

LAT History Writing Competition

Name: Joey Fox

Teacher: Mr T Bailey

I have become death, destroyer of worlds

16th July 1945 – Trinity: the first successful nuclear test

Everything and everyone fell silent as the cloud illuminated the early morning sky as if it were midday. We stood and stared in suspense, waiting for someone to say something. Then I mutter under my breath, “I have become death, destroyer of worlds”. Cheers erupted around the room, both soldiers and physicists were parading in celebration. I couldn’t help but crack a smile at my achievement, a preemptive victory sealed against the Japanese.

6th August 1945 – The bombing of Hiroshima

My only regret is that I hadn’t finished it sooner, to use against Nazi Germany. We assembled in Los Alamos, the town constructed to accommodate physicists and their families during the development of the bomb. We cheered as we heard that the bomb had detonated. We had won; Japan had to surrender. I couldn’t picture any sort of future where Japan didn’t immediately accept defeat, after levelling one of their cities.

9th August 1945 – The bombing of Nagasaki and the end of the Second World War

The second bomb, from a military point of view, was completely unnecessary. To me, and many more of the project staff, the bombing of Nagasaki was merely an opportunity for America to boast their power and might towards the Soviet Union. That’s what it was always about, I wasn’t tasked to make the atom bomb to end the war, it was always This pointless one-upmanship between the USA and USSR is going to bring about the end of the world, I’m sure of it.

6th May 1954 – End of the Oppenheimer security clearance hearing

I sat in silence during my hearing, knowing I was fighting a losing battle. I had been accused of being a communist. Of course, it wasn’t an unreasonable claim; despite not being part of any communist parties, I had connections and strong ties to the communist movement in the 1930s. Then later, I protested Operation Ivy, a series of

nuclear tests done to produce the hydrogen bomb. The government assumed I was working with the Soviet Union to delay the USA's progress in the Arms race, however, I personally believed that the research and production of any more nuclear weapons would bring about the end of the world. And ultimately, it was decided that my security clearance would be revoked, and this would mark the formal end of my relationship with the United States government.

14th September 1960 - Oppenheimer's lecture at Kyoto university

It didn't seem fair, Japan had bombed Pearl Harbour, and in response, we flattened their cities, decimated their communities, massacred their civilians. I stood in front of the chalkboard, explaining fission to my audience. The young minds took notes of what I wrote down. Then my vision started to narrow, and I started to see things. Harrowing things, sirens, people running, screaming, fleeing from an inconceivable threat. And I'm to blame, I made the bomb. Coming back to my senses, I felt immense guilt. I was lecturing these students on the very concepts I used to commit unimaginable horrors on their own people.

2nd December 1963 - Enrico Fermi Award Presentation

I stood, smiling for the cameras in the White House, as president Lyndon B. Johnson presented me with the Enrico Fermi Award. The award is one of the oldest and most prestigious honours for science and technology that an American can receive. However, it didn't feel like an honour. I was presented with the award for my 'contributions to theoretical physics and the advancement of science in the United States of America,' or so I'm told. I had been rewarded for creating a weapon of mass destruction. For killing hundreds of thousands of people. For reshaping the course of human history in the worst possible way. Do I deserve an award for this? I am a murderer, I am American Prometheus, I am death, destroyer of worlds.