Clarion Review

Historical

Our First Atom Bomb: An All-American Story
Frederick Borsch
iUniverse
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Three Stars (out of Five)

In the early morning of August 6, 1945, three U.S. planes approached airspace over Hiroshima, Japan. Launched from Tinian in the North Marianas Islands, the planes —*Enola Gay*, which held the atomic bombs; *The Great Artiste*, carrying instruments; and Necessary Evil, carrying photography equipment —carried crews who knew that they were on a historic mission. When the gravity bomb "Little Boy" was dropped at 8:15 a.m. Hiroshima time, the horror of atomic warfare became reality. *Our First Atom Bomb: An All-American Story* by Frederick Borsch is told from the perspective of one of the bombardiers and follows him during the intense six-hour mission, from Tinian launch to bomb drop.

Borsch, who was ten years old when the first atomic bomb fell on Japan, has degrees from Princeton, Oxford, and the University of Birmingham (UK). He has taught at universities around the world, including Princeton and Yale.

Our First Atom Bomb has an unusual format. Though it is historical fiction, its main storyline is based on actual interviews with World War II veterans. Interspersed with the main fictional narrative are transcripts of the interviews that Borsch conducted with personalities integral to the Pacific theater of World War II. People such as Colonel Paul Tibbets and associates of Curtis LeMay, who planned and executed huge bombing campaigns against Japan, are interviewed.

Borsch's innovative format has uneven results. While some of the interviews, such as the one with a Japanese civilian who was on the ground when the bombs burst, are interesting and affecting, others are more superficial and ill-related to the content at hand. Overall, the concept is a mixed bag, often distracting from the flow of the main story.

The primary narrative thread of *Our First Atom Bomb* takes place inside the head of one man. Our protagonist has plenty of time to brood while up in the air. He reminisces about his

earlier days in the war, making friends, playing poker with them, then watching them die horrible deaths. These are the strongest parts of the book, when the reader experiences along with the protagonist his hopes, regrets, and ambivalence about his life and this particular mission. Proud but also horrified, the main character is indeed all-American, embodying the range of reactions that the country had toward the atomic bomb.

Slightly disorganized in execution and written with competent, but not especially dramatic prose, *Our First Atom Bomb* is best read by aficionados of World War II history.