Waiting

Japan began to change dramatically as soon as the emperor's speech ended. The *Oita Godo Press*, for example, transitioned literally overnight from a war rallying platform to a peace-filled gazette. The August 16 edition wasted no time in explaining to a confused people why the war had to be stopped. The lead story, under the title “Imperial Rescript Declaring the End of the War Appreciated,” extolled the emperor’s “quite exceptional” announcement outlining the agreement to accept conditions laid out in the Potsdam Declaration. “Although Japan had intended to establish a peaceful world through this war, the situation for Japan deteriorated day after day, culminating with the great number of innocent people sacrificed by the atomic bomb. If we continue the war, our nation and civilization will become extinct.” It exhorted all citizens to heed the emperor’s words and rebuild the country with “full and collective efforts.”

But in reality the people were hungry, confused, and frightened. Throughout the country these three realities quickly overwhelmed the lives of most people. Food shortages had been building for the final two years of the war, but government subsidies, together with small but vital production of rice and vegetables in the countryside, kept starvation at bay. This was the physical pain to bear. Confusion arose from the shocking news that Japan had lost the war. While high-ranking officials and even mid-level military officers had seen the futility of continuing the war, none dared say so aloud, so civilians were not aware how thoroughly Japan had been beaten. Widespread anxiety and fear arose as they waited for U.S. soldiers to march into their country, changing their way of life, and raping their women.

Occupation Plans

Unknown to the people of Japan, including the military leaders who had taken their people into this disaster, American strategists had begun a detailed plan to occupy the country well before the surrender. “Top Secret” plans of action were written, debated, and readied for implementation by the Joint War Plans Committee and submitted to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

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even as the Battle of Okinawa raged on. By now, despite the continuing slaughter, the eventual victory was not in doubt, only the time it would take to occupy the country. One of the early occupation plans from May 1945 opens with the rational for preparation:

1. The possibility exists that Japan, realizing that defeat is inevitable, may surrender at any time in an effort to obtain the best terms possible and in order to avoid destruction of her homeland. In the event of a surrender or collapse, or of withdrawal from occupied territory, the Allies must be prepared to occupy such strategic areas as are necessary to enforce their demands and insure the peace. In order to be prepared for such an eventuality, the strategic areas to be occupied and the forces and resources necessary for Occupation must be determined.

2. It is the intent of this study to establish a priority list of such areas or positions. Such a list will remain reasonably firm. The forces and resources required for Occupation will vary with changes in enemy dispositions and capabilities, as will Allied resources available for Occupation. These matters should therefore be the subject of continuing studies.

The locations were prioritized according to the following criteria:

- a. The present political, military, and naval subdivisions of Japan
- b. Japanese commerce and industry, particularly with regard to foodstuffs
- c. Population centers
- d. Locations of prisoner of war and internment camps

Areas were prioritized in three categories. The top-priority areas were to be occupied immediately “as the minimum necessary to gain and exercise military, political and economic control.” The second tier would be occupied “to secure firmly the first priority areas or because they are themselves essential to a lesser degree.” The third-tier areas were considered of less importance, to be occupied “after first and second priority areas and when forces become available.”

Clearly the first priority was the region of Tokyo and Yokohama, the center of Japanese war making orchestrated by military, civilian, and imperial powers. Other primary areas included the industrialized Shimonoseki-Fukuoka area, as well as Osaka, Kobe, and Kyoto. The second priority area included Nagoya, with its massive military installations and suspected prisoner of war camps. Hakodate, Sasebo, Nagasaki, and Hiroshima were also on this list.

Finally, the third category of areas to be occupied included 29 cities and regions. Of these 29, the Oita-Bungo Channel Area, with Oita City on one
side of the channel and the nearby island of Shikoku on the other, were listed as the fourth most important location to occupy in this third tier. The rationale for occupying this area was spelled out briefly in the report:

1. **Oita-Bungo Channel Area**
   - **Military considerations.** This area includes: Air center at Oita: Hoyo Fortress (Bungo Channel)
   - **Economic considerations.** Aircraft assembly plant; several large cement plants; important copper smelter at Saganoseki. Oita is a junction of the Nippo main line and cross-island lines; good yards and shops. Radiotelegraph and broadcasting.
   - **Political Consideration.** Oita is the capital of Oita prefecture. Population of the area in 1940 was 200,000.3

As this report was prepared, war still raged in the Pacific, Hiroshima had not yet been targeted for the first atomic attack, and both sides prepared for a brutal invasion and resistance in the coming months. On the American side, the detailed analysis of the coming occupation was interspersed with awareness of the unknown, coupled with a profound fear of a crazed populace that could not be trusted. A May 16, 1945, report from the Joint War Plans Committee issued the following warning:

> Although the exact conditions which will exist in Japan at the time of collapse or surrender cannot be predicted, it is probable that the presence of an Occupation force will be bitterly resented. This fact, together with the inherently treacherous nature of the Japanese, make it mandatory that the Occupation force in each area be in sufficient strength to insure adequate defense of installations and communications, and effective control of the local populace.

The Americans were eager to take control of Japan, and they would brook little interference from anyone, not even their allies. A June 25, 1945, report states:

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2. The Bungo Straits, between Oita Prefecture and the island of Shikoku, were considered one of the most dangerous areas for American submarines and other warships to enter for most of the war. It was made famous in the 1955 film *Run Silent, Run Deep*, starring Clark Gable and Burt Lancaster.

The United States has carried virtually the entire burden of the war against Japan in the Pacific. In order to assure adequate post-war control in Japan and because we shall require post-war control of broad areas in the Pacific, our national interests demand we maintain a dominant role in the post-defeat period. For this reason the initial Occupation of the main islands of Japan, Formosa, Nansei Shoto and Nampo Shoto should be undertaken by U.S. forces. Regardless of the ultimate composition of Occupation forces as established by international agreement, the inclusion of Allied forces (except for minor elements) in initial Occupation forces would likely lead to unacceptable interference with operational plans.

The report goes on to identify the locations the Allies expected to occupy, with the United Kingdom focusing on Southeast Asia, the Soviet Union (if they declared war on Japan before the end of the war) the Kuriles and Karafuto (Sakhalin), in addition to already agreed upon Manchuria and north China. Chinese forces were expected to control all of China, apart from Manchuria and parts of north China. The plans for the postwar period were nearly ready. On July 26 the Joint War Plans Committee indicated with uncanny accuracy the expected date of surrender, as seen in this section of the report subtitled “Assumptions”:

Japanese resistance has collapsed or the Imperial High Command has surrendered unconditionally (i) about 15 August 1945, or (2) about 15 January. In isolated instances, local commanders will continue to resist and acts of sabotage and treachery on the part of local Japanese population will occur.

The plan envisioned that, upon collapse or surrender, an order would be issued to the Japanese Imperial High Command requiring the following actions:

1. All Japanese forces except police were to remain in present position, to be disarmed and all arms turned in to the occupying force.
2. Within 48 hours, lists of all military bases, their locations and strengths must be provided, including all aircraft, naval vessels, minefields and prisoner of war camps.
3. All military vessels and aircraft were to remain in their current location undamaged.
4. All mines, minefields and other obstacles to be removed within 14 days.

“The Occupation of Japan,” Sections 4-C-5 and 4-C-6. Manchuria was considered a separate entity at this time, with a confused status.
This plan anticipated that American troops removed from Europe after the recent surrender of Germany would be redeployed for Occupation service in Japan. If the war ended on August 15, it was expected there would not be enough available forces to occupy the island of Kyushu, which included Oita. Therefore, the most likely scenario envisioned mid-January 1945 for the initial Occupation force to land.\(^5\)

While Americans planned their Occupation, the people of Oita, under constant attack from the skies, could not imagine they would be occupied. Their leaders, through the tightly controlled media, continued to extol them to sacrifice and to work till exhaustion for victory and to prepare to die. Then, as projected by U.S. intelligence, the emperor’s speech of August 15 ended the illusion of victory and lifted the immediate threat of dying for the emperor while fighting an invasion force of American soldiers. But what was to come? Death in another way? The raping of Japanese women by American soldiers? Subjection to a foreign force, losing their own right to be Japanese, making Japanese decisions, and living in traditional Japanese ways? They waited, knowing nothing of American intentions.

**Running to the Hills**

Having no idea when the first American soldiers would arrive, Oita residents dreaded every day. Of course they did not know that Oita was a third-tier Occupation site. Some panicked. The first response, especially for the women, was to run away and hide. Unlike those nurses with easy access to poison, most had little time to find doctors or pharmacists to provide them this quick escape from the American rapists. They only had their wits and their legs. Yonosuke Yanase recalls what happened in his home.

The most uncertain period was from the end of the war on August 15 through the end of August. The citizens received no clear information during those fifteen days. Rumors ran rampant that the Americans were coming into Beppu Bay at any time. People were scared out of their wits imagining what the Americans would do to women and children. So they arranged to send the women and children into the mountains. On August 20, at 8:00 in the evening, my two sisters, my mother, and a neighbor left for Ajimu, about 50 kilometers away from our home. We packed as many kimonos and personal belongings as they could carry

\(^5\) “The Occupation of Japan,” Section 4-C-9.
and sent them on their way. They walked all the way, nonstop for ten hours. They had no flashlight, and it must have been very difficult to see where they were going. They told me later that they were really scared, not that the Americans were coming, but the road was really dark and really terrifying. They cried all the way. My oldest sister was seventeen and the other one fourteen. Just as they arrived in Ajimu the next morning, they heard that everything was going to be OK and that the Americans had not come and wouldn’t come for a while. They turned around and headed back home the next day. Again, they walked all the way back to Beppu without stopping.

A similar story is repeated by 99-year-old Masako Ono, who shared the following:

Right after the war, there were lots of rumors that the Americans were coming and what they’d do to women. Many people worried what would happen to them, so some of my family and friends ran and hid in the mountains, some for three days, others for a week. I was already a married woman, so I stayed, but sent my unmarried daughters to the countryside. They came back after we heard there was nothing to worry about, that no soldiers had arrived.

Bartering for Food

As a student laborer in the military factory in Oita City, Ichiro Hashimoto made torpedoes in the days leading up to August 15. Now that the war had stopped his family fretted and watched. As rumors spread that Americans were on the verge of entering the city, Ichiro and the rest of his family hurried into the surrounding mountains where they had family and friends. “Eventually we heard that there was no danger and that no Americans had arrived yet. We returned home in one week, though some people didn’t come back for a long time. They stayed away not only because of the fear of the Americans, but also because there wasn’t much food in the city and they thought living on a farm would be better.”

In Oita, a relatively poor region of Japan to begin with, one that had poured so many resources into the war effort and where much of the infrastructure was demolished by American bombing, this was certainly the case. Memories of those times remain painful. People sold or bartered what they could to get food, from clothing, to sea salt, to family heirlooms
of rare fine art and antiques. Rice was the most sought after commodity, with wheat and soybeans next. Vegetables were desired, but rarely available. Some people fished, and others went foraging in the fields for wild, edible roots and berries. School grounds were converted from sports and recreation centers to gardens, as children planted potatoes, each child receiving a small share when they were harvested.

Toyoki Goto says it is still “very difficult” to conjure up his thoughts from that time.

We watched the Americans when they finally came into Oita. But, to be honest, we didn’t pay much attention to them. We weren’t concerned with what they were doing. We were only concerned with ourselves, wondering if there was anything to eat tonight and tomorrow. My father had died, I was too young to earn an income, and my family was hungry. It was ridiculous. Sometimes, we’d have only one sweet potato for the whole family. What little rice we could find we grounded into powder and made a paste out of it. Hunger lasted for years after the war, though got better slowly as Japan’s economy recovered bit by bit.

Nobuko Takahashi remembers:

During much of the war, especially toward the end and then during the Occupation, there was little food for city folks. My mother and I would take her kimonos to the countryside to barter for food. There were two types of kimonos, the common daily wear and the more expensive and stylish wear used for weddings and festivals. The common kimonos were more popular with the farmers. We had no way to get there except to walk. So we’d just pack up the kimonos, carry the bundles on our backs or on our heads and walk until we found buyers. It was the women’s job to get the food, because men wouldn’t sell kimonos to farmers. I don’t remember how much rice we got for each kimono, but it wasn’t much. Each family would just take one or two kimonos. It was all a matter of supply and demand. Thinking back, those farmers were not very nice people. They stockpiled the kimonos to sell later, and many got rich off us.

Nobuko Takahashi’s attitude was not an isolated case. Some in the countryside felt little kinship with city people, especially in transactions that were just business deals with strangers, and not their relatives from the city. Growing up on a farm, Hideo Sonoda seems to relish a bit of payback to the city folk, who had lived more comfortably for years before and even
during much of the war, while farmers worked every day to tend their crops. Perhaps it was their time to lord it over those from the city. He recalls:

My family was farmers, so we weren’t particularly strained for food during and immediately after the war. Our entire family would work in the fields. I had done it since elementary school. I’d always work in the fields and never played with my friends. Even during spring break and summer vacation, I’d take a bento and work in the fields all day. The city kids, at least during much of the war, had time to play and enjoy their vacation while I was working. Now, when food became really scarce in the city, they had to come to us to for food.

Hidekatsu Nakano says that in his family, city buyers and countryside sellers felt no ill will, at least from the perspective of a small boy watching them come up to his home. In part this was because many of those in need were family and friends.

The city people would bring salt and kimonos to exchange for rice. I don’t remember much about how we used the kimonos, whether we sold them or kept them, or how much they were worth, but salt was more important for us, because we pickled so many things. Some of the people were our relatives or friends, so we wanted to help them. They’d walk 10 to 20 kilometers to our place, carrying their clothes and salt. After the war, when I went to the city to study, these people welcomed me into their homes.

The Passion of a Mother

For families who had no friends or family in the countryside, and whose husbands or fathers had died during the war, simply surviving day to day became desperate. Suicides were common and thoughts of suicide were constant. Umon Takamatsu was born in Korea, where his father ran a fishing company before joining the Japanese Army. When he returned from the war he was sick and weak, and his family of four was forced to return to Japan.

We left Korea carrying only what we could carry on our backs. So we started from scratch in Japan. We didn’t have a farm to grow rice or sweet potatoes, so we tried to exchange what possessions we had, like kimonos, for food. But my mother had only so many kimonos, and we quickly ran out. Soon after we returned, my father died, and then my
grandfather died, followed by my grandmother. That left just the three of us, my mother, my younger brother and me. When the country began to recover, the government offered support to families like ours. But my mother was too proud. She said that even though the military fought the war, it was our job as civilians to support them with everything we had. And because of that, each one of us was responsible for the outcome of the war. She didn't believe it was right to live off of other people's money. No civilian knew just how the war started, but once it did, it was in our nature to defend ourselves at all costs.

At that time, you heard quite often about people jumping in front of trains. Because our household was in shambles, my mother thought this might be the best way out for us, as life had become just too difficult. One day, she took my brother and me to the tracks. I was five and my brother was three. Only at the last minute, she changed her mind. She took us to the tracks two more times, but, each time, she gave up the idea of killing us and decided to work harder to raise us to be good men without government support. She sold sweets on the street in Beppu during the day and taught sewing at night. Typically, she'd sleep two or three hours a night. She wore herself out and died at the age of 48. In the end, my mother sacrificed her body and soul to raise her children to be the best possible citizens for the country.

Suffering Together

Over the first year of Occupation, food-rationing centers opened and people could go to the centers to receive small amounts. Bread, sugar, salt extracted from sea water, rice, and sweet potatoes were the staple foods. Beer was available, or rather a weak imitation of the real thing made from barley. People very rarely stole food. In fact, when asked about this more than six decades later, the question itself elicited surprise in the asking. “I can't remember any stealing, though there must have been some,” says Yonosuke Yanase. “I can't imagine there was a lot. Even though people were suffering they wouldn't take from another person in the same boat. My memories of the time were of everyone sharing what they had with one another.”

Medical care was in disarray, as equipment and medicine were in short supply. Midwife Tsuruko Tomonari recalls that, as soon as she heard the war was over, she and some other midwives, like most young women, escaped into the hills around Beppu. When they heard the Americans were not coming yet, they returned and continued delivering babies.
Because we didn't have much food or medical supplies in the last year of the war, we lost many babies. Many of the mothers were weak and sick when they came to the clinic. If they had high blood pressure or weak kidneys due to their lack of nourishment, we had no medicine to save them. And many babies were born brain dead. This was a problem for more than a year after the war.

Nurse Nobuko Eto, the spirited girl who put out the fire in her hospital during the final months of the war, picked right up where she left off when the war ended.

In September, after returning home right after the war, I worked as a surgical nurse in the hospital that had burned during the bombing. It still pains me to remember the ex-soldiers with bayonet cuts stretching from the right shoulder down to the small of their back and the ex-navy men with wounds below their knees. They came to us wrapped in white bandages, and so we had to carefully peel off the bandages and disinfect them with hot water, repeating the process daily. We had no real disinfectant at that time. As military doctors came back from the war, they wore their navy or army uniforms to work and taught us how to treat the wounds. We were all trained in how to deal with limited supplies and medicine, something unimaginable to a later generation in Japan. Later I moved to the maternity ward, as the first baby boom hit in 1947. Over two years we delivered babies in old bomb shelters and makeshift facilities in homes. I remember it being fun, tough, and sad. In 1949, during his journey across Japan to apologize to the people for our sufferings, the emperor visited our hospital.