

HANGING HARRY TRUMAN

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Lyrics and Music © 2010 by Bill Roper

(Chorus)

Em **Asus2** **C** **D**
They're singing just for you as you're sitting in your cell,
C **D** **Asus2**
Even though you didn't need the warning.
Em **Asus2** **C** **D**
They're waiting for the sunrise just to send you to hell,
Cmaj7 **Em Asus2 x2**
'Cause we're hanging Harry Truman in the morning.

Em **Asus2 B7** **Em**
Such a little man! Such a little mind!
C **D** **B7** **Em**
The accidental President we happened to find.
Em **Asus2 B7** **Em**
Haberdasher heir to Roosevelt's plan
C **D** **B7** **Em**
Turned out to be the dispensable man.
A **Em**
No one elected you Commander-in-Chief.
A **B7**
No one expected you would bring us such grief.
Em **Asus2** **C** **D**
Are you haunted by the faces you betrayed by your hand,
C **D** **Em**
Our American boys lying dead in Japan?

Germany fell, Hitler was dead.
V-E was here, Japan lay ahead.
Now it was time to get the job done,
Dying on the beaches of the Rising Sun.
Nobody knew that you held in your hand
The secret that could end the war in Japan.
You thought that the Bomb was too awful to use,
But how many lives were you willing to lose?

(Bridge)

C **D** **Em**
One chance to bring this war to an end.
A **Em**
One chance to save the lives of millions of men.
A **Em**
You say it was wrong - you say we'd be cursed,
Asus2 **B7**
But tell me what we did to Dresden wasn't worse.

Secrets close held, secrets no more.
Tried by the Senate and thrown out the door.
Rayburn backed down, Berlin fell alone,
And Uncle Joe's working on a Bomb of his own.
They called it treason and put you on trial.
When the sun comes up, you will walk your last mile.
"To save us from horror," was the reason you gave.
Now millions are dead, so what life did you save?

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2

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(Chorus twice)

Cmaj7

We're hanging Harry Truman in the morning.

I got the idea for this at ConText, where I wandered into the middle of some conversation that Juanita Coulson was having. I forget the exact context.

*But I suspect that there are many **worse** things than having dropped the Bomb on Japan. At least, that's what's happening one universe to the left of the one we live in.*

There's more to the story, of course:

When you're writing a song of any kind, it helps if you know what happened. And in an alternate-history like this, there's more backstory than is going to fit in the song. So here's what happened.

I don't think that there's much doubt that the U.S. would have eventually won the war with Japan, even if a ground invasion had been required. And thus, the U.S. won the war in this scenario, some time in 1947. But the invasion of Japan was incredibly costly in terms of both American and Japanese lives, living up to the expectations that millions would be killed.

When the news came out after the Japanese surrender that Truman had held back the American super-weapon, because he felt it was too terrible to use, the public outrage was tremendous. The Democratic Congress (still so – they held control in the 1946 mid-term election with the war still on) impeached Truman and convicted him, removing him from office. By then, the order of Presidential succession had been changed, so Sam Rayburn became President. But a weakened America couldn't deal with the Berlin Blockade, so Berlin fell to the Soviets.

Meanwhile, charges of treason and dereliction of duty were brought against Truman for having kept the Bomb in his back pocket instead of using it. He was tried, convicted, and sentenced to be executed on the first Wednesday in November of 1948.

His pending execution was the subhead to the main – and accurate! – headline in that day's Chicago Daily Tribune:

"Dewey Defeats Thurmond"

And that's the rest of the story... :)