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The Decision to Use the Bomb: A Historiographical Update

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In a powerful and provocative essay published in the *New Republic* in 1981, Paul Fussell, an English professor and author of the prize-winning *The Great War and Modern Memory*, challenged views that the atomic bombing of Japan

had been immoral, unjustifiable, or unwise. He argued that from the perspective of a combat soldier, which he was in 1945, the use of nuclear weapons was a cause for celebration because it averted the fearful prospect of invading Japan. “When the atom bombs were dropped and news began to circulate that 'Operation Olympic' would not, after all, be necessary, when we learned to our astonishment that we would not be obliged in a few months to rush up the beaches near Tokyo assault-firing while being machine-gunned, mortared, and shelled, for all the practiced phlegm of our tough facades we broke down and...

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