



Japan 1945: A U.S. Marine's Photographs From Ground Zero

By Joe O'Donnell

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In September 1945 Joe O'Donnell was a twenty-three-year-old Marine Corps photographer wading ashore in Japan, then under American occupation. His orders were to document the aftermath of U.S. bombing raids in Japanese cities, including not only Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but also cities such as Sasebo, one of the more than sixty Japanese cities firebombed before the atomic blasts. "The people I met," he now recalls, "the suffering I witnessed, and the scenes of incredible devastation taken by my camera caused me to question every belief I had previously held about my so-called enemies."

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Editorial Review

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O'Donnell, a 23-year-old Marine Corps photographer, was sent to Japan in September 1945 to document the impact of the war, especially the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. He took thousands of official photographs that disappeared into military archives, and shot several hundred with his own camera, but he was so appalled by all that he had seen, he locked his photographs in a trunk for 45 years. O'Donnell worked as a White House photographer, suffered illness and disability from his exposure to radiation, and remained haunted by the devastation and suffering he witnessed. Finally, in the 1990s, he exhibited his photographs in Europe and Japan, and now, at long last, 74 of his powerful black-and-white photographs are being made available in the U.S. for the first time, during a time of war, increased nuclear threats, and heightened awareness of photography's role in warfare. Not only do O'Donnell's tragically beautiful photographs capture a hell on earth, they also embody his profound compassion and respect, making his haunting images precious not only as documentation but also as works of art. *Donna Seaman*
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Review

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--*Booklist* (starred review)

This stunning work . . . is essential for all World War II collections.

--*Library Journal* (starred review)

O'Donnell could never forget what he saw, and we should never forget what he here shows us.

--The Japan Times

These photographs document with memorable visual images the impact of World War II on Japan's civilian populations. O'Donnell's status as a soldier with the American occupation forces gives the collection extra credibility. The passage of time has made these images more rather than less compelling.

--George H. Roeder, Jr., School of the Art Institute of Chicago and author of *The Censored War: American Visual Experience during World War II*

From the Inside Flap

Moving images of Japan in the months after World War II ended, as captured by a young Marine Corps photographer.

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