Charles Pellegrino's account about what it was actually like to be on the ground in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki, culled from survivors' memories and his own work in forensic archaeology, is the most powerful and detailed I have ever read. It puts flesh on the skeletons. . . . This book offers more than just effective popular history. It is a kind of reminder. We have now lived long enough with the bomb to begin to take it for granted. [As] nations join an expanding nuclear ‘club,’ we are in danger, as MacArthur's committee was, of thinking of nuclear weapons as nothing but more sophisticated bows and arrows. [This book] gives us, instead, a glimpse of their horror. It makes us afraid again. As we should be. (*The Instrumentalist*)

A tragic cautionary tale as well as a celebration of human resilience. (*People Magazine*)

Heart-stopping. Pellegrino dissects the complex political and military strategies that went into the atomic detonations and the untold suffering heaped upon countless Japanese civilians, weaving all of the book's many elements into a wise, informed protest against any further use of these terrible weapons. (*Publishers Weekly, Starred Review*)

The train of the title was bound for Nagasaki: thirty survivors of the Hiroshima bombing fled there, only to run straight into a second catastrophe. Pellegrino's account is full of such terrible ironies—which he describes with a lucid, almost lyrical precision. (*Time Magazine*)

A frightening, grim, yet fascinating examination of the nuclear attacks on Japan. . . . This is shocking, well-written, and will counter the oft-expressed opinion that [nuclear bombs] are ‘just another weapon.’ (*Booklist*)

#### About the Author

**Charles Pellegrino** is the author of twenty books, including the *New York Times* bestseller *Her Name, Titanic* and *Ghosts of the Titanic*, which James Cameron used as sources for his movie *Titanic* and his Imax film *Ghosts of the Abyss*. Pellegrino has contributed articles to many scientific journals based on his work in paleobiology, nuclear propulsion systems for space exploration, and forensic archaeology at sites ranging from Pompeii and the *Titanic* to the World Trade Center. He served as a scientific consultant on James Cameron's *Titanic* expeditions and his film *Avatar*. He is best known as the scientist whose “dinosaur biomorph recipe” became the scientific basis for the *Jurassic Park* series. He lives in New York City.

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