

## Historical Background

As Japan's fortunes in World War II took a turn for the worse, the Japanese government and military leaders formulated the strategy to win a "decisive battle" with the United States, after which they would negotiate a settlement of the war - just as they had done in the Russo-Japanese War forty years before. However, after their defeat at Okinawa, the Emperor lost confidence in ever attaining this victory, and he wished for an immediate end to the war. The Japanese hoped that the Soviet Union, their nominal ally via a neutrality pact, would negotiate with the Western Allies.

Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori spoke with Sato Naotake, Japan's ambassador in Moscow, on the subject of establishing "firm and lasting relations of friendship" with the Soviet Union, focusing on the status of Japan-controlled Manchuria and "any matter the Russians would like to bring up." After Sato met with Soviet Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov on July 11, he told Togo that "unconditional surrender or terms closely equivalent thereto" was all that Japan could expect to receive.

Unfortunately for Japan, Allied cryptographers had broken most of Japan's codes, and thus, all messages between Tokyo and Japan's embassies were provided to Allied decision-makers as quickly as they reached their intended recipients.

On July 26, the Allied forces (except for the Soviet Union) released the Potsdam Declaration, announcing the terms for Japan's surrender and warning that they would accept no deviation, alternatives, or delay. They called for the occupation and disarmament of Japan, along with the punishment of war criminals and those who had "misled the people of Japan into embarking upon world conquest." However, it stated that Japan could maintain industries to pay reparations, and that the occupying forces would leave Japan when a "peacefully inclined and responsible government" had been established (it was not clarified if the Emperor was considered one of those who had "misled the people of Japan" or would be a part of the new government). The Allies warned that the consequence for rebuffing the Potsdam Declaration was "prompt and utter destruction."

The Emperor's inner circle was divided on how to respond to this, with some advocating outright rejection and others wanting to measure the reaction of the Soviets. Although the Japanese people were alerted to the situation by the leaflets the Allies dropped over Japan, the Japanese papers downplayed the Declaration. Prime Minister Suzuki Kantaro supplemented this media campaign by stating that it was a "rehash of the Cairo Declaration" and that the government found no value in it.

On the morning of August 6, the United States dropped the first atomic bomb (code-named "Little Boy") on Hiroshima, leveling the city. Still, knowing how difficult building an atomic bomb was, many Japanese leaders refused to believe that the Americans had been successful. Worsening the situation was the Soviet invasion of Manchuria, who on August 9 broke the neutrality pact. On that same day, the United States dropped a second atomic bomb (code-named "Fat Man"), this time on Nagasaki.

After this disastrous news, the full cabinet split on a course of action, and the Emperor was asked to break the deadlock. After learning more of the conditions around his land, he said, "I swallow my tears and give my sanction to the proposal to accept the Allied proclamation." The cabinet accepted his will, and announcements were sent to the Allied that the Potsdam Declaration would be accepted "with the understanding that Japan does not compromise to any demand which prejudices the prerogative of His Majesty as a Sovereign Ruler." The Allies returned with an edict stating that the Emperor and the Japanese people would be under the rule of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, and the "ultimate form of government shall be established by the freely expressed will of the people."

The cabinet wanted to reject this, but Togo warned that they would not receive better terms. Facing a deadlock over continuing the war or surrendering to the Potsdam terms, the cabinet returned to the council of the Emperor. After listening to the arguments one more time, he maintained his position for surrender, and the cabinet immediately ratified his wishes.

The night of August 14 was a tumultuous one for the Japanese people. First, on that night, the final and largest bombing raid of the Pacific was launched. 800 bombers and 200 fighters dropped 6,000 tons of explosives and

incendiary weapons on eight Japanese cities. Even though this was only half of the explosive power of one of the atomic bombs, it did significant damage to the target cities.

Second, a group of Army officers launched a coup. They forged orders for the Imperial Guards Division and occupied the grounds of the Imperial Palace. At the same time, Army Minister Anami Korechika committed seppuku, leaving a message that he “humbly [apologized] to the Emperor for [his] great crime.” Anami had always been a fierce opponent of surrender, and it is unclear if his “great crime” was losing the war or his part in the Army's attempted coup. The coup broke down in the night, and the group of Army officers were unsuccessful.

At noon on August 15, the Emperor's recorded speech to the nation, the “Imperial Rescript on Surrender,” was broadcast. It heralded the bravery and sacrifice of the Japanese people, spoke of the ferocity of the atomic bomb and its destruction, and touched upon the coming difficulties of the occupation. The Emperor's speech concluded with this line: “It is according to the dictates of time and fate that We have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is unsufferable.”

Although Japan had surrendered to the Allied forces, they were still at war with the Soviets and the Chinese. The Soviet Union continued to fight until early September, taking the Kuril Islands. On August 28, Douglas MacArthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, began the occupation of Japan. Japan formally surrendered on September 2, when Japanese officials signed the Japanese Instrument of Surrender in Tokyo Bay. This officially ended World War II.

Still, August 15 is generally considered the end of World War II, celebrated in the United States with Victory over Japan Day and in Japan with Shusen-kinenbi (“Memorial day for the end of the war”).

### **Clarifications and Expositions**

There are two authors to the book “Japan's Longest Day.” Hando Kazutoshi wrote the original in 1965, but Bungei Shunju, the publisher of the book, chose to announce the author as social critic and literary essayist Oya Soichi. With the permission of Oya's wife, Hando later re-published the book with additional info. Our version of “Japan's Longest Day” is based on the Oya edition, which is [available in english on Amazon.com](#).

“Japan's Longest Day” was released on the 35th anniversary of Toho's founding. Founded in 1932 by the Hankyu Railway as the Tokyo-Takarazuka Theater Company, the present-day Toho Co., Ltd. is headquartered in Chiyoda, Tokyo. The legendary film studio is best known as the producer of many kaiju (monster) movies (including “Godzilla” and its sequels and offspring), epic samurai films, and the works of Akira Kurosawa.

**“Yes, it is considerably different from their previous Cairo Declaration.”**

Released unsigned, the Cairo Declaration was issued in Cairo, Egypt on November 27, 1943 by President Franklin Roosevelt of the United States, Prime Minister Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek of the Republic of China. It insists on the deployment of brutal military force until the unconditional surrender of Japan, that Japan should return the territories of Manchuria, Formosa, and the Pescadores to China, and that Korea should become independent.

**“...he finally used the word 'mokusatsu,' which means 'to remain in wise silence.’”**

Formed from the Chinese characters for “silence” and “kill,” this word was possible misinterpreted by the United States as a blatant contempt on the part of Japan regarding their response to the Potsdam Declaration.

**“But in the Pacific Theatre, a crucial strategic battle was lost at Midway.”**

The decisive naval battle of the Pacific War, the Battle of Midway took place on June 4-7, 1942 and was a crushing defeat for Japan. The Japanese plan was to lure America's few remaining carriers into a trap and

destroy them, thus finishing off the U.S. Pacific Fleet and guaranteeing Japanese naval supremacy in the Pacific until at least late 1943. This could have also forced the Americans to the negotiating table to terminate the Pacific War.

**“Plans for the so-called 'Operation Olympic...’”**

The overall Allied plan for the invasion of Japan at the end of World War II, it consisted of invasions of Kyushu (scheduled for November 1945) and Honshu, (scheduled for spring 1946). Following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the Soviet declaration of war against Japan, Japan surrendered and this operation was cancelled.

**“It’s potassium cyanide.”**

Potassium cyanide (KCN) is the potassium salt of hydrogen cyanide (or hydrocyanic acid). Also used in extracting metal from ores, if used as a poison it is a potent inhibitor of respiration. Notable suicides on potassium cyanide include Nazis Hermann Goering and Heinrich Himmler, and the 1978 mass murder/suicide of more than 900 people at Jonestown, Guyana.

**“...the Soviets will overrun us in Manchuria, Korea, Sakhalin, and not only there, but even in Hokkaido.”**

Manchuria is a vast territory in northeast Asia, bordering Russia, Mongolia, and China. Sakhalin is a large elongated island in the North Pacific, currently part of the Russian Federation. Hokkaido is the second largest island in Japan, located to the far north of that country.

**Book title: “The Priest and His Apprentice,” by Kurata Hyakuzo**

Kurata Hyakuzo wrote philosophy on how life should be lived. The thing that healed his pains and setbacks is said to be Ueno Pond, his spiritual love, where his family’s cottage was located. He said, “Youth is brief, a time to be treasured.”

**“Do you dare dismiss tragic defeats like Leyte as mere 'logistical problems'?!”**

The second bloodiest battle in the Pacific War (after Okinawa), the Battle of Leyte was the invasion and conquest of Leyte in the Philippines by Allied forces in late 1944. The Allies used this to base a later invasion of Luzon.

**“How rare... my malaria isn’t acting up today.”**

Malaria infects about 350-500 million humans a year, with approximately 1.3-3 million deaths annually, mainly in the tropics. Symptoms include fever, shivering, joint pain, vomiting, and convulsions. Colonel Kozono is probably taking chloroquine for his case, although it has recently been found to be ineffective against the most dangerous strain.

**“Likened to Marshal Pietro Badoglio of Italy...”**

A former adversary of Benito Mussolini, Pietro Badoglio later reconciled with the Italian leader and was given a high position in the government. Following the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943, he led a coup d’etat against Mussolini and assumed his position. He did not hold the position long, eventually giving way to Ivanoe Bonomi and other committed anti-Fascists.

**“Anami, my friend, you have an eloquent way of saying farewell.”**

Throughout the movie, Prime Minister Suzuki has been using the “-san” suffix, a formal one, to address Minister of War Anami. Here he uses the “-kun” suffix, a much more informal honorific. This is similar to the

difference between “Mr.” and calling someone by their first name in English. It is appropriate for Suzuki to use the “-kun” suffix with Anami because he holds a position higher than that of the Minister of War.

**“I will now go to the Meiji Jingu Shrine.”**

Located in Tokyo, Japan near Harajuku Station, the Shinto shrine of Meiji Jingu is dedicated to the souls of Emperor Meiji and his wife, Empress Shoken. The original building was destroyed during World War II, and the present shrine rebuilt in October 1958.

**“The men who launched the 2.26 Incident were reviled as traitors...”**

An uprising against the Japanese government that took place on February 26, 1936, it was a major coup attempt by the Imperial Way Faction. Fourteen hundred junior military officer assaulted Tokyo, seizing control of the Diet, army ministry, and police headquarters. Groups of assassins attempted to kill the upper leadership of the government, and three cabinet members were slain. Most of the city ended up under rebel control.

Although the rebels opposed the pro-war military and industrial factions and believed they were fighting in the Emperor's best interests, Emperor Hirohito denounced them and ordered the army and navy to suppress the revolt. The rebels were conquered by the 29th, executed or forced into ritual suicide, and martial law was imposed until July. The event wiped out pro-peace factions in Japan and place the country on a solid militarist footing.

**“When you're as old as I am, it isn't that hard to cut your belly.”**

Seppuku, also known as hara-kiri in English, is a form of Japanese ritual suicide by disembowelment. Highly detailed, the warrior would dress ceremonially, with his sword in front of him and sometimes seated on special cloths, and write a death poem. With his selected attending assistant (kaishakunin, his second) standing behind him, he would open his kimono, take up his wakizashi (short sword) or tanto (knife) and plunge it into his abdomen. From there, he would perform a left-to-right cut and then a second slightly upward stroke to spill out his intestines.

On the second stroke, the kaishakunin would perform daki-kubi, all but decapitating the head from the body (a slight band was left attaching the head to the body - a skilled swordsman was needed!). Some samurai chose to perform the more taxing form of seppuku, known as jumonji-giri, in which there was no second. It involved a second, and more painful, vertical cut across the belly, and the warrior was expected to bear his suffering quietly until perishing from blood loss.