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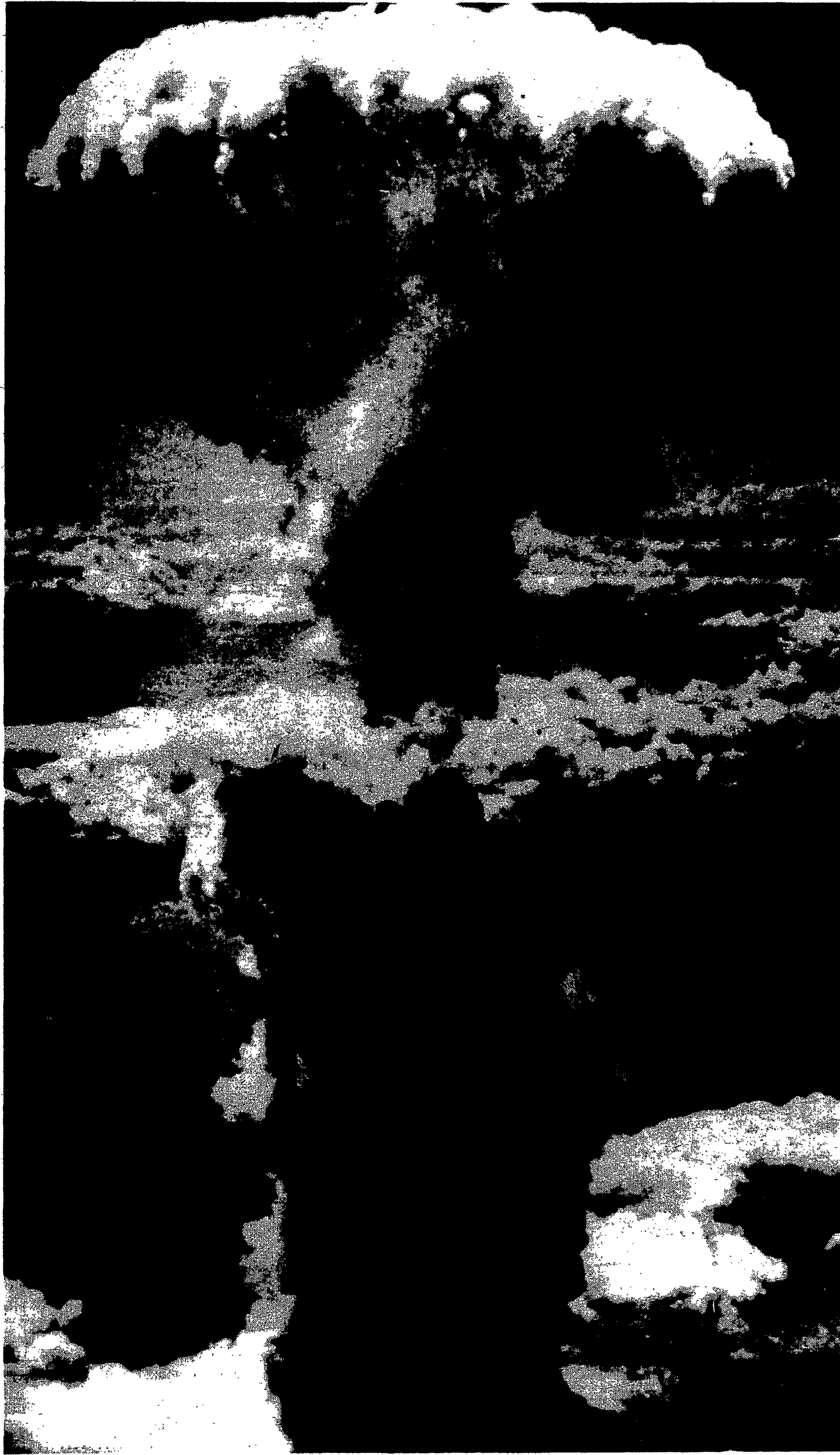
# COURIER-JOURNAL

Newspaper of the Diocese of Rochester

Wednesday, August 14, 1985

16 Pages 35 Cents

## 40 years later: Seeking an end to nuclear terror



### LIFELINES, DEATHFLOWERS

We shall not all sleep,  
but we shall be changed . . .  
Galway Kinnell  
*The Book of Nightmares*

1.

At Nagasaki, there were tuna nets,  
moonrays basting the pale skin  
of your ankles. "Mama," you sang,  
slipping the halfknot of knuckles  
clenched too late to save you,  
"there is no fish coming out of  
my dream." Bright fleets  
of marlin swarmed into the air.

2.

First, the flash,  
a hundred times brighter  
than the sun. After,  
the earthsplitting quake.  
At the epicenter,  
everything is quiet  
for the end of history.  
Where a woman walked, an  
oilspot, a white orchid of ash  
stamped out on paving stones.

A hand reaches out from  
the rubble, as I make my way to you.  
I take it, but the flesh slips off,  
a mateless glove.  
"Help," a voice pleads, without  
malice, "if I may ask."

Vishnu, mirror of wisdom,  
jewel of nobility, sword of  
strength, regenerates five arms  
for every starfish blasted  
from the boiling sea.

Night falls, a black curtain  
of moans. There is no panic.

Children die without weeping.

3.

My son, you are so small,  
I have no words for this.  
In Japanese, *pica*, the flash  
that blinded you, and  
*don*, the awful thunderclap  
that split the eardrums of a god  
whose eyes melted in hindsight  
in the solar storm.

Days pass. I bring you water  
nothing living should drink,  
and swallow it myself. At last  
you sleep, dreaming cool gardens  
of molting birds. I put you to  
my breast, knowing  
the shining milk will come.

4.

On the twentieth day,  
the mountains glow like tumors.  
Vegetation reproduces wildly,  
trilliums, mourning weeds  
the delirious color  
of mooncheese,  
of suppurating sores.

Vishnu takes me aside,  
presses fresh whorls into my palms,  
rearranges my molecules with many  
probing hands, whispering  
in the voice of a lover,  
"Now I have become death,  
the destroyer of worlds."

Two thousand people die each day  
at sunrise. The city is blanketed  
with sunflowers and wild nettle.

Emily Morrison