



Beyond the Wire

CPOW
Civilian Ex-Prisoners of War
(Formerly BACEPOW)

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From the Commander

It's the New Year and, dare I say, good riddance to 2020! A new year also means that the 76th anniversary of liberation is just a month away. Looking back to our 75th Commemoration of Liberation last February in Sacramento, we didn't realize at the time how lucky we were to be together to celebrate that event just before the pandemic took hold.

Speaking of last year's event, one of the articles in this newsletter is by Dr. Mary Beth Klee, daughter of Santo Tomas internee Leonore Iserson (Klee). Mary Beth brought up the subject of "adulthood" in Santo Tomas at one of the reunion sessions; she expounds on that topic here and it makes for interesting reading. We also feature a look back by former BACEPOW Commander, Donald Thompson, as well as a book review by our editor, Angus Lorenzen.

Although we had hoped to hold a mini-Reunion luncheon in Southern California in the spring, it's not realistic to expect we can do that safely. We will though continue to plan for the next full Reunion at the MacArthur Memorial in Norfolk, Virginia in May 2022. By then, hopefully the vaccines will have cleared the way for us to travel safely and be together again.

A new year also means it's time to renew your CPOW membership for 2021 if you haven't already done so. The form is included in this newsletter. Additionally, we will very soon have the website enabled to allow you to join or renew online, so check the website, CPOW.org, if you prefer a secure online way to renew.

If you mail your membership information, please be sure to carefully print your email address and let us know if you'd be interested in receiving Beyond the Wire by email.

Finally, we'd like to make sure that we do our best to focus on what is important to you, our members. When you send your renewal, please consider also including an answer to the following question, "*What is the most important thing we can achieve together as members of CPOW?*" You can also email your response if you prefer, to my email address, Commander@CPOW.org.

Best wishes to everyone for a healthy, fulfilling and happy 2021!

Sally Meadows

Reflections of a Past Commander

By Don Thompson

I was born in Flushing, New York in 1935. My father, Vernon, born and raised in Los Angeles, was a partner in an international CPA firm, working out of the head office in New York City. My beautiful Spanish mother, Gloria, was born and raised in Manila. My parents met when my mother had served as my father's secretary in the Manila office.

In 1936, my father was transferred to the Shanghai office. We crossed the International Date Line on my first birthday, skipping it, but my father later assured me that it was duly celebrated. We were in China until 1938 when Japanese bombings forced us to flee to what was considered a safe place, Manila, the Pearl of the Orient.

The Sobral family, consisting of my mother's parents, three sisters and two brothers, still lived in Manila. (Three other sisters had married and were living in the U.S.) They were a wonderful source of love and support to us during our first two years in Santo Tomas. During our third year, we were isolated from the outside world by the Japanese and could no longer receive their care packages. The Sobral family also supported the guerrillas and harbored two British boys throughout the Japanese occupation. One of my aunts, Angelita, received the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom for her heroism. My father considered them all heroes.

My parents and I and my little sister, Diane, survived the rigors of our camp experiences, although when I came down with diphtheria and measles at the same time in year three I came about as close to dying as a person can without actually doing it. After our liberation, we were repatriated to the U.S. arriving in San Francisco aboard the U.S.S. Admiral Capps in April 1945, together with 800 other former internees including BACEPOW's beloved Sascha Weinzheimer Jansen.

On February 16, 1980, an internee reunion was held at the Elks Club in San Mateo, CA to commemorate the 35th anniversary of our liberation. There were 426 attendees from all over our country, including my mother, two aunts and me. Many of the attendees had been adults during our camp years. The committee that hosted this wonderful gathering was headed by Doug Willard, a

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(Reflections, continued from page 1)

former garbage collector in Santo Tomas, who would become the first commander of BACEPOW. Featured guests included Lt. General Joseph Swing (11th Airborne), Major General William Chase (First Cavalry) and Lt. Col. Henry Burgess (11th Airborne). All three provided us with interesting details of the raids they led on Santo Tomas and Los Baños. What I remember most vividly were the squeals of delight when women saw each other for the first time in 35 years. Emotions ran high at this, my first, reunion.

Sometime in the 1990s I joined BACEPOW and soon became Treasurer. By then, BACEPOW was a chapter of AXPOW, and was holding luncheon meetings three times a year in the San Mateo area. BACEPOW was led by Commander Doug Willard and Vice Commander, George Mora. Doug ran the meetings with a smooth, caring and humorous approach, while George produced our newsletter and filled us in on issues at the national level. As I attended Board meetings and saw how those two individuals contributed to our organization, it became apparent to me that they were the heart and soul of BACEPOW.

I became Commander of BACEPOW in 1999. Up to that time, all our luncheon meetings had been held in San Mateo. I arranged for luncheons to be held alternately at the Elks Club in Alameda. Our members joined several thousand military ex-POWs in a lawsuit against Japan. Unfortunately, the case had to be heard in Tokyo. We lost. There would be no formal apology and no compensation.

On February 26, 2005, we held a reunion in celebration of the 60th anniversary of our liberation at the Embassy Suites in Walnut Creek. Featured speakers included the gunner from the "Battlin' Basic", a First Cavalry member who spoke about their roles in the Santo Tomas rescue, and a doctor in the 11th Airborne who dropped in on Los Baños. Having liberators there made this reunion more meaningful, but just to make sure

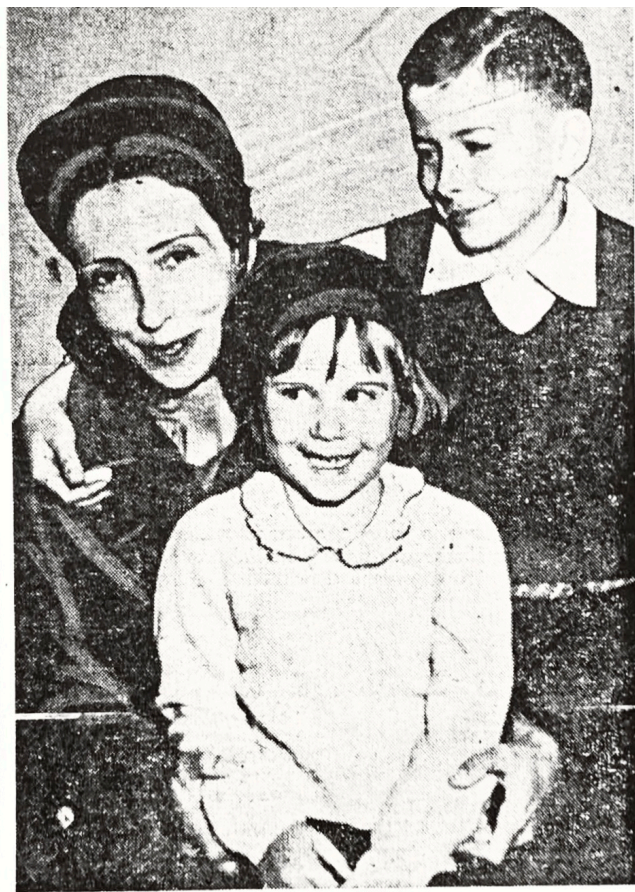


Angus Lorenzen, Sascha Jansen, and Don Thompson at the BACEPOW reunion, February 3, 2008.

everyone had a good time we had a Filipino dancing troupe perform for us.

We followed up our highly successful 60th with another reunion in 2007, at which I handed out POW-MIA medallions to those attendees who had not previously received one. We had a speaker who had been aboard the "Pueblo" that was captured and held for a time by North Korea. Ted Cadwallader gave us a comprehensive explanation of whether civilian prison camp refugees should be referred to as ex-internees or ex-POWs. We took a vote. A resounding majority felt we were ex-POWs.

One of my greatest achievements was talking Sascha Jansen into joining BACEPOW and bringing her extensive list of contacts with her. We lined up the Marriott in Fremont for a reunion in February 2008, and Sascha made sure it was well attended. She also rounded up a prospective replacement for me, a Southern Californian by the name of Angus Lorenzen. After many years of reliving our concentration camp experiences, I needed to back off and rest my mind. We voted Angus in at our last luncheon meeting in 2007. He and Sascha took BACEPOW to new heights in ensuing years.



—Acme telephotos
MRS. GLORIA S. THOMPSON, LOS ANGELES, AND CHILDREN Dianne, 5, and Donald, 10, were among 800 liberated Americans

The Thompson family on April 8, 1945 after arriving in San Francisco from Manila (from the April 9, 1945 SF Examiner).

Looking Back, Looking Forward: “Adulting” at Santo Tomas

© Mary Beth Klee, 2020

Janus, the two-faced Roman god for whom the month of January is named, invites us to move forward by looking back. With one face turned to the future and another to the past, he reminds us we chart our best course by reflecting on where we have come from – as well as where we’re going. What does that mean in 2021 for survivors of Santo Tomas Internment Camp and their descendants?

January 2021 marks no memorable anniversary: seventy-nine years since the camp’s formation and seventy-six years from its liberation. Survivors who experienced its horrors (and humor) were mostly children on February 3, 1945. Long gone are the adults who structured the STIC experience, confronted their captors, negotiated for internee health and sustenance, and let’s face it – largely ensured their survival. Perhaps then, this January we do well to remember *them* and the experience of “adulting at Santo Tomas.”

“To adult” is a new verb in American English. I became aware of it two years ago when a young cashier with jet-black hair, tattooed arms, and an earring in his lip, rang up my groceries sporting the button “I Can’t Adult Today. You can’t make me.” (This did not fill me with confidence.) “Adulting” refers to the ability to execute responsibilities normally associated with maturity—let’s say paying bills, caring for children, organizing a home. The fact that it has become a verb (in jest or not) indicates that many believe it is optional nowadays, and that one can choose to do it or decline. As we look forward to this new option in life, I propose that we look back and celebrate the splendid record of “adulting” at Santo Tomas – grownups acting responsibly to ensure the wellbeing of those in their care.

Examples? Securing Santo Tomas itself, the university campus as the place of internment for Allied civilians, was the first noteworthy example of “grown-ups at work.” Classes at the Dominican-run University of Santo Tomas had ended on December 8, 1941 when the war began. By December 25, when Manila was declared an “open city” and US troops pulled out, the Emergency Committee of the American Red Cross hustled. Headed by newly arrived insurance executive Earl Carroll, they confronted the likelihood of Japanese conquest and internment of American civilians. Carroll and the committee negotiated energetically with (neutral) Spanish Dominican priests for use of Santo Tomas as a place of internment should the worst occur. To their lasting credit, the Dominicans granted that permission.

Why was this a good thing? The University of Santo Tomas, founded in 1611, was famously “the oldest university under the American flag,” but facilities on the España Street campus were recent construction with the Main Building completed in 1927. Architect and civil engineer, Fra Roque Ruaño, O.P., had taken pains to design the safest, most quake-proof building he could. The

Japanese were leaders in quake-resistant construction (having suffered “the big one” in Yokohama in 1923), so Ruaño traveled to Tokyo to study their new techniques. He designed the university’s Main Building with forty independent, rebar-ribbed, small towers on a continuous slab foundation. The campus was also big, open, and had been plumbed for hundreds of (day) students. All of those attributes became enormous advantages for what would become an overcrowded, under-plumbed internment camp. But the greatest advantage in securing the quake-proof Main Building was evident in a man-made quake. During the horrible shelling at war’s end, the building’s central staircase was one safe haven, a place where internees sat and endured, even as Japanese pounded from across the Pasig River.

If site choice were simply a fortuitous first step by self-interested Americans, numerous ongoing camp initiatives testified to the can-do spirit and unflinching acceptance of “adulting.” The camp’s hastily conceived and highly functional organizational structure came not from Japanese edict, but from Americans and Brits bringing lessons of representative democracy to play before the Japanese knew what hit them.

The Japanese appointed Earl Carroll as their go-between with internees, but Carroll persuaded his captors to accept an elected Executive Committee, which in turn, labored diligently to organize committees on all fronts: sanitation, health, food procurement, finance and supplies, public order, education, religious services, recreation, radio-music, but before all else: “duplication.” During this blizzard of organizational activity in January 1942 the “Duplication Department” headed by Charles Buhler and Peter Richards, and assisted by Bessie Hackett, was formed before any other committee. It would be the means of keeping “the people,” the internees informed. It had as its charge: “duplicating official circulars and notices, department news items” for circulation. (Stevens, 384)

Why is this interesting? I speculate that Santo Tomas is not a widely known or understood story of World War II internment partly because of this aspect – its extraordinary organization and dizzying amount of documentation. The number of committees formed in short order, and the number of pages devoted to their various activities, staggers the imagination, taking up blocks of shelf space at the Jesuit archives in the Ateneo. It is little wonder that one of the greatest internee shortages in the last year of imprisonment was paper.

Viewing the documentation, the uninitiated scholar of Santo Tomas wants to ask: who was running this camp? And it turns out the answer is: the internees. Internees on the American Red Cross committee. Internees on the Executive Committee. Internees on the various committees established by the Executive Committee. Internees acting as Room Monitors or Red Arm-Band patrol officers. All of

(Adulting, continued on page 4)

(Adulting, continued from page 3)

the internees doing the work assigned to them by the committees. Jailed by the Japanese, deprived of liberty, and imprisoned to be sure, internees were not deprived of a sense of responsibility and can-do. "Let's show them how democracy works!" was an oft-cited slogan in the early months.

The American Red Cross committee (made up of internees) immediately established a canteen that served coffee and breakfast. Within one week of internment, the Executive Committee launched a vaccination program and organized a Central Kitchen. An infirmary and hospital were set up in camp, and a "release committee" arranged for transport of internees to outside hospitals with conditions that couldn't be treated in camp. A package line was organized to receive donations from "the outside." Within two weeks, a K-12 school was up and running for more than seven hundred children, an afternoon sports program organized, regular religious services begun, choral groups organized, and a newspaper published. Internees started small businesses and registered them, paying fees to the Camp Administration. A system of shanty neighborhoods with names like Froggy Bottom, Glamorville, and Jungle Town sprang up (with monthly rent also paid to the Executive Committee to help support those of lesser means.)

Most readers of this newsletter can rattle off dozens of other examples of organizational "adulting" that astound (a bamboo pavilion and jungle gym built for kids; a "cafeteria Christmas" with toys fashioned of scraps from camp; quiz shows, dancing lessons, and floor shows). These initiatives are important because each one buffered. Each one was a layer of protection from the horror of war and complete dehumanization.

School was a bulwark against hunger and horror for many older children. It absorbed and distracted. My mother, internee Leonore Agnes Iserson (Klee), who was thirteen at the time of internment in 1942, raved about her education at Santo Tomas. She and best friend Mary Louella Cleland (Hedrick) spent many nights studying by candlelight in the halls of the Main Building with the scarce textbooks shared by their 28 classmates. "The camp census lists 28 professional teachers" Lee wrote, "but for the most part, we had engineers teaching math, chemists teaching science, missionaries who had lived abroad teaching us languages, and of course, religion. And there was one Shakespearean actress who taught history in a way no one could ever forget." Each of those newly deputized high school teachers stepped up to the plate in a time of need, and with noteworthy results. "We were juniors in high school when we left camp," Lee recalled. "We scattered to schools all over the U.S. and the following year, six of the twenty-eight graduated as valedictorians."

I close these reflections with perhaps the most important theme of "adulting" – which is willingness to sacrifice, putting those in one's care before one's self. This

did not happen universally. STIC was home to venality as well as virtue, but self-sacrifice was particularly striking at the end. Among the most moving liberation photos are those of parents and children. Parents are gaunt, haggard, hollow-faced, and stick-like. But the children look well, like children. They suffered, to be sure. They hungered for "a sandwich with some bread on it," as one little girl put it. They suffered calcium deficiency. But children were shielded from many of the most deadly effects of starvation by a community that organized for their wellbeing (extra Lactogen and eggs for children under two, and full food rations for kids in the chow line, though the Japanese allotted only half rations for kids; adults sacrificed their own). And on the side, parents, friends, and roommates gave extra to children "not from their surplus but from their want," as Jesus would say. Stories of adults sacrificing the last ounces of their own sustenance for their children are legion. Stories of those in authority (members of the Executive Committee) losing their own lives for those they served are also exemplars at camp's end.

This January, a time when we are called to sacrifice (a little) in our own time of (modest) confinement, survivors and descendants of Santo Tomas can draw strength from a backward glance. Maybe we should make some new buttons: "I'm adulting today. You can count on me."

Mary Beth Klee holds a Ph.D. in the History of American Civilization from Brandeis University. She is the daughter of internee Leonore Agnes Iserson Klee (1928-1996) and the author of *Leonore's Suite*, a novel about the teen experience at Santo Tomas, available at www.leonoresuite.com or amazon.com.

Share Your Stories

We'd like this newsletter to be interactive, so we invite you to share memories and stories for inclusion, either in whole or in part, in future newsletters. Do you have a story, photo or other content you'd like us to consider for Beyond the Wire? Want to participate but need some ideas about what to share? How about answers to questions such as:

- After reading Mary Beth's article in this newsletter, give your own examples of "adulting" in internment camp.
- Do the experiences over the past year during the pandemic bring back memories of your time in camp? Tell us how they compare.

To share anecdotes with our members, please email to our editor, Angus Lorenzen, at bacepow@earthlink.net or Sally Meadows, Commander@cpow.org.

We Knew You When

John Phillip Montesa
September 21, 1925 - September 24, 2020

John Montesa was born in San Diego, California, and at the age of 8 in 1933, he and his family moved to Manila in the Philippines. In 1942 when the Japanese invaders entered the city, he, and his mother and two brothers, were interned in the Santo Tomas Internment Camp. In May of 1943, he was transferred along with 786 men and 12 Navy nurses to what was to become a new camp at Los Baños 50 miles away. After the camp was built, others were transferred to it and by 1945 it housed about 2,300 internees. In a dramatic rescue, a company of 11th Airborne troopers parachuted into the camp and along with Filipino guerrillas rescued the prisoners and transported them by amtracs to safety across the Laguna de Baye.

After he was repatriated to the U.S., John joined the Navy and served 8 years that included the Korean War, after which he finished his schooling and earned a degree in economics, then began a 35-year career with the U.S. Treasury Dept. He married Joan in 1962 and had two sons.

John, along with his wife Joan, served on the Board of Directors for BACEPOW for many years. He participated in reunions and was the conscience of those who had been in Los Baños, keeping the historical contribution to our organization accurate, and we will miss him and his sharp wit.



Advertisement

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Painting,
"Manila Bay", by
Fernando Amorsolo.

CPOW (formerly BACEPOW) 2021 Membership Form

We hope you enjoy CPOW's first newsletter of the year. If you would like to continue receiving, or begin receiving, the newsletter (3 times per year), please fill out this form, along with your check for \$15 (per person), and mail to:

Cindie Leonard, 1675 S. Lake Crest Way, Eagle, ID 83616
Please make your check out to Civilian ex-POWs (CPOW)

Name(s): _____

Current Mailing Address: _____

Email Address (please print clearly): _____

Would you like to receive the CPOW newsletter by email rather than USPS? ____ Yes ____ No

Phone Number: _____

Please check the appropriate box indicating your connection to CPOW and provide the requested information below:

____ **Ex-POW**

Camp(s) Check all that apply: ____ Santo Tomas ____ Baguio/Bilibid ____ Los Baños ____ Other

Name in camp (if different than current name): _____

____ **Relative or Descendant**

What is your relationship to the ex-POW? Please share the name(s) of your relative or relatives -- including maiden names or any other names they may go by or have gone by in the past, along with their camp or camps.

____ **Military** Branch of Service _____

____ **Friend or other** _____

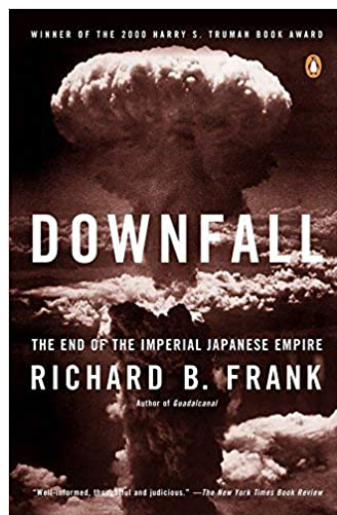
We are *considering* creating a members-only directory. Members would be able to choose what information they would like to share (e.g. camp, address, phone number, email...). Interested? ____ Yes ____ No

If you have any questions, please contact Cindie: cindieleonard@gmail.com 208-890-5694

Book Review
by Angus Lorenzen

Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire

By Richard B. Frank | Penguin Books, 1999



In the spring of 1945, the horror of the European war was over, but the Allies' armed forces, and particularly those of the United States, anticipated months, and perhaps years, of bloody warfare with an implacable enemy in the Asia-Pacific theater. Then suddenly in August 1945, it was all over – the Japanese had announced an unconditional surrender after the dropping of the atomic

bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In the Allied nations there was euphoria and celebration. But what was this thing called an atomic bomb? Then newsreels began to show the devastation that had been rendered, and people were horrified. Slowly a mindset began to develop that the terrible bombs were not needed to end the war, and an anti-war culture began to emerge that Japan was about to surrender without that added incentive. It became baked into our culture that the U.S. had committed horrible atrocities unnecessarily. By 1999, 72% of Americans believed we were wrong to drop the bombs. But historian Richard Frank uncovered newly declassified documents that cast a very different picture on how prepared Japan was to surrender and whether even the A-bombs had provided enough inducement.

Downfall provides a methodical narrative of the events leading to the end of the Pacific war. An important element in the planning for the last acts in the invasion of Japanese islands was the fact that U.S. Navy cryptographers had broken two key Japanese codes. The system called Magic was able to interpret their coded diplomatic messages, and the one called Ultra was used for military communications traffic. Daily summaries from these systems were provided to the U.S. President and key staff planning future operations and proved invaluable.

With the conclusion of the Okinawa Campaign in May 1945 and Saipan in July, planning was underway for Operation Downfall with two major invasions of Japan that would end the war – Olympic for the invasion of Kyushu on November 1, 1945 and Coronet on March 1, 1946 for the invasion of Honshu in the Tokyo-Yokohama area. The projected commitment of men landing on Kyushu was almost 770,000, and total battle casualties were projected

at 514,000, including killed and wounded. Coronet's projected commitment was 1,0260,000 men, with 688,000 casualties. These were figures for the men who would be physically on land and did not include figures for Naval and Air Corps personnel. These numbers were highly speculative and varied based on how they were derived from past experience during the war.

While Americans planned the demise of Japan, the Japanese were countering. Their planners had concluded that the next American invasion objective would be Kyushu, and through the spring and summer of 1945 were building their forces to meet the expected invasion. The Imperial Army fully intended to commit all of its resources with 7,500 aircraft Kamikaze attacks. They also were planning mini-submarine and guided torpedo attacks against the invasion fleet. In addition, civilians were being trained to attack the enemy forces.

When American planners started on Olympic, the Japanese were known to have 3 divisions of troops on Kyushu – less than 100,000 men - and the American strategy was to overwhelm them by at least a ratio of 3 to 1. But by August Japan had beefed up its defenses to 900,000 men. Top American commanders were beginning to have misgivings about Operation Olympic.

The Japanese were also working on the diplomatic front. In April of 1941, Japan and the Soviet Union signed a neutrality pact which remained in force until April 1946. The Japanese approached the Soviets to give assistance in ending the war with the U.S. During the Potsdam meeting in 1945 between Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin the Soviets had agreed to declare war on Japan on August 15, 1945. So, the Soviets seem to have been double-dealing by assisting Japan on achieving peace while at the same time preparing to attack it.

The Japanese Supreme Council was considering the terms the Allies had specified for ending the war, which was an unconditional surrender by Japan, but leaving the Emperor in place. The Council wanted to improve on these terms, but the Imperial Army was adamant – no surrender could be considered until after Japan had achieved a major victory against the Americans. They had lost the opportunity on Luzon when General Yamashita decided on a campaign to delay American victory rather than make a direct confrontation, and on Okinawa the American forces were too strong. They now saw an American invasion of Kyushu as the best opportunity to achieve their goal and started to build up forces to confront the American landings near their beachheads.

(Downfall, continued on page 8)

(Downfall, continued from page 7)

With the dropping of the A-bombs on Hiroshima on August 6 and Nagasaki on August 9, the Japanese were confronted with a new dilemma. They had received word of the Soviet declaration of war early in the morning of August 9. It appears the Soviets had jumped the gun on the war declaration, possibly to ensure that should Japan surrender they would be able to share the bounty of the victors. Their plan was to overwhelm Manchuria's unprepared Japanese with a lightening attack by 3 armies invading from different directions. Then they planned to take Sakhalin and the Kurile islands, followed by invasion of Japan's northern island of Hokkaido.

The Japanese Supreme Council debated whether to accept the Allies Potsdam Declaration of unconditional surrender without displacing the role of the Emperor, though the Army was adamant that it would not accept surrender until it had achieved an overwhelming victory over American Forces. In the face of expected additional A-bombs, the Emperor uncharacteristically overrode the Supreme Council and announced that Japan would accept the surrender terms. This information was conveyed to America through neutral countries on August 10. While the general inclination in the Japanese government was towards terminating the war, militarists were strongly insistent on continuing.

On August 12, the official copy of the terms of surrender were transmitted from America. In a meeting of Japan's Supreme Council on August 13, the army minister warned against agreement to the terms, but it was pointed

out that the Emperor had made his wishes clear and Japan must accept the terms. The Army argued that an all-out attack against an invasion of Kyushu, even sacrificing 20 million Japanese, would yield better terms. Finally, at a gathering of top military leaders it was resolved that the Army would act in accordance with the Imperial decision. Still, a plot was hatched to assemble a coup d'état, but it was not strong enough to succeed.

On August 15, the Emperor broadcast his speech to the people announcing that Japan would unconditionally surrender in accordance with the Potsdam Declaration. Spasms of insubordination and insurrection flared, but the military brought these under control and the fighting in Manchuria continued sporadically until August 29 when final resistance ceased.

This book is a dense treatise on the events leading to Japan's surrender with detail and documentation of the events, both involving the Allies and the Japanese. It provides details of the final days before Japan's surrender and the debates that affected the final outcome. It is clear that Japan was not prepared to surrender without a decisive victory against American forces, most likely during Operation Olympic. It was only because the Emperor intervened in the debate and called for surrender that the bloodbath that would have accompanied an invasion of Japan was avoided, and that was only by the slimmest of margins. This book should end the debate on whether it was necessary to use the A-bombs.