

Hiroshima Sunset

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While set against the background of the Atomic bombing of Hiroshima and the subsequent deployment of British Commonwealth Occupation Forces in 1946, this book is a work of fiction. The characters and incidents portrayed are the product of the author's imagination and are not real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons or real organizations similar in name and description, is purely coincidental.

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My thanks to the BCOF veterans interviewed, who gave of their time, their stories and perspectives.

By the same author:

SATAN'S LITTLE HELPERS

ANDREA'S SECRET

SAINTS AND RELICS

Hiroshima Sunset

Foreword

For the residents of Hiroshima, the 6th August 1945 was the day to end all days; the dawn of a new age of horror, when night came in the morning and the most depraved of all the weapons used in the war, was unleashed upon her unsuspecting people. As her citizens both military and civilian, went about their early morning activities, busily preparing for their day, travelling to work, riding in buses, travelling on trams, children on their way to elementary school, the temperature rose quickly to twenty-eight degrees centigrade. What began as a bright, sunny Monday morning, gave no hint to the death and destruction that was shortly to follow. At 7.00 am, fourteen year-old Masako Yamada cheerfully said goodbye to her mother and set out to join her school friends. Her class had been ordered to help with the demolition parties clearing fire breaks across the city in anticipation of American bombing. As she left the house, she heard the all-too-familiar sound of the air-raid sirens warning people of approaching aircraft. Masako looked up above to see a lone B-29 bomber streaking across

the sky; not unusual, she thought; they were often seen running reconnaissance missions; no need to be concerned. Half a mile away, Dr. Kano had just finished breakfast and settled back on the balcony of his private clinic, beside the Kyo Bridge to read the morning paper. He too, looked up when he heard the sirens and saw the bomber passing over. Like Masako, he was not concerned. B-29's were passing over Hiroshima everyday, on their way to some other city in Japan. Twenty miles away on the island of Miyajima, Shigeiko Suzuki sat with her parents in the kitchen of their home enjoying breakfast. In one way or another, some four hundred thousand people went about their normal routine that morning, most of them steadfast in their belief that Japan was winning the war, and that soon the soldiers would be coming home, victorious.

Above them, at 30,000 feet, Major Claude Eatherly, of the 509th Composite group, piloting *Straight Flush*, radioed his weather report to the command pilot of *Enola Gay* several miles to the south... '*Cloud cover less than three-tenths at all altitudes. Advice: Bomb primary.*' That message sealed the city's fate and the lives of 130,000 people. Had the weather report been unfavourable, *Enola Gay* would have proceeded to either Kokura or Nagasaki. On the ground, it was 7.30 am, *Straight Flush* could no longer be heard or seen and the all-clear siren sounded, advising people that it was safe to resume normal duties. Few had even bothered to take shelter. Masako Yamada met up with her school friends and arrived at their prearranged location while Dr. Kano continued reading his paper on the balcony overlooking the Ota River.

To the south, and climbing to 31,000 feet, Colonel Paul Tibbets, piloting the aircraft he renamed *Enola Gay* after his

mother, was leading a group of three B-29's on the most important and by far the most expensive mission the United States had ever mounted. The Manhattan Project, first begun in 1942 and culminating in the production and successful testing of nuclear fission at a cost of two billion dollars, was about to change the world forever.

'It's Hiroshima,' Tibbets announced to the crew through the intercom. The long night's flight was over. Now, the months of intense training and the realization that this mission was itself historic in nature brought them all to a new level of anticipation. Each man aboard *Enola Gay* was there for a specific purpose; each a specialist in his field. Thirty-five minutes later and within sight of the city, Colonel Tibbets set his course for the bomb run. As they approached from the east, Tibbets' group bombardier, Major Tom Ferebee, took control of the aircraft, piloting from the bomb bay, and manoeuvred the M-9B Norden bombsight, the most advanced of its kind ever constructed, into position. The target was the Aioi Bridge, so chosen because it was so easily recognized from aerial photographs, forming a perfect T-shape with the Ota River. Just minutes before release, Ferebee could see the city's suburbs appear beneath him as he made a slight adjustment to his delivery angle to compensate for the wind. At 8.15am local time, he flipped the switch that released '*Little boy*', a 9000lb uranium bomb, the first ever constructed, from the pneumatically operated bomb bay doors of *Enola Gay*.

Three minutes earlier, in the hills east of Hiroshima, the lookout at the Matsunaga monitoring post reported three high flying aircraft tracking west toward the city. One minute later, the air raid warning centre at Saijo confirmed the sighting and

telephoned the communication centre in the bunker underneath Hiroshima Castle. From there a frantic attempt by a schoolgirl in the bunker to relay the sighting to the local radio station, in an attempt to warn people to seek shelter, was too late. When Ferebee reported that the bomb was on its way, Colonel Tibbets turned off the automatic pilot and immediately banked *Enola Gay* sharply sixty degrees to the right. At the same time, the second B-29, *The Great Artiste* dropped three aluminium canisters attached to parachutes, and its pilot Chuck Sweeney hard-banked to the left, both planes attempting to outrun the expected shockwave. The blast-gauge canisters dropped from *The Great Artiste* would record vital information and relay details of the impact by radio signal back to the aircraft. The third B-29, Dimples 91, later renamed *Necessary Evil*, hung back some 18 miles to the south ready to view and photograph the results using a slow-motion camera. The bomb dropped into the freezing air and began its deadly descent, set to detonate at 1850 feet, the height calculated by the scientists who built it, to inflict the maximum damage on the city of Hiroshima.

At ground level, just seconds after detonation, the impact was appalling. The temperature at the core reached greater than one million degrees centigrade, intensifying outward in a brilliant flash of light followed by a roiling display of electrically charged colours; reds, greens, yellows, purple. On the ground directly below, the temperature peaked at 3000 degrees centigrade, twice the heat required to melt iron. Those immediately exposed to the heat at the burst point were vaporized where they stood or turned into blackened, overcooked lumps of scorched char on the street. Within a one mile radius of the hypocentre, all manner of life and matter

melted in the thermal heat, clothes disappeared from human bodies and skin fell away from flesh like wrapping paper from a parcel. Human organs liquefied, boiled and vanished. Later estimates suggested 50,000 people died in the first few seconds. Cats, dogs, birds, pets and insects of all description, all plant life simply ceased to be.

The shockwave followed; a force of high pressure, initially greater than six tons per square metre travelling in excess of 7000 miles per hour propelled its way across the city, destroying everything in its wake. It demolished Hiroshima's predominantly wooden structures in seconds, blowing out windows and sending splinters of glass into the seething fiery air, flying indiscriminately, piercing anything and anyone in its path. The shockwave thundered in all directions, setting fire to everything it struck, but even worse, carrying with it, the deadly neutrons and gamma rays, that would poison the air and ground for years. As the entire city was set alight, the radioactive particles spread their silent, invisible legacy.

Aboard *Enola Gay*, Tail gunner, Sergeant Bob Caron watched in shock as the mushroom cloud climbed six miles high. As the cloud raced upward, Caron could see the shockwave materialize in the thermal heat and race toward the retreating planes now eleven miles away from the blast. Even at that distance and height, *Enola Gay* experienced strong turbulence, as the plane shook violently and the approaching shockwave battered against the fuselage now caught up in the expanding force of energy. The mushroom cloud reached a height of 60,000 feet, a furious, boiling mass of fire radiating all the colours under the sun. On the ground eight miles from the hypocentre, tiles blew from roofs, windows smashed, homes

were destroyed, and trees were incinerated. Everywhere fires started, catching residents in the foothills unawares as they came out of their homes to see what had caused the brilliant flash of light and the terrifying, thundering roar.

Then came the firestorm! As the air temperature soared, it rushed upward, sucking the oxygen along with it, leaving behind a vacuum. Cold air rushed in to fill the vacuum, creating a tornado that tore through the city at frightening speed dragging the fire, and the debris, as it hurled itself along, relentlessly and indiscriminately. Masako Yamada was two miles from the hypocentre, inside a lunch-room shelter at the time of the blast. She was thrown to the ground and lost consciousness for several minutes. When she awoke, she was underneath a pile of rubble, the city was in darkness, covered by a thick pale of black cloud above, and fires were raging all around her. Dr. Kano's clinic collapsed into the Ota River. He tumbled downward and found himself pinned between two wooden beams that threatened to either crush him or hold him steadfast such that when the tide rose, he would drown. Miraculously, both of them survived.

Across the Inland Sea on the island of Miyajima, Shigeko Suzuki and her parents were suddenly startled by the flash of light and a tremendous roar that rattled windows and shook the front door. She dived for cover underneath the table first thinking an unexpected typhoon had struck the Island. She waited until it passed, then ventured outside only to witness a huge mushroom cloud rise up above Hiroshima, some twenty miles away. Above the inferno, *Enola Gay* flew out of the after-shock and made a left turn, Tibbets rewarding the crew with a panoramic view of the results of their months of long,

hard training and the isolation experienced in the most top-secret of missions of the entire war. The crew crammed across to the starboard side of the aircraft, momentarily stunned into silence by what they saw. Ahead of them lay a further six hours flying time before returning to Tinian Island in the Mariana's. As the radio operator sent a brief message to Tinian, reporting a successful mission, the B-29 and its two companions, tracked south-east away from the devastation they had inflicted. Ninety minutes later and nearly 400 miles away, Tail gunner Bob Caron could still see the mushroom cloud. Amid the mixed cries of astonishment and wonder among the crew, Tibbet's co-pilot Captain Bob Lewis, scribbled in his log, '*My God! What have we done?*'

1.

Melbourne, April 2007

The sign on the double doors read BLM Publishing Pty. Limited and identified a small publishing house in the leafy eastern suburbs of the city. The initials stood for, Balwyn, Lester and Merricks, the names of the three partners in the company, but George Balwyn, the only active member of the trio always preferred George Balwyn and Associates. It was an example of this self-made millionaire, entrepreneur, turned philanthropist having his moment of superiority; a moment propelled by his own sense of importance and his perception that his partners were irrelevant in the day-to-day running of

the business. The staff members closest to him agreed but were not persuaded with the suggested change of name. BLM was a respected name in the publishing industry, a name they had helped promote. To them, such a change would suggest their devoted efforts would be reduced to the superfluous. To most of them, George was self-assured and generous but also inclined to indulge in hubris; a man with incredible self-confidence, possessing astute judgement, and he knew it. He was also inclined toward the mysterious, never really explaining his intentions beyond what was necessary. To his staff, or at least those who knew him well, the latter explanation correctly identified the man who paid their salaries, but whom they found at the best of times odd, and when things weren't going so well, bordering on the eccentric. He had a good eye and ear for the right book though, and perhaps there was some truth in his attitude toward his inactive partners. They had helped finance the company, but took no active role beyond that. George also had a good eye and ear for finding the right people to work for him. He head-hunted his two most senior executives and gave them authority to head-hunt the people they thought would be star performers. And they did.

George grew up on a farm at Lillico, near Warragul in Victoria, where his parents struggled to keep food on the table. Childhood memories remained steadfast. Images of his father raising cattle and working the fields from five in the morning till nine at night were vivid. For days on end his only contact a wave across the field in the morning as he left for school and a wave on his return in the afternoon. In the distance, a man on a tractor returned the gesture, to reassure the boy that all was well. At night George listened to stories about the war and the

part his father played in winning the peace. The war, his father used to say, made him old before his time. George was aware from a very young age that circumstances were harsh. It infused within him, an intense desire to make good, to succeed in life, to help his parents overcome and conquer the unforgiving landscape. Perhaps it was these early childhood experiences that helped mould his determination to first make good and then where the opportunity presented itself, improve the lot of the less fortunate.

His mother never smiled. George often felt that she was disconnected, not quite living in the present; always there, always caring, nurturing, but so serious, so intense and detached from the here and now. George's early observations of his surroundings, the bleakness of the countryside, and the severity of life on the land did not endear him to follow in his father's footsteps. Farming would not, he thought, be the catalyst for achieving his goals. He showed unusual promise at school and won a scholarship to University, graduating with a degree in Arts/Law. After a succession of jobs here and there, mostly associated with journalism, he joined the *Farmer's Daily*, a small regional newspaper in eastern Victoria. In due course he became senior editor but left the paper after twenty years to start his own publishing business. He had an unusual flair for knowing what people liked to read and a talent for finding authors to write the kind of stories that would attract and stimulate the market. But he shied away from the idea of an autobiography, or commissioning anyone else to write about him. He felt uncomfortable when the subject arose from time to time. There were matters about his childhood, his parents, that would remain private; secrets that would remain so. The tabloid press were always showing an interest as were the

glossy magazine editors with their paparazzi photographs on the front cover and some trivial story of how he walked from his apartment each morning to the local newsagent to pick up the morning paper. Riveting stuff! Now fifty-eight, and slightly overweight, he was in good health, gliding through middle-age gracefully. He never married. There was never enough time, he thought, never the opportunity, or if it came, he never recognized it as such. His parents had long since sold off the farm to the co-operatives, holding on to the house and a few acres, and living off the proceeds in retirement. George was a regular visitor. He had the means to set them up comfortably in the town, but they preferred to remain on the land, in the house where he grew up. He wondered why, but never pressed them. They seemed content, and that, to him, was sufficient. His life was very different from theirs and he would not want anyone to try and change his, therefore, he had no desire to change theirs.

But now, his mother was gravely ill, struck down with Alzheimer's disease and spending what were her final days in a nursing home. George drove back to the farm at Lillico each weekend and together with his father they kept her company as she lay, staring toward the ceiling of her comfortable but staid room, occasionally uttering words that had no meaning and struggling to recognize who was in her room. Each Sunday night he returned to Melbourne, exhausted from the weight of concern he shared with his father. Then, each Monday morning he returned to his office attending to the pressing matters of business.

*

As one passed through the front doors of BLM, into a deserted foyer and up a short spiral staircase, the relentless publicity machine that drives the industry rolled out its wares. The walls boldly displayed giant framed posters of the company's best selling novels and autobiographies, matched with glossy photographs of the novelists and non-fiction writers under contract. At the top of the stairs the impressive literary merchandising and decor continued against a light blue backdrop all the way to the reception desk ten metres away where Sarah Whelan sat surrounded by a pile of newspapers still to be circulated around the office. At her feet lay a small collection of packages, mostly unsolicited manuscripts that would never be read, while around her telephone switchboard, tiny little notes adhered here and there, constantly reminded her of all the outstanding matters needing attention. She was on the phone trying to organize a rescue mission. Sometime, during the night, an inventive and aspiring graffiti artist, had gained access to the building and cleverly spray-painted the word 'bolshevist' across the foyer wall. As benign as the addition was, the artistic standard did not meet with management's approval and the painters had been called to have it removed. 'Balwyn, Lester and Merricks' were, after all, a publishing house with a fair-minded reputation. One could tolerate the odd eccentric academic demanding a retraction now and again, or a disgruntled author whose manuscript had been rejected, but to compound the infringement with graffiti on the front door was an offence that could not be tolerated under any circumstances.

While Sarah Whelan was at her desk fingering her way through the yellow pages, down below, George Balwyn slipped into the building quietly. Dressed in his usual impeccable style, his grey hair adding a certain elegance to his dapper appearance,

he took note of the graffiti splashed across the foyer wall, grinned with mild amusement and disappeared through a partly concealed door at the back of the spiral staircase; a door that was always locked; a door for which, only George held a key. The staff thought it was a storeroom but were never sure. No one, it seems, had ever set foot inside. They were curious about what was behind the locked door, the mystery door, as they referred to it. When things were not all smooth sailing, when George was in one of his moods, that's where he would go; disappearing for an hour or so, then re-appearing as if nothing happened. Nobody had ever seen behind the door, let alone entered. As time passed, the myth surrounding the mystery door developed its own momentum, helped by an ample contribution from curious staff members who devised anything from a secret meeting place with spies, to a love-nest with a famous personality. George knew of the interest his staff held for the mystery door and did nothing to dispel their curiosity. But when his senior editor Janet Ryan came to him with a proposal to send Amanda Blackburn to Japan, it wasn't his astute judgement or his eye for a good story that prompted him to agree. It was something else, and the reason could be explained behind the mystery door, in the contents of a secret file locked away securely in a safe.

*

In the senior editor's office on the first floor, directly above the defiled foyer, three people rested comfortably in swish, dark