Tentative chronology of part played by scientists in decision to use the bomb against Japan

1. Early 1944. "Everyone took for granted that the new bombs would be used in Europe if they were ready in time." (Compton, p. 221; for complete references see attached bibliography.)

2. Early 1944. The men on the metallurgical project beginning to think about the future of atomic energy. (Compton, p. 231)


4. Summer, 1944. At request of Metallurgical Project Council the Jeffries Committee was appointed by Compton to study "postwar work on nuclearists." (Compton, p. 232)

5. Autumn, 1944. The Tolman Committee was appointed by Gen. Groves to look into future possibilities of atomic energy. Strong background for much of work of Interim Committee in spring of 1945. (Compton, p. 232)


7. Dec. 28, 1944. Tolman Committee handed its report to Gen. Groves on future of atomic energy (Compton, p. 233)

8. Early 1945. Conversations between Groves and A.H. Compton on use of bomb. Groves brings to Stimson's attention the concern of scientists about immediate use and long-term planning. (Compton, p. 233)

9. March, 1945. Stilwell prepares memo. for Roosevelt. (Stilwell "memo")
10. April 1945 Compton appointed a committee of three boot
informers to consider "anticipated human,
military and political consequences" of use
of the bomb. Report of this committee was
brought directly to Stimson (Compton and
Daniels).

11. Spring 1945 Frank Committee at work. Referred to by
Compton as "within our project, the subcom-
nittee on social and political consequences
headed by James Franck focused its attention
on this problem: the use of bomb." (Compton,
p. 23)

12. Spring 1945 Stimson writes to the President and went to
Washington to urge that the bomb not be used.
(Compton, p. 24)

13. April 12, 1945 Stimson tells Truman briefly about new
explosive after Truman is sworn into office.
(Truman, p. 10)

14. April 17, 1945 Byrnes gives Truman more details; "later"
Truman received a scientific account from Bush.
(Truman, p. 10)

15. April 25, 1945 Stimson discusses with Truman the relation
of the bomb to foreign policy and presents
a memorandum discussing security and interna-
tional control. (Truman, pp. 85 and 87; 
Stimson & Busby, p. 31)

16. April 1945 Appointment of Interim Committee by Truman
"for recommending action to the executive
and legislative branches." (Stimson "Decision"

17. May 28, 1945 Szillard presents his March memo (which had
not reached Roosevelt before his death) to
"Yard" Byrnes in a personal interview.
(Szillard, "Memo")

18. May 31, 1945 Interim Committee discusses use of the bomb.
1st meeting. Possibility of non-military demonstration
brought up; Scientific panel asked to prepare
a report on this. (Compton, pp. 219, 234)

19. June 1, 1945 Interim Committee after consultations with
Scientific Panel unanimously decided: 1) 
bomb should be used against Japan as soon as
possible 2) dual target, military and other
buildings 3) should be used without prior
warning. (Stimson, "Decision")
20. June 1, 1945 Conclusions of Int. Com. & Sc. Pan. brought to Truman by Stimson. (Truman, pp. 149)
Ralph Bard later changed his views and dissented from recommendation No. 3 of the June 1st report. (Stimson, "Decision")

21. June, 1945 "Eventually, in June, 1945, the suggestions of these various subcommittees (of the Jeffries Committee) were collected into a combined report for the use of the Interim Committee and its successors." (Compton, p. 232)

22. About June 9, 1945 Scientific panel to Interim Committee (Lawrence, Fermi, Oppenheimer, and A. H. Compton) to prepare report on possible non-military demonstration. (Compton, p. 240)

23. June, 1945 Hearing that Truman was consulting Stimson about use of the bomb, Franck "and certain members of his committee hastened to draft their conclusions." (Compton, p. 235)

24. June 11, 1945 Franck report presented to Stimson; drawn up by committee of 3 physicists, 3 chemists, and 1 biologist; "dispatched to Washington" six days before explosion. (Editorial, Bull. At. Sc., May, 1946); cf. Compton, p. 236 which states that Franck was in Washington, but Stimson was away and report was left for him with Geo. L. Harrison, his assistant.

25. June 11-16, 1945 Interim Committee and its scientific panel consider the Franck report (Stimson states, "The Interim Committee and the Scientific Panel also served as a channel through which suggestions from other scientists...were forwarded to me and to the President. Among the suggestions thus forwarded was one memorandum which questioned using the bomb at all against the enemy." Stimson, "Decision")

26. June 16, 1945 Scientific Panel reports to Interim Committee that they can propose no technical demonstration likely to end war and see no alternative to direct military use. (Stimson, "Decision")
27. 1945
Sielard circulated petitions in Chicago; urges others to do so in Oak Ridge and Los Alamos, requesting that the atomic bomb should not be used in World War II. (Compton, p. 241)

28. see below
30. July 2, 1945
Sielard petition in original form gets almost no support. Sielard turns revised petition over to Compton for delivery to Washington, indicating that it was signed by 67 scientists residing in Chicago. (Compton, pp. 251-52) (Sielard says about 55 signatures.)

29. Counter-petitions to Sielard's circulated at Chicago and Oak Ridge. (Compton, p. 251-52)

30. July 2, 1945
Stimson sends memo to Truman discussing issue of strong warning to Japan of destruction if she does not surrender. Bomb not specifically mentioned 1) because of secrecy and 2) because not yet tested. (Stimson 'Declaration')

31. July 6, 1945
President's party, including Byrnes but not Stimson, leaves Washington for Potsdam. (This and some of the following items are included as relevant because of the question of what key officials were in Washington to receive the opinions of scientists that were expressed after this date.)

32. July 12, 1945
Fall taken in Met Lab at Chicago. (Compton & Daniels)

33. July 15, 1945
Truman, Byrnes and others arrive in Berlin; greeted by Stimson at airport. (Truman, p. 119; on date of Stimson's arrival cf. also #35.)

34. July 16, 1945
Bomb successfully tested at Alamogordo.

35. July 16, 1945
News of test flashed to Truman at Potsdam by Stimson. (Truman, p. 115; cf. Byrnes' statement, p. 262, that it took several days for decoding. Stimson & Bunky, II p. 617, says word of test was received at Potsdam on July 15th.)

36. July 17, 1945
Stimson flew to Potsdam and gave Truman full details of test (Truman, p. 115)

36-a July 17, 1945
Revised Sielard petition. Sielard says about 63 signatures.
37. July 17 to 24, 1945

Truman makes the decision to use
the bomb against Japan when it is
ready for delivery unless surrender
has taken place. Truman does not date
this decision exactly, but says as soon
as he received details of test from
Stimson on July 17th he called together
chiefs of staff to review military
strategy in light of successful test.
(p. 265) Truman also says when he
talked with Churchill he favored use
of bomb (p. 219) Compton (p. 265)
says that Truman later told him that
it was at that meeting with the Joint
Chiefs that he gave his "final assent"
to use of bomb.

38. July 17, 1945

As soon as Stimson arrived in Potsdam,
(Truman here uses the date given in
#36) Truman called in Byrnes, Leahy,
Marshall, Gen. Arnold and Adm. King;
they reviewed military strategy in
light of the successful test. (Truman,
p. 219-21)

39. July 23, 1945

Col. Nichols asks Compton at Oak Ridge
for results of the poll at the Met.
Lab. G. wrote out a message summarizing
the results of the "votes and petitions"
as objectively as he could. An hour
later Nichols came back wanting to
know what G. himself thought; gave
opinion favoring use. (Compton, p. 265)

40. July 24, 1945

The War Department "was given orders"
to instruct Gen. Spaatz that first bomb
would be dropped as soon after August
3rd as weather permits. Truman told
Stimson that order to Spaatz would
stand unless Truman notified him of
favorable Japanese reply. (Truman,
pp. 239-241)

41. July 24, 1945

Truman tells Stalin of "new weapon of
unusual destructive force." (Truman,
p. 416)

42. July 26, 1945

Allies broadcast demand that Japan
surrender or face destruction.

43. July 28, 1945

Fram of Japan rejects Potsdam ultima-
tion as unworthy of notice. (Stimson,
"Decision"; Truman, p. 421)
14. between decision to use bomb and leaving Potsdam: Truman authorizes statement to be released after first bomb is dropped. (Truman, pp. 422-23)

15. August 2, 1945: Truman leaves Potsdam; flies to England; home by ship. (Truman, pp. 405, 411, ff.)

16. August 3, 1945: 1st day scheduled for dropping bomb, weather permitting. (Truman, p. 411.)


18. August 8, 1945: Molotov informed Amb. Harriman in Moscow that Russia would consider itself at war with Japan as of Aug. 9th. Truman received this news on August 8th and immediately announced it at press conference. (Truman, p. 425)

19. August 9, 1945: Nagasaki bombed. ("We gave the Japanese three days in which to make up their minds to surrender, and the bombing would have been held off another two days had weather permitted." Truman, p. 425)

20. August 10, 1945: Japanese offer surrender on Potsdam terms but with reservation about sovereignty of emperor. (Stimson, "Decision")