











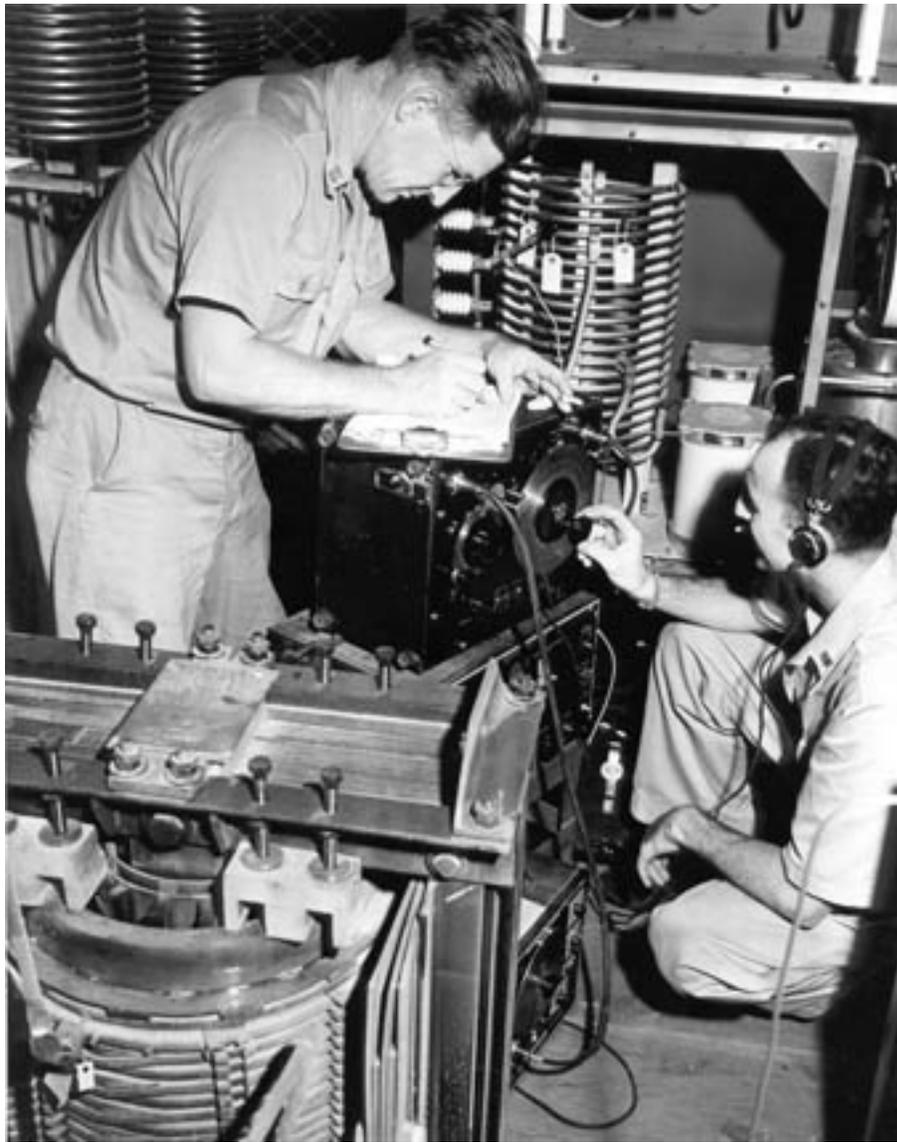




# Broadcasting the Surrender Offer

On 26 July 1945, the heads of state of the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union, meeting in Potsdam, Germany, agreed to give Japan an opportunity to end the war.<sup>7</sup> Their terms called for the disarmament and abolition of the Japanese military; elimination of military influence in political forums; Allied occupation of Japan; liberation of Pacific territories gained by Japan since 1914; swift justice for war criminals; maintenance of non-military industries; establishment of freedom of speech, religion and thought; and introduction of respect for fundamental human rights. The final section demanded that the government of Japan “proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces.” The alternative for Japan was “prompt and utter destruction.”<sup>8</sup>

By 7:00 p.m. on the very day of the Potsdam Proclamation, OWI’s station KSAI began broadcasting the surrender terms to the Japanese nation at regular intervals. OWI also printed the full text of the offer in the Japanese language and dropped over 3 million leaflets by B-29 aircraft. Thus Japanese officials learned of the Potsdam conditions a day ahead of the official communication sent through diplomatic channels.



OWI personnel adjusting the KSAI radio transmitter to new frequencies

to avoid jamming by Japan.

Japan's Cabinet and the Supreme Council for the Direction of the War were immediately called into joint session. They met almost continually from 26 July through 14 August. Arguments over whether, when, and under what conditions Japan should surrender continued right through the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On 27 July, after a routine meeting not attended by Japan's civilian Foreign Minister, the militarists released notification to the world's media that Japan rejected the Potsdam offer.<sup>9</sup>

## **Stepped-Up Bombing**

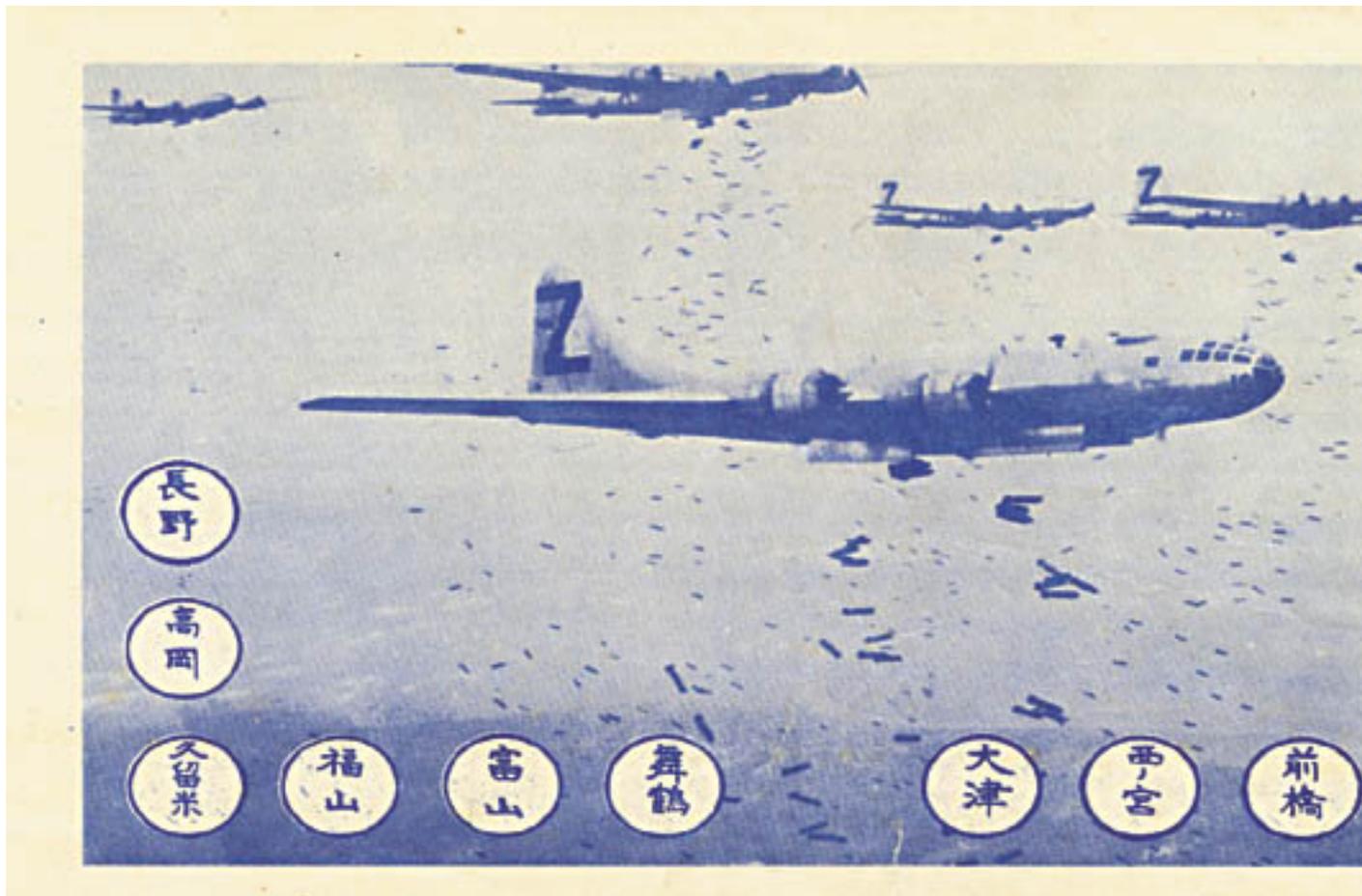
By noon on 28 July, OWI's presses on Saipan were rolling with notices warning civilians to evacuate 35 Japanese cities scheduled to be bombed within the next few days. About 1 million leaflets fell on the targeted cities whose names appeared in Japanese writing under a picture of five airborne B-29s releasing bombs. Given the extent of the effort, it is extraordinary that many Americans are not aware that Japanese cities were warned prior to being bombed. Even today, members of the B-29 crews recall their fears that the warnings would make them easier targets for Japanese planes and anti-aircraft artillery. However, they concurred with Gen. Curtis LeMay's proposal at the time.<sup>10</sup> Military newspapers featured the unprecedented action under such headlines as "B-29 Command Now Calling Its Shots" and "580 B-29s Follow Up Leaflet Warnings With 3800 Tons Of Fire And Explosives."<sup>11</sup> Visualize what it must have been like for people in the targeted cities to look up and see more than 100 B-29 "Superfortresses" overhead. The image lends understanding to the Allies' decision to warn civilians, even at their own risk.

## **Advertising the Destruction of Hiroshima**

At 2:45 a.m. on 6 August, the Allies' B-29 "Enola Gay" left the island of Tinian near Saipan. Its primary target was Hiroshima, where the 2nd

Japanese Army stood poised to defend against an expected Allied invasion of their homeland. At 8:15 a.m., the “Enola Gay” destroyed Hiroshima with a single atomic bomb.

Back on Saipan, the OWI presses were turning out leaflets that revealed the special nature of Hiroshima’s destruction and predicted similar fates for more Japanese cities in the absence of immediate acceptance of the terms of the Potsdam agreement. By 9 August, more than 5 million leaflets about the atom bomb had been released over major Japanese cities. The OWI radio station beamed a similar message to Japan every 15 minutes.



Front side of OWI notice #2106, dubbed the “LeMay bombing leaflet,”

which was delivered to Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and 33 other Japanese cities on 1 August 1945.

The Japanese text on the reverse side of the leaflet carried the following warning: “Read this carefully as it may save your life or the life of a relative or friend. In the next few days, some or all of the cities named on the reverse side will be destroyed by American bombs. These cities contain military installations and workshops or factories which produce military goods. We are determined to destroy all of the tools of the military clique which they are using to prolong this useless war. But, unfortunately, bombs have no eyes. So, in accordance with America's humanitarian policies, the American Air Force, which does not wish to injure innocent people, now gives you warning to evacuate the cities named and save your lives. America is not fighting the Japanese people but is fighting the military clique which has enslaved the Japanese people. The peace which America will bring will free the people from the oppression of the military clique and mean the emergence of a new and better Japan. You can restore peace by demanding new and good leaders who will end the war. We cannot promise that only these cities will be among those attacked but some or all of them will be, so heed this warning and evacuate these cities immediately.” (See Richard S. R. Hubert, “The OWI Saipan Operation,” *Official Report to US Information Service, Washington, DC 1946.*)

## **Indecision in Tokyo**

Japanese officials dispatched scientists and military personnel to Hiroshima to assess damages from the atomic bomb, but they remained paralyzed by disagreement over whether to surrender. The Supreme Council for the Direction of the War, composed of four military and two civilian members, was deadlocked, unable to present the Cabinet and the Emperor with its customary unanimous decision. Army Chief of Staff Gen. Umezo Yoshijir, Navy Chief of Staff Adm. Toyoda Soemu, and War Minister Gen. Anami Korechika maintained that any surrender agreement had to guarantee the Emperor's continued power as sovereign ruler, prevent occupation of major cities such as Tokyo, and place responsibility for disarmament and dealing with war criminals in Japan's own hands. The trio opposing them (Premier Suzuki Kantar, Foreign Minister Tg Shigenori, and Navy Minister Adm. Yonai Mitsumasa) viewed the Potsdam agreement as an ultimatum. In their view, the only negotiable ambiguity was the official

position of the Emperor—the Potsdam agreement had applied the term “unconditional surrender” exclusively to the enemy’s armed forces.

The Supreme War Direction Council met from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. on 9 August. The Japanese Cabinet—which included four members of the Supreme Council—was convened from 2:30 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. that night. Neither meeting proved decisive. The heated argumentation throughout these meetings must surely have reflected the grim realities around them. Not only Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but *all* of Japan’s major cities had been destroyed, with the exception of the historic temple area of Kyoto. Japan’s Air Defense General Headquarters reported that out of 206 cities, 44 had been almost completely wiped out, while 37 others, including Tokyo, had lost over 30 percent of their built-up areas.<sup>12</sup> Almost 2 million military personnel and civilians had been killed. Another 8 million were wounded or homeless. The destruction was so complete, historian Edwin Reischauer reminds us, that Japan, experiencing total military and industrial defeat for the first time in its history, took over 10 years to regain its pre-war productive capacity.<sup>13</sup>

The spreading awareness of the destructive power released at Hiroshima and Nagasaki increased the urgent atmosphere at these meetings in Tokyo. Nonetheless, it took an unprecedented action by the Emperor, and the extraordinary effort of OWI to publicize his action, to break the Japanese military-civilian deadlock.

Half an hour after the 9 August Cabinet meeting ended, Premier Suzuki Kantaro and Foreign Minister Tg Shigenori called members of the Cabinet and the Supreme Council, and Baron Kiichiro Hiranuma, President of Japan’s Privy Council, into an Imperial Conference. For several hours in a hot, airless bomb shelter, the Emperor listened to the opposing arguments. His political role usually consisted of passively endorsing Cabinet decisions. But at 2:00 a.m. on the morning of 10 August, in a deeply moving speech, Japan’s Emperor Hirohito called upon the power of his moral and spiritual leadership and directed that Japan should accept the terms of the Potsdam agreement.

There are indications that the Emperor had long wished for an end to the war for practical and emotional reasons. Ascending to the throne in 1926

at the age of 25, Hirohito was an intelligent man, a distinguished marine biologist, and a rather quiet, shy individual. He remained in Tokyo throughout the war, witnessing personally the destruction that he knew to be indicative of what was happening to the rest of his country. According to various historians, he found the arguments of the militarists to be self-seeking and born of false pride.<sup>14</sup> No doubt pressure from the civilian members of his Cabinet and other government officials strengthened his resolve to end the devastation.

So it was that on 10 August, at 3:00 a.m., the Cabinet and the Supreme Council complied and voted in reluctant unanimity to accept the Potsdam offer, but with the stipulation that the Emperor remain the sovereign ruler of the country. By 7:00 a.m., the Foreign Minister had dispatched an announcement of the decision to the United States and China through Japan's Minister Shunichi Kase in Switzerland, and to Great Britain and the USSR through Minister Suemasa Okamoto in Sweden. Japanese officials tensely awaited the Allies' response.

## **Turmoil in Washington**

Washington hotly debated Japan's request for modification of the Potsdam accord. Historian Robert Butow details the opposing arguments: one side was convinced that acceding to Japan's proviso would inspire prolonged fighting; the other side held that assuring the Emperor's continued status as head of state would strengthen post-war reformation.<sup>15</sup>

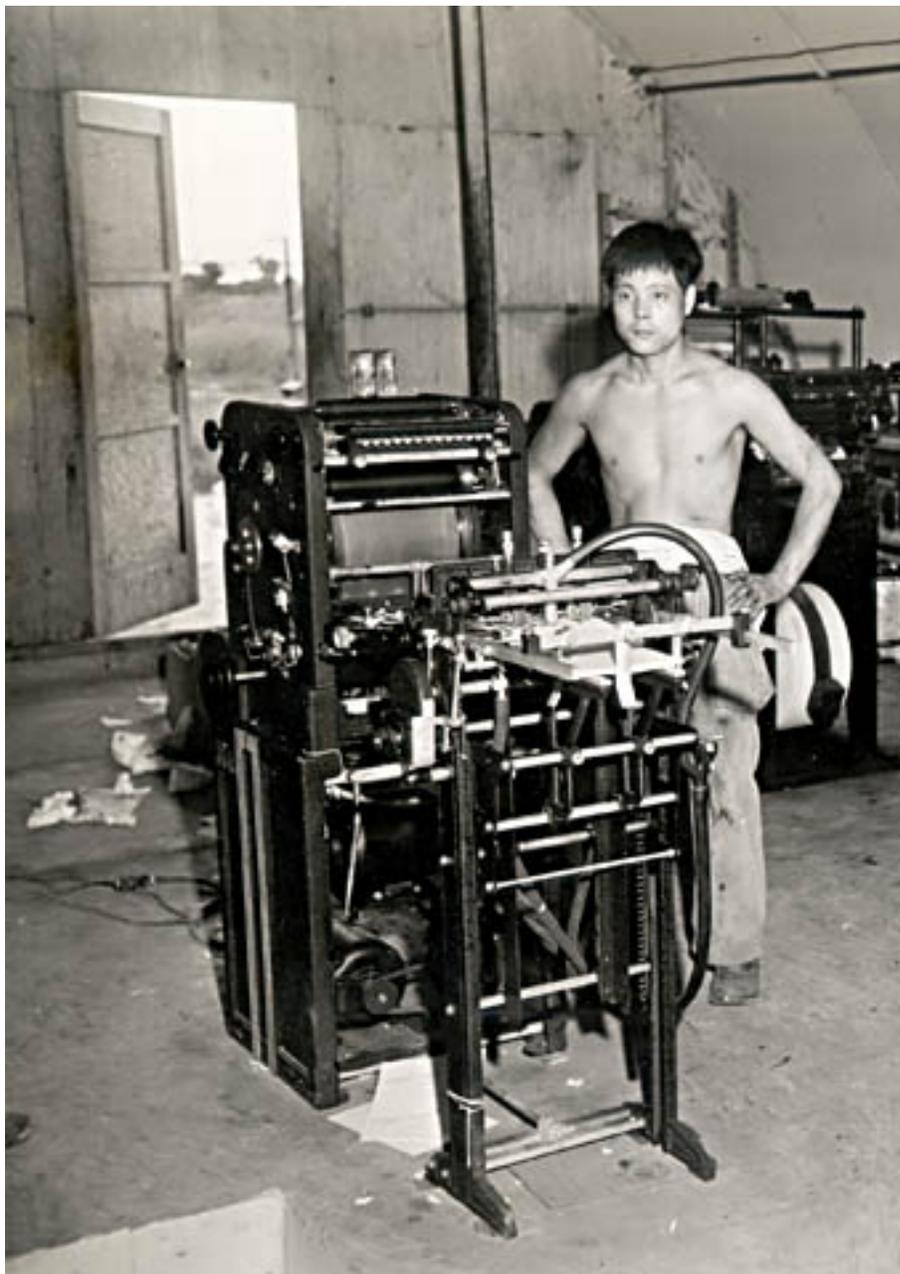
In the end, Secretary of State Byrnes prevailed and prepared the Allied nations' reply, stipulating that the Emperor could remain as a sovereign ruler, but that "from the moment of surrender, the authority of the Emperor and the Japanese Government to rule the state shall be subject to the Supreme Commander of the Allied powers." With the concurrence of the United Kingdom, China, Australia and, ultimately, the USSR, the reply was forwarded to Japan through Switzerland.<sup>16</sup>

## **Getting the Word Out**

OWI now played its most dramatic role.

Technically, Japan had not yet surrendered. The war was not yet over. President Truman had ordered the continuation of Allied bombing runs over Japanese military installations. The people of Japan knew nothing of their government's plan to surrender. Radio Tokyo still exhorted all Japanese to prepare defenses against an enemy invasion.

In a race to save the lives of soldiers still fighting, the Allies' acceptance of Japan's modification of the Potsdam surrender terms was radioed to OWI in Honolulu and Saipan at the same time that it was forwarded to Switzerland. The US War Department sent an urgent dispatch ordering OWI to inform the Japanese people directly, by leaflet and radio, that their government had offered to surrender and that the Allies had accepted the offer. The order, which originated from the White House, threw OWI personnel into high gear. The text for the message was prepared in Washington and dictated by telephone to Honolulu, where it was transcribed, translated into Japanese, lettered, and transmitted to Saipan by "radiophoto" within two hours.



Japanese prisoners helped turn out leaflets and newspapers on OWI's

presses on Saipan.

The 17 members of the OWI staff on Saipan were challenged to a previously unmatched degree. By mid-night on 11 August, less than 48 hours after Japan's message was received in Washington, three-quarters of a million leaflets giving notification of the surrender offer had been printed on OWI's three Webendorfer highspeed presses running continually. By the next afternoon, production of OWI leaflet #2117 totaled well over 5 million copies.

OWI did not have to work alone in this important effort. Saipan's naval base designated two 15-member Navy crews to pack the leaflets into bomb casings for delivery. All bombing of Japan ceased while the Air Force loaded the leaflets onto the B-29s of its 73rd Wing. Even Japanese prisoners of war on Saipan volunteered. Realizing that the Japanese military regime was on a suicidal course, some prisoners helped run the presses for the leaflets in order to give accurate information to the Japanese people. Eventually, they even offered to write copy, under OWI supervision, for Allied newsprint distributions to Japan.



Loading OWI leaflets for transport to the US air field on Saipan,

1945.

On 12 August, aircraft runs departed Saipan at 1:30, 4:30, 7:30 and 11:30 p.m., delivering to the people of Japan the news of their government's surrender offer. The 4" x 5" leaflets rained down by the millions, telling the Japanese people:

*These American planes are not dropping bombs on you today. American planes are dropping these leaflets instead because the Japanese Government has offered to surrender, and every Japanese has a right to know the terms of that offer and the reply made to it by the United States Government on behalf of itself, the British, the Chinese, and the Russians. Your government now has a chance to end the war immediately. You will see how the war can be ended by reading the two following official statements.*

Two paragraphs then gave the Japanese surrender offer verbatim and the Byrnes response indicating the Allies' willingness to accept that offer. OWI repeated the same message continuously over station KSAI.

The significance of this information barrage cannot be overstated. For the first time the Japanese people became aware that their government was trying to surrender. And it was the first that Japanese officials knew of the Allies' acceptance of their surrender offer, because the OWI notification preceded, by about 72 hours, the receipt of the official diplomatic reply sent through Switzerland.

## **The Emperor's Next Steps**

Copies of the leaflet that fell on the palace grounds were immediately taken to the Emperor by Marquis Kichi Kido, Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal. The Emperor realized that Japanese civilians now knew of the surrender attempt and, more significantly, so did ordinary Japanese soldiers, sailors, and airmen.

Fearing a military coup to ensure continuation of the war, the Emperor decided to take additional action to bring the conflict to an end. On 13 August, when the Cabinet was called into immediate session, members Anami Korechika, Umezo Yoshijir, and Toyoda Soemu unexpectedly

dissented anew, saying that an item in the original Potsdam proposal stipulating that postwar Japan would ultimately be governed by the will of the people was against Japanese tradition and therefore compliance was impossible. This reversal precipitated another Imperial Conference at which the Emperor stopped all argument by forcefully declaring that Japan would accept the Potsdam conditions as modified in the 11 August message from US Secretary of State Byrnes on behalf of the Allied nations.

In an action without precedent, the Emperor decided to issue an Imperial Rescript announcing the capitulation, to be delivered both to the Allies through diplomatic channels and to his subjects in his own voice via radio broadcast. The enormity of this decision must be understood in context: the Emperor was considered a deity—no one was allowed to look upon him from above, few citizens had seen him at all, and the Japanese people had never before heard his voice. Hirohito well understood the powerful effect his broadcast would have.

On 14 August, the Emperor made two recordings of the Rescript for broadcast the next day. Aware that such a powerful communication would doom efforts to continue the war, the military sent soldiers from a Tokyo garrison to attack the Imperial Palace at night, imprison the Emperor, and seize the recordings. They failed to turn up the recordings, however, which had been secured at the radio station. Later that night, War Minister Anami Korechika, having failed to promote his views and control his soldiers, committed suicide, the first of many such actions in the days that followed.

## **The Surrender Announcement**

At noon on 15 August, a stunned population listened to Emperor Hirohito's high, shaking, unfamiliar voice announcing the final surrender of the Japanese nation.

The world was jubilant. In New York, Times Square erupted in a sea of celebrating humanity. In Naples, a USO Andrews Sisters show was completely disrupted as the war-weary soldiers, about to embark from Europe for the Pacific, heard the announcement and realized that their trip would be cancelled. In a prison camp near Tokyo, an American, expecting

yet another beating, was handed a paper cup of sake wine and his smiling captor informed him that the war was over.

On Saipan, OWI staff members had little time to savor the moment. They were already hard at work producing leaflets of instruction for the surrendering Japanese on the homeland islands and subsequently in Manchuria, China, New Guinea, and the Philippines.

## **Washington's Gratitude**

Secretary of State Byrnes lost no time in thanking the OWI staff in Honolulu and Saipan. A dispatch from Washington dated 17 August 1945, sent through OWI's Bradford Smith in Honolulu, reads:

*I have been requested by Secretary Byrnes to send appreciation to everyone concerned for the magnificent work done in lettering, translating, printing, sending, and distributing the important leaflet directly before the surrender of Japan. It is the belief of Secretary Byrnes as well as we in this office that the factor which helped to bring about the final surrender was this leaflet. We would appreciate your passing this along to everyone concerned including Hubert [Chief of the Forward Area], Air Force personnel, Psychological Warfare and all those in the OWI who are well deserving of congratulations for the superb job.*

On 2 September, formal instruments of surrender were signed by Japanese officials on behalf of the Emperor and by Allied officials on behalf of the governments of the United States, the Republic of China, the United Kingdom, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Commonwealth of Australia, the Dominion of New Zealand, the Dominion of Canada, the Provisional Government of the French Republic, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Although OWI continued to handle its national affairs through its headquarters in Washington until 12 March 1946, its overseas operations began to wind down after Japan's surrender. On 7 September 1945, oversight of the forward area on Saipan was transferred to the United States Information Service; OWI's Honolulu office closed on 31 October 1945. Chief of the Forward Area, Richard Hubert, returning to Washington, reflected the sentiment of many on his staff:

*It is an honor and privilege to have served with the Office of War Information,*

*which agency deserves more credit than public opinion may ever realize. Operating abroad in secrecy, it is undoubtedly so that the Axis know more about the OWI operations than our own citizens.*

These words rang true for years, but finally the story of OWI's important role in the final days of the war in the Pacific can be told.

### **Footnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>The Office of War Information was established by President Roosevelt on 13 June 1942, under Executive Order 9182, "in recognition of the right of the American people and of all other peoples opposing the Axis aggressors to be truthfully informed about the common war effort." Subsequent Executive Orders empowered OWI to conduct such propaganda abroad as would contribute to victory. For additional information, see: "Statement of Secretary of State Byrnes to the House Appropriations Sub-committee," *Congressional Record*, 19 February 1946.

<sup>2</sup> Bradford Smith reported that "During the first week of operation, four B-29s which otherwise would have been lost were returned to base through the use of the station. By April, more than 20 had been saved." Personal papers at the University of Vermont Library, p. 18. See also, letter of 12 August 1945 from Nathan F. Twining, Lt. Gen. US Army, to R. S. R. Hubert, OWI Chief, Saipan: "Your staying on the air throughout the entire day has served a two-fold purpose: first, the long range radio homing facility has greatly facilitated navigation on our combat missions and, secondly, the programs have been a great help to the morale of combat crews participating in these operations."

<sup>3</sup> Richard S. R. Hubert, "The OWI Saipan Operation," *Official Report to US Information Service*, Washington, 1946, charts pp. 88-89.

<sup>4</sup> Bradford Smith, "Propaganda and Counter-Propaganda in Japan," pp. 21-22. Personal papers at the University of Vermont Library.

<sup>5</sup> The effectiveness of the leaflets was indelibly established in the minds of Company B of the 381st Infantry on Okinawa when a pretty young girl surrendered to them stark naked. She had misinterpreted the wording,

which instructed men to come out stripped to the waist and women to “come as they are.” *Stars and Stripes*, 29 June 1945.

<sup>6</sup> As early as 10 March 1945, Japan's War Minister Sugiyama Gen had declared that, “The enemy invasion of our homeland is imminent.” Daily Digest of Tokyo Radio, OWI Overseas Branch, San Francisco.

<sup>7</sup> China's Chiang Kai-shek participated in the Potsdam discussions by wire communication.

<sup>8</sup> *World War II Surrender Documents: Japan Surrenders 1945*, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, DC, 1976.

<sup>9</sup> As reported by Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori in his book, *The Cause of Japan* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), p. 313. Japanese broadcasts, apparently in response to the leaflet campaign, contrasted Germany's alleged lack of resolve under aerial siege with that of Japan, noting that, “Orientals are made of sterner stuff.” As quoted in the *Philadelphia Inquirer & Public Ledger*, 5 August 1945.

<sup>10</sup> *Newsweek*, 6 August 1945, p. 25.

<sup>11</sup> *The Daily Target*, Saipan, vol. II, no. 92, 7 August 1945.

<sup>12</sup> *OWI Daily Digest*, series 7, no. 46, 23 August 1945.

<sup>13</sup> Edwin O. Reischauer, *The Japanese* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 103.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Robert Butow, *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (Hoover Library Publication: Stanford University Press, 1954).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 189 ff.

<sup>16</sup> The USSR briefly withheld approval, hoping to gain veto power over the designation of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers.

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