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Stop Fighting... The War Ended 30 Years Ago!

The bizarre and almost comical episode of the Japanese soldier who continued fighting for his country 30 years after the surrender of Japan and the end of World War II



In a horrifying and grand climax to the long and bitter war that had engulfed virtually the entire globe, America dropped two atomic bombs on Japan on August 6 and 9, 1945, ushering in the atomic age and making it clear that if the Japanese did not surrender at once they would face not merely occupation but obliteration. After days of negotiation, the Japanese accepted surrender unconditionally, except for the stipulation that the position of Japan's emperor remain intact.

On September 2, 1945, representatives of the Japanese government signed the surrender document aboard the USS Missouri. World War II was formally and finally over. People around the world and especially in America—the country that carried the brunt of the Pacific war—celebrated the end of the most bloody, costly and horrendous conflict in human history.

Even as the great armies of the world demobilized and began repatriating their troops, one Japanese soldier in the Philippines never laid down his arms. The news of his country's surrender failed to reach him and for the next 30 years he lived in isolation, carrying on the war against an enemy that no longer existed. Read how this individual fought fanatically to keep up a non-existent three-decade long fight.

The Japanese at the time of World War II had barely emerged from their feudal past. Part of that past included fanatical adherence to a warrior code of behavior that put loyalty to the emperor above life and limb.

The Mikado, as the Japanese emperor was known, was worshipped literally as a deity. Although in practice the Mikado at the time of the war—Emperor Hirohito—did not exercise much of his rights over his countrymen, his word was considered divine and loyalty to him was absolute.

According to the ancient warrior code, the shame of surrender was worse than death. Japanese soldiers regularly fought to the death no matter how clear it was that the battle was lost. Japan was the first country to employ kamikaze pilots, young men often with little flying experience who knowingly boarded one-way, bomb-laden planes for the express purpose of crashing them into American warships. Indeed, the kamikazes were used with considerable success when conventional battle methods failed.

Loyalty to the Mikado was so extreme that historians agree that arguably the major reason the Japanese continued to fight the war late into 1945, long after their position was clearly hopeless, was that they were unable to face the idea that their emperor might be removed from his position—or, worse yet, tried as a war criminal. Even after two atom bombs were dropped on their battered nation, the Japanese would not immediately surrender, in great part due to the fear that the Allies would remove the emperor from power.

Then, even *after* the surrender, which the emperor announced directly over the radio (it was the first time his people had ever heard him speak), Allied Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Forces General Douglas McArthur had to force the emperor to publicly renounce his status as a deity so that he could obtain Japanese cooperation in his



US navy personnel try to shoot down an approaching kamikaze plane.



Part of a kamikaze plane that was shot down by the gun crew of a US warship is seen on the ship's deck.

post-war administration of the country. Most incredible of all, despite the public declaration, many Japanese continued to view and treat the emperor as a deity until his death in 1989!

As an aside, the story is told how before the first bomb was dropped, President Truman and his cabinet got into a heated debate whether or not to make removal of the emperor part of their surrender terms. If they made it part of the terms, the Japanese might never give up. Yet, if they allowed him to stay, it could cause problems. Finally, they came up with the idea to leave the office of emperor intact but make him answerable

to the Allied Supreme Commander, who had not yet been appointed but was likely to be the extremely self-confident, arrogant General Douglas MacArthur.

Barely containing a smile, one of Truman's cabinet members then said, "Yes, and since that Supreme Commander is likely to be good, old Douglas MacArthur, it will be just like one deity answering to another...."

The Last Fanatic

While the war did officially end on September 2, 1945, numerous Japanese soldiers scattered throughout the crumbled empire were so loyal to land and emperor that they refused to accept that the war was over. Instead, they remained hidden in the forests and jungles and fought for years until they were captured or killed, succumbed to the adverse conditions in the field or simply came to their senses.

Estimates ran that as many as 1,000 Japanese soldiers refused to give up the fight after their leaders signed the surrender document, which explicitly ordered the demobilization of all Japanese forces. Over time their numbers dwindled and the world breathed more freely in the knowledge that these fanatics were at last gone.

Or so they thought...

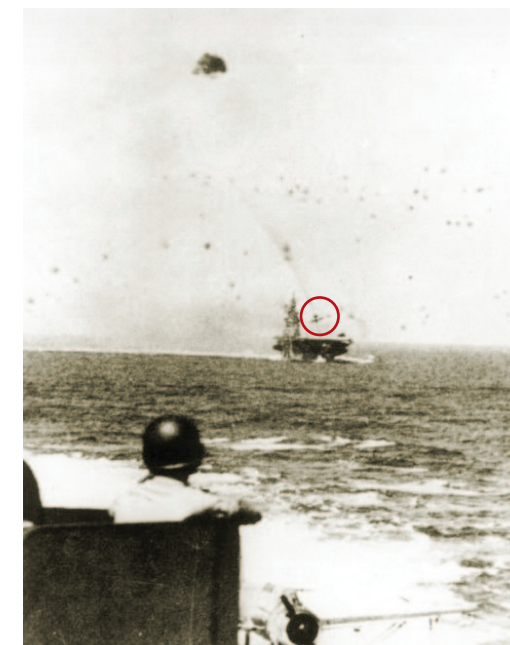
One decade passed and another and another and some of the soldiers had not yet given in. Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda was one of those. His country had entered the war dreaming of conquering Southeast Asia and the entire Pacific, and he saw it as his duty to do everything in his power to see that dream fulfilled.

Onoda had been shipped to the tiny island of Lubang in the Philippines in 1944 to fight a guerrilla action against the American forces that were swiftly approaching, but he never received the order to disengage. When the war ended he read about it and heard the reports of the surrender. Nevertheless, since his commanders had never formally commanded him to lay down his arms, he believed that the reports were falsehoods spread by the enemy or perhaps subversive

elements within his own army. Therefore, he stayed in the island jungles of Lubang for 29 years to continue his one-man guerrilla campaign against the enemy that no longer existed.

Hiroo Onoda

Onoda was born on March 19, 1922, and in 1942 at the age of 20, was recruited for the imperial Japanese army. At the time he was far away from home, working for a division of the Tajima Yoko trading company



USS *Intrepid*, seconds before being hit by a kamikaze pilot.



A kamikaze pilot crashes his plane into a ship while the smoke of the rounds that missed him are still visible in the sky.