

from our viewpoint...

Important dates go unremembered

A history-minded *Star-News* reader pointed out something on our Facebook page recently. Aug. 6 and Aug. 9 are significant historical dates that are all too often forgotten in this day and age.

If you're not familiar with those dates, we wouldn't blame you. They have taken a back seat to Sept. 11, June 6 or Dec. 9. You likely know some of the details though.

On Aug. 6, a flight of seven planes took off from an airfield on Tinian, a small island in the Pacific Ocean. The planes carried measurement instruments, high-resolution cameras, weather instruments and navigation equipment.

The planes flew two different routes toward their target, meeting up over Iwo Jima at 8,000 feet. The flight reached their target without incident, and one of the planes released its payload at 8:15 a.m. It exploded 43 seconds later. The first atomic bomb used against an enemy.

Much of the downtown area of the city of Hiroshima, Japan, was instantly leveled. Fires raged out of control throughout the rest of the city. The death toll is estimated at 80,000, with that many or more injured.

Nothing on that scale of destruction had ever been brought to bear against a civilian population before. Not even the incendiary bombing of Dresden, which killed more than 20,000, could match it.

Three days later, on Aug. 9, another bomb was used against Nagasaki, the second, and to date the last, time an atomic bomb had been used on a human population.

The decision to deploy what we today call weapons of mass destruction, was likely one of the most difficult that has ever come out of the Oval Office. Lincoln had to decide whether to launch a war against fellow Americans, Washington had to build a nation-state out of quarrelsome colonies. But Harry Truman, a man who had been in office for mere months, had to decide whether or not to kill hundreds of thousands to save millions.

In the summer of 1945, the fierce fighting on Iwo Jima and Okinawa had convinced American commanders that any invasion force landing on the Japanese main islands would be up to its neck in casualties. The Japanese – though sorely depleted by battles throughout the Pacific – mobilized a huge army to defend the homeland, and had begun arming and training almost every civilian.

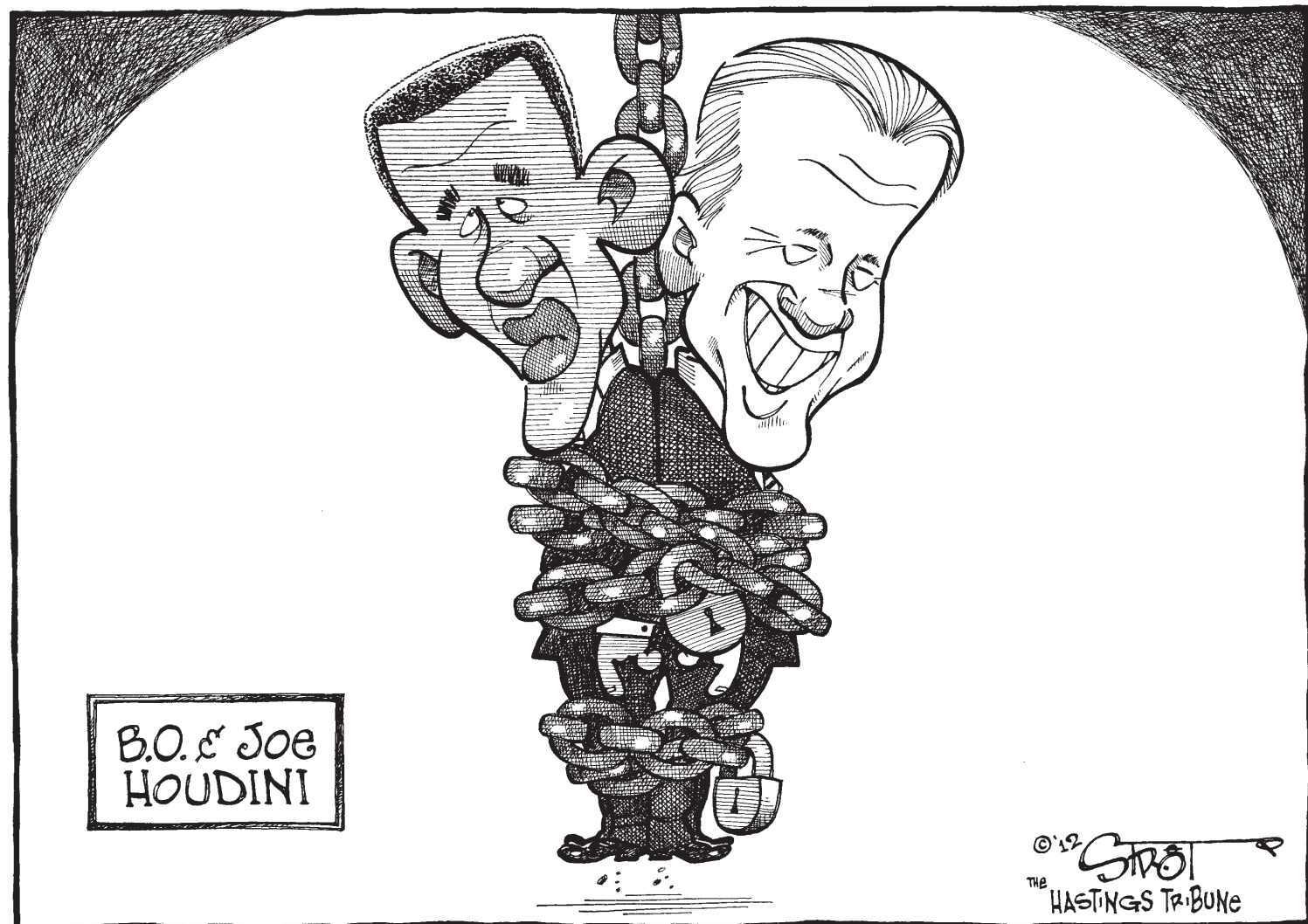
Plans were already underway. The U.S. Sixth Army was to invade Kyushu, while the First, Eighth and 10th Armies were to land on Honshu. The Joint Chiefs of Staff estimated hundreds of thousands of casualties. The Japanese expected as many as 20 million dead on their side, the result of a cultural code that forbid surrender.

So Truman decided to drop the bomb. Forcing Japan to surrender rather than be utterly destroyed. In doing so, Truman saved countless lives, both among the American forces staging for the invasion, and the Japanese who would not have to defend their homeland to the death.

Wars are different in this day and age. More often than not, our soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are not going toe to toe with an evenly matched military force. Our wars are fought in the streets, against enemies that blend into the civilian population, rather than lead it.

Still there are many difficult decisions made by the Commander and Chief, some no less agonizing than Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This is something every voter should remember when it comes time to cast their vote for president. Whom do you want to make those life or death decisions?

In the meantime, remember Aug. 6 and 9. —Kevin Bottrell



Benefits of organic foods

Do organically produced foods have higher nutritional value?

Let's take a look. At a 19-country international conference, research studies compared the nutritional value of organic crops versus conventional crops.

Colorado State University (CSU) researchers compared vitamin content of organically and conventionally grown vegetables (carrots and broccoli). They found no statistically significant differences.

Other research from CSU focused on growing potatoes using four different farming techniques under the same growing conditions: an intensive high-chemical system; a moderate conventional system; customary organic farming (hog manure and crop rotation on land used for organic production for 10 years); and virgin organic production, using cow manure on land cleared from brush. Nine minerals and seven vitamins were analyzed and no clear differences were discovered.

Another U.S. study found more soluble iron in conventionally grown spinach. The proportion of the soluble iron available to consumer's system was somewhat higher for both spinach and peppers grown with compost and manure.

In other studies abroad, a Norwegian study found conventionally grown carrots contained more beta-carotene, more magnesium and more manganese. The ecologically grown



Insight this week

• john schlageck

carrots had more aluminum. When carrots of the same variety were compared, the only difference was a higher level of carotenoids in the conventionally grown carrots.

A German study discovered lower levels of nitrate in carrots, beets and potatoes grown with manure but the differences were minute under good storage conditions. Stressful storage conditions enhanced the difference.

Consumers can conclude from such findings that people who do not buy organically grown fruits and vegetables, usually at higher prices, can find equally good products with equal nutrition at supermarkets and roadside stands. It also means people who wish to eat organically grown fruits and vegetables should do so.

Bottom line - differing farming systems produce virtually no difference in the nutritional value of the crops. The variety, or strain, of the carrots and potatoes grown appears to have a bigger impact on their nutrient value than organic production methods.

It's no secret, plant breeders have long advocated that fruits, vegetables and grains require three main nutrients - nitrogen, phosphate

and potassium in varying amounts according to the plant species. If a plant is sorely lacking in one of these nutrients, it will not grow. If it has access to these nutrients, it will grow into the crop its heredity determines and will pass along the nutrients its heredity intends.

Translation - for a healthy diet eat plenty of fruit and vegetables each day, regardless of how they were grown. Doing so will probably mean a person eats more fiber which is healthy. It also means less room for fatty foods that are one of the major contributors to poor health.

Eating five fruits and vegetables per day reduces our risk for heart disease and cancer. Researchers tell us this health-enhancing effect is derived from the high levels of antioxidant chemicals in the fruits and vegetables. Studies are confirming this cleansing effect from specific chemicals from specific crops including broccoli and blueberries.

So much of this research on conventional versus organically grown food has demonstrated little nutritional differences. In our society consumers have a choice. It is an individual decision.

The choice is yours.

John Schlageck is a leading commentator on agriculture and rural Kansas. Born and raised on a diversified farm in northwestern Kansas, his writing reflects a lifetime of experience, knowledge and passion.

Olympics draw attention from real issues

This year the Olympic Games came at a time that helps America shift focus away from the ugliest episode in our sports history: the Sandusky-Penn State Affair. The ugliness in this affair was the jaw-dropping degree that coaches and administrators right up to the top failed to report, and in effect covered up, egregious crimes primarily to preserve a sports reputation. This episode has moved off of our radar thanks to the Olympic Games.

But a bad aspect of local sports remains: the overemphasis on sports that makes it "job one" at most U.S. schools. In the 1980s when ten science student teachers graduated and went looking for jobs, those who could coach were hired first. Those who had superior credentials but did not coach – were often not hired and, being ambitious, took other jobs and were lost to the Kansas science classroom. The science teacher shortage changed that formula for awhile. But the hire-the-coach-first and ask-what-else-can-they-teach-later attitude is returning.

The dramatic cuts in state funding has placed small community high schools at risk. Declining enrollments make eventual consolidation inevitable. But communities rightfully cry that losing the school will doom their community's future – ghost town in the making.

But probe deeper. It is not the loss of the high school as a center of academics, but the loss of high school sports that brings the communities grief. That is what the community is attending during the sports seasons and long



education frontlines

• John Schrock

after they have any children in school. View the glass cases of athletic awards that line school hallways, metal icons to ball playing and track accomplishments dating back a century.

Any academic awards, if there are any, are usually temporarily posted on bulletin boards. Despite the professed academic goal of American schools, we rarely see awards celebrating those students who went into research, medicine, law, public service, music, theater, writing, etc.

American public schools and most universities have rightly been called a "jockocracy." We assume that the rest of the world operates the same way. That is wrong.

For five months this last spring I taught at a Chinese university that, similar to all of their schools, does not compete in high profile competition with any other university. For two days only, university undergraduates did have an internal sports competition. Most students played for fun and excitement.

It was the School of Computing versus the School of Plant Protection.

But the whole focus of the public schools and universities in China remains academics. Outstanding student scholars were known and lauded. Yet these students had just as much pride in their university. Years later, just as many alumni return for class reunions.

China and many other countries can still select and train their best athletes for the Olympics without sports mania. So yes, as we witnessed in the Olympics, you can have academic schools and national sports without subverting the whole educational system to a jockocracy.

Some of our coaches assert: "Sports keeps some students from dropping out of school."

But overseas schools keep students in school by celebrating academic achievement – a system that does not mislead larger numbers of students into thinking they can become one of the few million-dollar professional baseball or basketball players. And we fail to weigh the cost of this bribery on the atmosphere of our schools – when buses for science field trips and debate are canceled, but not for sports.

But I am not going to win this debate. America will continue in its gladiatorial mindset.

So I tell my science student teachers, if they are lucky enough to get a job, to be sure to sign up to help take tickets at the ball games. It may be a bigger factor in their being re-hired than anything they do in the classroom.

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The Goodland Star-News

(USPS No. 222-460. ISSN 0893-0562)

Member: Kansas Press Association

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Published every Tuesday and Friday except the days observed for New Year's Day, Memorial Day, July 4th, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and Christmas Day, at 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

Periodicals postage paid at Goodland, Kan. 67735; entered at the Goodland, Kan., Post Office under the Act of Congress of March 8, 1878.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Goodland Star-News, 1205 Main Ave., Goodland, Kan. 67735.

TELEPHONE: (785) 899-2338. Editorial e-mail: star-news@nwkansas.com. Advertising questions can be sent to: goodlandads@nwkansas.com

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SUBSCRIPTIONS: In Sherman County and adjacent counties: three months, \$29; six months, \$46; 12 months, \$81. Out of area, weekly mailing of two issues: three months, \$39; six months, \$54; 12 months, \$89 (All tax included). Mailed individually each day: (call for a price).

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The Goodland Daily News

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The Sherman
County Herald

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