

Ministry of National Defence
PORTUGUESE COMMISSION OF MILITARY HISTORY

ACTA 2024

*The role of the military in political transitions:
from the 18th century to the present day*

XLIX International Congress of Military History

1 - 6 September 2024, Lisbon

Volume I





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Published by:

Portuguese Commission of Military History

Av. Ilha da Madeira, n.º 1, Room 332

1400-204 Lisboa - Portugal

Coordinator and editor: Jorge Silva Rocha, PhD

Book Cover Design: Jorge Silva Rocha

Book cover images: Alfredo Cunha (*front*) and Eduardo Gageiro (*back*)

ISBN: 978-989-8593-31-3

DOI for this volume: <https://doi.org/10.56092/GDSK9438>

Printed in Portugal by Rainho & Neves - Artes Gráficas

DIVIDED MILITARY IN JAPAN'S “AUGUST REVOLUTION”, 1945

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Abstract

Japan's “August revolution” of 1945 refers to a transition of the source of the imperial authority from the divine will of the imperial ancestors to the popular will. Such a transition to democracy was triggered by the emperor's decision to accept the Allied terms for Japanese surrender contained in the Potsdam proclamation as clarified by James F. Byrnes. The US Secretary of State noted that the ultimate form of Japanese government should be established by the freely expressed will of the Japanese people. This paper highlights the divided roles of Japanese military in the process of making the emperor's wish to surrender into a formal decision of the legitimate authority of Japan to be complied with by the military and discusses what risks Japan and the Allies were running during the process. In a nutshell, there was a real risk of Japan collapsing into a failed state, leaving guerrillas resisting Allied attempts at conquering them here and there throughout the vast territories then still under Japanese military control across Indo-Pacific region, including China and Japan's home islands. In such an eventuality, Japan proper, rather than Korea, was likely to have been partitioned between the Allies and the Soviets, the latter of whom would have found greater opportunities to achieve communist conquest across continental East Asia than they in fact did.

Keywords: Second World War, Japanese surrender, August revolution, mutiny, failed state

Introduction

This paper highlights the mutiny of some quarters of the Imperial Army and Navy against the “August revolution” of 1945, and discusses their implications for the eventual Allied democratisation of Japan and for the fate of the vast territories in North and Southeast Asia still under Japanese occupation at the time of the revolution.

What was “August revolution”? In 1946, Miyazawa, a professor of constitutional law of the Imperial University of Tokyo, argued that Japan’s acceptance, on 14 August 1945, of the Allied terms for Japanese surrender, which had been contained in the Potsdam proclamation of 26 July, and clarified further by US Secretary of State Byrnes on behalf of the Allies on 11 August, occasioned an “August revolution”, whereby the source of the monarchical authority was transferred from the will of the “divine” ancestors of the monarch to that of the people.⁽¹⁾ Byrnes said, “The ultimate form of government of Japan shall [...] be established by the freely expressed will of the Japanese people.” Byrnes’ note heralded article 1 of the Constitution of Japan, which was eventually promulgated on 3 November 1946. It reads, “The Emperor shall be [...] deriving his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power.” Whilst the relevant episode has hardly been called a “revolution” outside the narrow circle of constitutional theorists in Japan for many legitimate reasons, Professor António José Telo’s keynote speech, which called the five Portuguese transitions of 1820, 1851, 1910, 1926 and 1974 “revolutions”, would justify the appellation of the Japanese transition in terms of “revolution”, too. At least, the relevant decision by the emperor was so revolutionary that it divided Imperial Army and Navy, some subordinates trying to overturn the decision, and some superiors risking their lives to overpower the former. As shown below, the former included those who misled the imperial guards by a forged divisional order to occupy the imperial palace and the national broadcasting house in the early hours of 15 August; those who attempted to forge the proclamation of martial law at the same time; and those Navy airmen, who attempted to wreck the flight of Japanese “green cross” delegation to and from Manila to receive MacArthur’s requirements for carrying into effect the terms of surrender, and kept occupying Atsugi airfield up to 26 August, when MacArthur was scheduled to land there.

As such, the August revolution was a hard-won process, initiated by the emperor’s decision, which his Army and Navy had come a long way to comply with. Richard Frank called the compliance a “near miraculous deliverance”.⁽²⁾ No organised surrender of the Imperial Army and Navy was taken for granted, within or without Japan’s home islands. For example, on 8 August, Major-General Stephen J. Chamberlin, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-3, of US Army Forces, Pacific, planned “Blacklist” operations to “occupy

1. Toshiyoshi MIYAZAWA, “Hachigatsu Kakumei to Kokumin Shukenshugi (The Significance of the August Revolution in Constitutional History)”, *Sekai bunka (World Culture)*, vol. 1, no. 4, May 1946, p. 69.

2. Richard B. FRANK, “Ketsu-Go: Japanese Political and Military Strategy in 1945”, *Journal of Law, Politics and Sociology*, vol. 89, no. 8 (August 2016) p. 75; in its original unpublished English manuscript, p. 61.

JAPAN Proper and KOREA after surrender or collapse of the Japanese Government and Imperial High Command",⁽³⁾ effectively foreseeing a possibility of Japan becoming a failed state. Chamberlin's assumptions included "That surrender of Japanese Commanders in occupied areas outside JAPAN Proper may have to be imposed by force"; and "That there is reasonable probability of active post-surrender resistance of considerable proportions within JAPAN Proper, particularly by suicidal elements of the armed forces who will take advantage of any weakness on the part of our forces".⁽⁴⁾ MacArthur's opinion about the suggested indictment of the emperor dated 25 January 1946 echoes Chamberlin: "it is not inconceivable that all government agencies will break down, [...] and a condition of underground chaos and disorder amounting to guerilla warfare in the mountainous and outlying regions result."⁽⁵⁾ So, if there had been no organised surrender of Imperial Army and Navy, the Allies would have had to overpower sporadic Japanese guerrilla resistance here and there by force, likely partitioning Japan's home islands into halves with the Soviets, leaving the whole territories in North and South East Asia still under Japanese occupation chaotic enough to be exploited by the communists. In that eventuality, MacArthur's warning as of 25 January 1946, "all hope of introducing modern democratic methods would disappear",⁽⁶⁾ would have come true as of August 1945.

This study will show, based on Japanese sources, how realistic these forecasts were. This paper follows the military time zone I, which is 9 hours ahead of universal time, Z, unless otherwise stated.

The August Revolution of 1945

Prelude to the August Revolution of 1945

The diary entry of 10 August of Lieutenant-General Kawabe, the deputy chief of the general staff, who was informed by General Umezu, the chief of the general staff, of the outcome of an imperial conference in the early hours, noted that the emperor's decision to surrender was not the result of the discussions at the conference, but that of the accumulation of a variety of factors, leading to the collapse of the emperor's trust in his armed forces.⁽⁷⁾ Therefore, those mentioned below are better understood to be

3. General Headquarters United States Army Forces, Pacific, 'Basic Outline Plan for "Blacklist" Operations to Occupy Japan Proper and Korea after Surrender or Collapse', dated 8 August 1945, signed by S. J. CHAMBERLIN. 11620-A. <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA438111.pdf>

4. CHAMBERLIN, "Blacklist" Operations, pp. 3-4.

5. US State Department Records Decimal File, 1945-1949 "894.001 HIROHITO/1-2546" <Sheet No. SDDF (B) 00065> Incoming Classified Message From CinCAFPAC to WarCOS, reference WA93871, CA57235 dated 25 January 1946, p. 2. https://www.ndl.go.jp/constitution/shiryō/03/064/064_002l.html

6. Message From CinCAFPAC to WarCOS, reference WA93871, CA57235 dated 25 January 1946, p. 2.

7. Torashiro KAWABE, *Nikki (Diary of Deputy Chief of the General Staff, entry 10 August 1945)* in Kawabe Trashiro Bunsho Kenkyukai, *Shosho Hikkin: Rikugun-ha akumade Goseidan-ni Shitagaitte Kodosu (Article 3 of the Constitution of 17 Articles, 604 CE, Compels Army to Follow Emperor's Decision No Matter What)*, Tokyo: Kokusho Kankokai, 2005, p. 178-179.

some immediate events, which helped trigger the collapse, under the weight of mass of other factors accumulated over years:

(a) the destruction, in the early hours of 26 May 1945, of Meiji Palace by fire spreading from Allied air raid;⁽⁸⁾

(b) a lecture by a former diplomat, Michikazu Matsuda, on 14 June, concerning Germany under the Allied occupation, causing the emperor to vomit while listening,⁽⁹⁾ and following his subsequent meeting with his mother, to be “uncharacteristically” withdrawn in his bedroom as long as 32 hours and 17 minutes up to an air raid alarm at 00:30 on 16 June;⁽¹⁰⁾

(c) the loss of Okinawa, which Imperial High Command Army Order (*Dai Riku Mei*) No. 1352 of 20 June implicitly acknowledged,⁽¹¹⁾ leading the emperor “unusually” to summon the chiefs of staff and the war, naval, prime and foreign ministers to urge them to pursue a quick end to the war in concrete terms;⁽¹²⁾

(d) the Allied proclamation at Potsdam containing their terms of Japanese surrender, which were discussed by Japanese cabinet on 27 July, which decided to make no comment lest it compromise their pursuit of Soviet good offices;⁽¹³⁾

(e) a series of reports through a variety of “civilian” channels on the 8 August afternoon, about the power and nature of the bomb which had struck Hiroshima and a “civilian” intelligence report for 2 hours about the distress of the people across Japan, who had been anxiously longing for their sovereign’s decision for far too long;⁽¹⁴⁾ and

(f) the prominent absence of any “military” report on these topics prompted the emperor to instruct his prime minister, through the foreign minister in audience, to bring the war to an end as soon as possible “without trying to gain better terms” as his ministers and chiefs of staff seemed to him to be quite unable to reach any agreement on what terms to offer.⁽¹⁵⁾ This was done more

8. KUNAICHO (IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD AGENCY), *Showa Tenno Jitsuroku (Real Record of Emperor Hirohito)*, vol. IX, Tokyo Shoseki, 2016, p. 678.

9. Kuraji OGURA, “Ogura Kuraji Jiju Nikki” (Chamberlain Ogura Kuraji’s Diary), annotated by Kazutoshi Hando, in *Bungei Shunju*, vol. 85, April 2007, p. 187 (entry, 14 June 1945); Michikazu Matsuda, “Goshinko Memo” (Lecture Notes) and “Nikki” (Diary), entry 14 June 1945, available on NHK, <https://www.nhk.jp/p/special/ts/2NY2QQLPM3/episode/te/ZP73NY57P1/>

10. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, p. 701-702.

11. Japan Center for Asian Historical Records, National Archives of Japan, C14060924000, <https://www.jacar.archives.go.jp/aj/meta/listPhoto?LANG=default&ID=M2014070214261257981&ID=M2014070214261257983&REFCODE=C14060924000>

12. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, pp. 707-708.

13. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, pp. 733-737.

14. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX p. 748.

15. Shigenori TOGO, translated by Ben Bruce Blakeney, *The Cause of Japan*, New York: Simon Schuster, 1950, pp.

than 6 hours and 37 minutes before the onset of the Soviet attacks at around 00.00I on 9 August.⁽¹⁶⁾

The Constitutional Mechanism of Imperial Japanese Decision-Making

The emperor's indication of his wish to accept the Allied terms promptly and unconditionally, which was done on 8 August, was one thing, and the empire's legitimate decision-making body to make their decision, which was done twice consecutively on 10 and 14 August by cabinet, was quite another. The latter's decisions were somewhat different from the former. Here is the riddle of Imperial Japanese decision-making. Was the emperor their "god", was he not? Yes, the imperial constitution said he was "sacred and inviolable" (article 3), and therefore, somewhat paradoxically, Professor Minobe of the Imperial University of Tokyo explained, not he, but his ministers, who, under article 55 (1), "support and correct" the exercise of his prerogatives (which were enumerated in articles 6 to 16), should be collectively responsible for its consequences.⁽¹⁷⁾ The ministerial power under article 55 (1) was expressed in a couple of Chinese characters, one "supporting" someone or something on the bed of a wheeled chariot (*ho*), the other "rectifying" any twist and sag of a bow (*hitsu*).⁽¹⁸⁾ Thus, literally, the ministers were obliged to "rectify and correct" any error on the part of the emperor. Professor Minobe said the set of characters meant to give opinions to ensure the exercise of prerogatives free from error.⁽¹⁹⁾ Such ministerial duty to help the monarch exercise his prerogatives can be expressed in English as follows: "by and with the consent and advice of ministers of state", or something similar. It sounds quite reasonable. What went wrong?

There remains a question of to whom ministers of state are accountable. In the UK, the prime minister and secretaries of state are members of Parliament and as such, accountable to Parliament. Their constituencies may elect somebody else. The Japanese emperor was supposed to be accountable to the "divine spirits" of his ancestors in a lineage descending from the sun goddess, who gave him the mandate to rule the land of the rising sun. However, the modern constitutional theory demanded that his ministers be accountable to someone on earth in their lifetime. In the reign of Emperor Hirohito from 26 December 1926 onwards, the first elected member of Diet, who was appointed as prime minister⁽²⁰⁾ was killed on 15 May 1932 by a group of junior commissioned

315-316; GAIMUSHO (FOREIGN MINISTRY) ed, *Shusenshiroku (Historical Records of the Ending of the War)*, Tokyo: Gaimusho, p. 537 (Togo's oral testimony in September 1945).

16. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, p. 748 (17.23) and p. 750 (00.00).

17. Tatsukichi MINOBE, *Kempo Satsuyo, Kaiteiban (Scanning of the Constitution, Revised Edition)*, Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 1924, pp. 232-233.

18. 輔弼

19. MINOBE, *Scanning of the Constitution*, 1924, p. 264.

20. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, V, p. 934 (entry 12 December 1931). He was elected in the election of 20 February 1930 but the party he led came second.

officers.⁽²¹⁾ The second was the leader of the socialist party, which won the largest number of seats to form a minority government following the election of 25 April 1947. All governments in between were not accountable to Diet for 15 years. It may be pertinent to ask what roles the Japanese military could have played after the 1932 mutiny to ease a transition to a more accountable government. This shall be a later research question. This paper gives a focus on the divided roles of Imperial Army and Navy in salvaging Japan, after the fear of mutiny had misled a series of unaccountable governments to bring Japan to the brink of sinking to a failed state. The task of making a Japanese government accountable to people through Diet, was, then, left to the victorious Allies.

The Chiefs of Staff and Imperial High Command

The exercise of a prerogative under article 11 to command the Army and Navy had, Professor Minobe argued, been put outside the cabinet ministers' supporting and rectifying duties, by convention and usage "before" the promulgation of the constitution, and "against" all the rational interpretations of its black letters.⁽²²⁾ As such, the prerogative of commanding the armed forces was described to be either "paramount" or "most exalted" or "sovereign",⁽²³⁾ and quite independent of cabinet collective responsibility. Still, according to Professor Minobe, the chiefs of staff, war and naval ministers owed, by convention, the "supporting and rectifying" duties for the exercise of the command prerogative.⁽²⁴⁾ To refer to the same duties, the war minister as of 8 January 1941 used the following vocabulary in the education rescript of 1890, represented by another set of Chinese characters, which meant "to give hands to support" (*fu*) and either "to give protection under wings" or "to give propulsion by the coordinated movements of wings" (*yoku*) or both,⁽²⁵⁾ in combination, describing the power to give the commander-in-chief (emperor) such "support, protection and propulsion" as were necessary for his prosecution of war.⁽²⁶⁾

The prerogatives under article 13 of declaring war, making peace, and giving diverse diplomatic activities, were supposed to be exercised by the relevant ministers, rather than by the chiefs of staff. However, as far as the opening and closing of the war against the Allies from December 1941 to August 1945 were concerned, before formal cabinet decisions were made, the same substantial agreements had been reached at imperial

21. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, VI, p. 90 (entry 15 May 1932).

22. MINOBE, *Scanning of the Constitution*, 1924, pp. 219-220.

23. Hirobumi ITO, *Dainihon Teikoku Kempo Koshitsu Tempan Gikai* (Commentaries on the Constitution of the Empire of Japan), 5th ed. 1904, Maruzen, p. 24. Its 3rd English edition by Chu-o Daigaku, 1931, p. 25.

24. MINOBE, *Scanning of the Constitution*, 1924, p. 301.

25. 扶翼

26. RIKUGUN DAIJIN Kunrei 1-Go (THE WAR MINISTER'S Instruction No. 1 of 8 January 1941), *Senjinkun* (code of field service), part I, article 2 in Asahi Shimbun, Morning 8 January 1941, p. 1.

conferences.⁽²⁷⁾ A cabinet decision of 19 November 1937 defined "imperial conference" as a meeting of the imperial high command to discuss matters of special importance, in which the chiefs of staff, the war and naval ministers met before the emperor in his capacity as the commander-in-chief, being supported by the chief cabinet secretary and the war and naval ministries' directors-general of the military affairs bureaus.⁽²⁸⁾ If the emperor was advised to wish, the prime and other ministers might attend, too.⁽²⁹⁾ The imperial high command was irregularly established in November 1937 in response to the rapid development of undeclared wars in China.⁽³⁰⁾ Whatever the intention of taking such an irregular step at that time, the imperial high command enabled the chiefs of staff to assume every unaccountable power they found fitting for their propulsion of the emperor's prosecution of hostilities, including the formal opening of another war against the United States and Great Britain.

Between 16 March 1945 and 30 April, the "supreme war council" consisting of the chiefs of staff and the war and naval ministers as well as, extraordinarily, the prime and foreign ministers, too (who were called the "big 6" for short), was established as the imperial high command's running decision-making body. The inclusion of the prime minister had to be specially insisted on by Prime Minister Koiso, who had succeeded Hideki Tojo on 22 July 1944. In Koiso's capacity as a retired general, he had been kept excluded from all the imperial high command meetings. Having thus been kept out of touch with the war's reality, Premier Koiso explored ways to establish political control of that war-making machine. The inclusion of the foreign minister had to be insisted upon by Suzuki, a retired admiral, who succeeded Koiso on 7 April 1945.⁽³¹⁾

Were the Japanese ministers and chiefs of staff accountable to the emperor himself? In theory, yes. The emperor appointed the prime minister and gave him a mandate to form a cabinet to govern Japan, and cabinet ministers were collectively answerable to the emperor. He separately appointed the chiefs of staff and gave them mandates to help him exercise his command prerogative, when necessary, and they were separately answerable to him. In practice, Hirohito was a young monarch, without much opportunity to learn from his father's example, because Hirohito was 25 years old when he succeeded his father, who had long been ill. Hirohito's old and experienced advisers interpreted their duties were to guide and teach their young and naïve sovereign. Therefore, his advisers tended to be accountable to their own image of "ideal" emperor, virtually to themselves.

27. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, VIII, pp. 562-564 (1 December 1941); IX, pp. 767-768 (14 August 1945).

28. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, VII, pp. 458-459 (19 November 1937).

29. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, VII, pp. 458-459.

30. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, VII, pp. 456-457 (17 November 1937).

31. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, p. 636 (7 April 1945).

Hirohito was known to have put rather pertinent questions to his ministers and chiefs of staff during informal consultations. He usually stopped there, however, and did not go any further, whether answers he got were satisfactory or not. In 1946, Hirohito himself said in his defence preparation for possible class-A war crime charges, that after 1929, when his comment caused a prime minister to resign and to die of heart attack, Hirohito derogated from his constitutional limit only twice, firstly in February 1936, when “there was no Cabinet in being” as a result of mutiny, and in August 1945, when he was asked “to break the deadlock”.⁽³²⁾ However, in fact, Hirohito began to express his wishes in a more than usually straightforward fashion after the “withdrawn” episode in mid-June 1945. So, the emperor’s instruction on 8 August should be understood in this context. Even then, at least half of his ministers and chiefs of staff had not given up their duty to correct any error on the part of the emperor, ultimately up to the moment in which their emperor shed tears and entreated to his war minister to help him save Japan on 14 August.⁽³³⁾ The resulting decision was later called the “August revolution” by Professor Miyazawa.

The Mutiny

Reasons for Mutinies

Those who attended at least one of the imperial conferences of 10 and 14 August witnessed the emperor doing his best to persuade his older advisers. Those who were immediately subordinate to the attendants of the conference tended to keep informed of the developments so that they had time to change their minds. Still, it must be remembered that the decision was made only 8 days after the first atomic bombing and only 5 days after the Soviet attacks. These realities should be contrasted with the estimate, as of 12 August, by US Army chief of staff’s chief intelligence officer, that the “[atomic bombs] will not have a decisive effect in the next 30 days”.⁽³⁴⁾ Those Japanese servicemen, who were standing down below the Army and Navy echelons tended to be simply told about the emperor’s decision as a matter of hearsay or double hearsay. They found it hard to catch up with the development in the closed imperial palace. It was generally hard for those, who had been taught and trained to fight on no matter what without fear of death, to surrender their arms. They found it too much too early

32. Makoto HIGASHINO, *Showa Tenno Futatsu-no Dokuhakuroku (Two Versions of Emperor Hirohito’s Confessions)*, Tokyo: NHK Shuppan, 1998, p. 217 (English version); Hidenari TERASAKI, *Showa Tenno Dokuhakuroku, Terasaki Hidenari Goyokakari Nikki (Emperor Hirohito’s Confession and His Assistant, Terasaki Hidenari’s Diary)*, Tokyo: Bungeishunju, 1991, p. 32 (Japanese version).

33. KAWABE, *Diary*, p. 185.

34. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Major General Clayton Bissell, memorandum for the Chief of Staff, Subject: Estimate of the Japanese Situation for the Next 30 Days, Aug. 12, 1945, RG 165, entry 422, box 12, executive no. 2, item no. 11.

to give up. They tended to believe that the emperor was "misled" by his advisers, whose collective authority collapsed as a result of their decision to surrender.⁽³⁵⁾

The Imperial Conferences of 10 and 14 August

Why did the imperial conferences meet twice consecutively on 10 and 14 August? Such seemingly unnecessary duplication testifies to the emperor's difficulties surmounting his advisors' duty of rectification. To make a long story short, the emperor was asked to break the deadlock reached by the big 6 twice. The foreign minister proposed to accept the Allied terms, "understanding" that they would not compromise the status of the emperor under national law. The war minister proposed to add to it a condition that Japan might disarm its armed forces and court-martial their war crimes without any Allied occupation of Japan. The naval and prime ministers supported the foreign minister while the chiefs of staff concurred with the war minister. The emperor's casting ballot in the early hours of 10 August would have been sufficient to end the hostilities, had the octogenarian president of the privy council not lectured for 2 hours to change the wording of the foreign minister's "understanding", from "the status of the emperor under national law" to "prerogatives of the emperor as the sovereign ruler".⁽³⁶⁾ Such dogmatic amendment invited the said "clarification" by US Secretary of State Byrnes, the acceptance of which required another casting ballot by the emperor on 14 August.

Prelude to Mutiny

Back on the 9 August morning, in response to the Soviet attacks, the deputy chief of the general staff, Lieutenant-General Kawabe sketched a plan to keep on fighting the USA no matter what; to proclaim martial law across Japan to replace the government, if necessary; to abandon Manchuria; to withdraw up to southern Korea; to transfer the Manchurian emperor to Japan; to get the war minister's proclamation to stabilise the morale of the armed forces.⁽³⁷⁾ Kawabe noted that his chief did not explicitly oppose these ideas.⁽³⁸⁾ In the evening of 13 August, Lieutenant-Colonel Takeshita, who was a brother by marriage and a personal secretary of War Minister Anami, drafted a plan to use force to proclaim martial law.⁽³⁹⁾ A group of 5 senior commissioned officers belonging to the war ministry's military affairs bureau, including Colonel Arao and Lieutenant-Colonel

35. Naval Captain Yasuna Kozono's leaflet dated 15 August 1945, in ABEMA documentary, *Midori Fujiki Kesshi-no Hiko: Shusen 74-nenme-no Shinjitsu (The Adventure Flight of Green Cross Aircrafts, Revelation 74 Years After the Event)*. https://abema.tv/video/episode/89-118_s15_p2

36. Masahiko TAKESHITA, "Kimitsu Sakusen Nisshi (Secret Operational Diary from 9 August 1945 to 15 August 1945)" in GUNJISHI GAKKAI (JAPANESE COMMISSION OF MILITARY HISTORY) ed., *Daihonei Rikugunbu Sensoshidohan Kimitsu Senso Nisshi, Ge (Imperial High Command, Army Division, War Direction Section, Secret War Diary, vol. 2)*, Kinseisha, 1998, pp. 755-756.

37. KAWABE, *Diary*, pp. 170-171.

38. KAWABE, *Diary*, p. 171.

39. TAKESHITA, *Secret Operational Diary*, pp. 759-760.

Takeshita, went to see the war minister to ask him to help implement their plan. At 07:00 on 14 August, the war minister asked Colonel Arao from among the 5 to come along to consult the chief of the general staff, General Umezu, about their idea of ambushing the prime, foreign and naval ministers, who were coming to attend the imperial conference at 10:00, with a hidden band of soldiers, while asking the chief aide-de-camp to escort the emperor into another room.⁽⁴⁰⁾ General Umezu firmly dismissed any idea of bringing soldiers into the imperial palace.⁽⁴¹⁾ Takeshita's "Plan 1" thus failed.

The Confirmation of Allegiance by 6 Army Leaders

The outcome of the imperial conference led Kawabe, the deputy chief of the general staff, to recite the paramount duty under article 3 of "the constitution of 17 articles" of 604 CE to implement imperial order.⁽⁴²⁾ Kawabe was asked to establish a policy of the top army leaders to ensure strict compliance across the Army with the imperial decision.⁽⁴³⁾ Kawabe persuaded the vice-minister for war and Colonel Arao to help him draft such a policy on a piece of paper: "we, the Army members conduct ourselves in accordance with the emperor's decision no matter what", and to get it signed by the 2 marshals, the chief of the general staff, the inspector-general of military training, the war minister, and the head of the army air service.⁽⁴⁴⁾

The emperor's speeches explaining his decision at the imperial conferences of 10 and 14 August were reduced to a draft rescript by the chief cabinet secretary before formally adopted by the cabinet, which gave their advice that the emperor announce the rescript through radio broadcast.⁽⁴⁵⁾ The gramophone recording, by NHK, of the emperor's narration of the rescript started at 23:25 within the palace premises and he entered his bedroom at 00:05 on 15 August.⁽⁴⁶⁾

Mutineers Stormed Imperial Palace

Takeshita's "Plan 2"

On 14 August, a hearsay that the chief of the general staff was resolved to fight on with the war minister, led Lieutenant-Colonel Takeshita to draft his "Plan 2".⁽⁴⁷⁾ Its implementation was left to Lieutenant-Colonels Shiizaki and Ida and Major Hatanaka,

40. TAKESHITA, *Secret Diary*, pp. 760-761.

41. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, p. 764-765.

42. KAWABE, *Diary*, p. 185.

43. KAWABE, *Diary*, p. 185.

44. KAWABE, *Diary*, p. 186.

45. Account of Chief Cabinet Secretary Sakomizu in YOMIURI SHIMBUN, *Showashi-no Tenno (Emperor Hirohito in History)*, 2012, IV, pp. 393-466.

46. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, p. 770.

47. TAKESHITA, *Secret Diary*, p. 762.

while Takeshita himself went to see War Minister Anami.⁽⁴⁸⁾ About 01:00 on 15 August, Shiizaki and Ida met Lieutenant-General Mori commanding the 1st imperial guards division to persuade him to rise with arms to protect Japan's polity (*kokutai*) against enemy subversion.⁽⁴⁹⁾ Unexpectedly, Majors Hatanaka and Kubota and Captain Uehara killed Mori. The rebels forged a divisional order under Mori's name (Imperial Guards Operational Order [*Kon Saku Mei*] No. 584).⁽⁵⁰⁾ Following this, the 1st company of the 1st imperial guards regiment seized the NHK broadcasting house, while 2 battalions of the 2nd regiment invaded the palace to disconnect all the communication cables, disarmed the palace police, stopped and searched chamberlains for the gramophone records of the imperial rescript and for the privy seal, which would have been necessary to forge martial law.⁽⁵¹⁾ The rest of the imperial guards regiments took no action, except the 6th which investigated what happened in the division headquarters and alerted the eastern district army to the mutiny.⁽⁵²⁾

At 03:00, Chamberlain Tokugawa hid the imperial household minister and the keeper of the privy seal behind the steel door of the basement shelter of the ministerial building.⁽⁵³⁾ At around 03:40, Tokugawa managed to reach the imperial library to alert those who served the imperial couple there to the mutiny.⁽⁵⁴⁾ After 04:30, an aide-de-camp (Vice-Admiral Nakamura) in the imperial library succeeded in communicating with the naval ministry (Captain Nagasawa) through a wireless VHF phone.⁽⁵⁵⁾ The naval ministry informed the eastern district army of the mutiny.⁽⁵⁶⁾ Tokugawa had tactfully put the boxes of gramophone records of the imperial rescript in a safe and hid it behind piles of paper on a humble shelf of an obscure room for part-time employees next to the 2 offices for aides-de-camp so that it would escape the notice of the rebels.⁽⁵⁷⁾

Earlier, at 04:00, Colonel Haga commanding the 2nd imperial guards regiment asked Major Hatanaka why neither the eastern district army nor the war minister made any contact and discovered that the divisional order was a fake.⁽⁵⁸⁾ At 04:30, as Major Hatanaka emerged in the broadcasting house to join the imperial guards company, some

48. Satoru MORISHITA, *Kawaguchi Hosojo Senkyo Jiken Hishi (A Hidden History of the Occupation of Kawaguchi Radio Station)*, Tokyo, 2008, p. 33.

49. MORISHITA, *Hidden History*, pp. 32-35.

50. MORISHITA, *Hidden History*, pp. 42-43.

51. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, p. 771.

52. MORISHITA, *Hidden History*, p. 45.

53. Yoshihiro TOKUGAWA, *Shusen Nikki (Diary of A Chamberlain)*, Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun, 1999, pp. 271-272.

54. TOKUGAWA, *Diary of Chamberlain*, p. 272.

55. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, p. 772; Tokugawa, *Diary of Chamberlain*, p. 274.

56. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, p. 772.

57. TOKUGAWA, *Diary of Chamberlain*, p. 270; Nagaakira Okabe, "Tenno Heika no Oikari (Emperor's Anger)" in *Bungeishunju*, vol. 29, no. 17, 1951, pp. 31-32.

58. MORISHITA, *Hidden History*, p. 48.

NHK junior officials on duty misled him to believe that he had to ask the eastern district army for their permission to use radio broadcasting facilities.⁽⁵⁹⁾

War Minister General Anami's Death

At 01:30 on 15 August, Takeshita visited the war minister at his official residence.⁽⁶⁰⁾ By then, Anami had written in calligraphy 2 scrolls, which Takeshita found to be the general's will.⁽⁶¹⁾ The 1st scroll read, "May my death alone suffice to atone for the great crime [of the Army to have lost the war]!"⁽⁶²⁾ on the front and "Trusting firmly that Your Majesty's divine land will never perish, War Minister Korechika Anami", on the back.⁽⁶³⁾ His 2nd scroll was a poem which he had composed on 9 November 1938:⁽⁶⁴⁾ "Deeply immersed in the grace of my great sovereign, I have no longer any complaint to make."⁽⁶⁵⁾ After talking to Takeshita and Ida at length over cups of rice wine telling them to survive him to rebuild Japan,⁽⁶⁶⁾ at 05:30,⁽⁶⁷⁾ Anami put on that white shirt which Hirohito had worn during his earlier horse-riding exercises with Anami⁽⁶⁸⁾ and thus being enveloped by the emperor's gift, Anami began his performance of the Japanese warrior's ritual of dying for honour in order to help implement Japan's "peace with honour". Takeshita took his pulse and announced his death at 07:10.⁽⁶⁹⁾ At about 11:20, Lieutenant-Colonel Shiizaki and Major Takenaka committed suicide in front of the imperial palace.⁽⁷⁰⁾

The Broadcast of Imperial Rescript

At 05:15, General Tanaka of the eastern district army and his men had reached the imperial palace and at 07:00, he reported the chief aide-de-camp the restoration of law and order.⁽⁷¹⁾

59. Nobutaka WADA, *Hoso Banashi Announcer 10-nen (Broadcasting Stories: Ten Years of Announcing Experience)*, Tokyo: Aoyama Shoten, 1946, pp. 206-226.

60. TAKESHITA, *Secret Diary*, p. 765.

61. TAKESHITA, *Secret Diary*, p. 765.

62. 一死以て大罪を謝し奉る TAKESHITA, *Secret Diary*, p. 765.

63. 神州不滅を確信して陸軍大臣阿南惟幾 TAKESHITA, *Secret Diary*, p. 765.

64. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, VII, p. 663.

65. 大君の深き恵に浴みし身は言ひ遺すべき片言もなし TAKESHITA, *Secret Diary*, p. 765.

66. TAKESHITA, *Secret Diary*, p. 765.

67. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, p. 775.

68. TAKESHITA, *Secret Operational Diary*, p. 766.

69. Danro BETSUMIYA, *Shusen Kudeta: Konoe Shidancho Satsugai Jiken-no Nazo (Coup d'État at the End of the War: Riddle of the Murder of the Imperial Guards Division Commander)*, Tokyo: Namiki Shobo, 2012, p. 235.

70. MORISHITA, *Hidden History*, p. 49.

71. IMPERIAL HOUSEHOLD, *Emperor Hirohito*, IX, p. 772.

At 11:45, when the set of the gramophone records of imperial rescript was brought into Studio No. 8 of the NHK broadcasting house, a police 1st lieutenant of the eastern district army, who was supposed to guard the studio from the rebels, suddenly drew his sword and turned to enter the studio, shouting, "If this is going to be a surrender announcement, I will chop it into pieces!" In no time, Lieutenant-Colonel Suzuki, a signal officer on the eastern district army staff, got him in an armlock from behind to put him under arrest.⁽⁷²⁾ At noon, the imperial rescript was put on air.⁽⁷³⁾

The Navy Airmen's Mutiny

Navy Air Fleet Commander's Disobedience

At some point in time after 17:00 on 15 August, Vice-Admiral Ugaki commanding the 5th Air Fleet led a *kamikaze* sortie of 11 D4Ys "Judies" with 22 subordinate airmen onboard from Ohita airfield to attack the Allies in Okinawa. 18, including the vice-admiral himself, were killed without any success, while 5 came back after crash landing.⁽⁷⁴⁾

Mutiny at the Navy Atsugi Airfield

On 15 August, as soon as the broadcast of the imperial rescript ended, Captain Yasuna Kozono, commanding the 302nd Navy Air Group in Atsugi responsible for the defence of Tokyo, ordered to get his leaflets disseminated from the air, urging soldiers, sailors, airmen and people not to follow the traitors, who had lost their authority to command as a result of yielding to enemy subversion, but to fight on to preserve the polity.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The other air groups took no action.

On 17 August, Kozono's airmen tried to shoot down a test flight of Mitsubishi G4M "Betty" bombers, which were painted white with "green cross" ensigns, following the instruction of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, to carry the emperor's delegation to receive the instrument of surrender.⁽⁷⁶⁾ At 02:15I on 18 August, the Soviets had begun their invasion of Kuril islands, aiming at seizing Hokkaido.⁽⁷⁷⁾ Later, Kozono's airmen killed one of US airmen who flew over Tokyo for reconnaissance purposes.⁽⁷⁸⁾ At 07:18 on 19 August, the Japanese delegation led by Lieutenant-General Kawabe (deputy

72. NHK, *Nihon Hososhi* (A History of Broadcasting in Japan), vol. I. 1965, pp. 646-7.

73. NHK, *History*, I. p. 646.

74. BOEICHO BOEI KENSHUJO SENSISHITSU (DEFENSE AGENCY), ed. *Senshi Soshō: Okinawa Homen Kaigun Sakusen* (War History Series, Okinawa Area Naval Operations), Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbun, pp. 609-613.

75. ABEMA documentary, *The Adventure Flight of Green Cross Aircrafts*. https://abema.tv/video/episode/89-118_s15_p2

76. KAWABE, *Diary*, p. 219.

77. Tsuyoshi HASEGAWA, *Racing the Enemy: Stalin, Truman and the Surrender of Japan*, Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2005, p. 261.

78. ABEMA documentary, *The Adventure Flight of Green Cross Aircrafts*, testimony of Kamiyoshi Yashiko. https://abema.tv/video/episode/89-118_s15_p2

chief of the general staff), Rear Admiral Yokoyama (former naval attaché in Washington DC), and Katsuhiko Okazaki (director-general of the foreign ministry's research bureau) got onboard 2 Green Cross Betties to depart from the Navy's Kisarazu airfield. At 08:20, a rebel air reconnaissance from Atsugi spotted the 1st Betty. Its pilot, Lieutenant Sudo, took a zigzag course near the sea surface to escape the notice of the rebel "Zekes". The Betties encountered a series of mysterious mechanical failures. At Iejima, northwest of Okinawa, Sudo had to land his Betty at dangerously high speed, because her flaps failed to extend, but he managed to get her standstill before hitting a US aircraft at the end of the runway. The Japanese delegation got onboard a Douglas C-54 Skymaster to fly to Manila. There, Rear Admiral Yokoyama negotiated hard over midnight to persuade his counterpart to postpone the arrival date of an Allied advance mission at Atsugi from 23 to 26 August, tactfully keeping the secret that Atsugi at that time was being occupied by the rebels and acquiring 3 more days for Japan to suppress them. On 20 August, the Japanese delegation flew back with the instrument of surrender to Tokyo via Iejima. There, one of the Betties was damaged in a collision caused by the sudden lowering of pressure in her hydraulic brakes. All the delegates had to get onboard the other Betty, which mysteriously ran out of fuel and crash landed on a beach in Shizuoka prefecture at 23:55. Thanks to the moonlight and professional aeronautical skills of Sudo, no one got injured and the instrument of surrender was kept intact. In the early hours of 21 August, the delegation was led by a group of local vigilantes to their village to contact a nearby airfield to be carried on a lorry to get to Hamamatsu airfield. There, they found all the aircrafts but 1 damaged Army bomber, Mitsubishi Ki-67 "Peggy", had been evacuated. The Peggy was repaired in 150 minutes to carry the delegation to Chofu airfield in Tokyo, where it landed at 08:00, whereby MacArthur's order was duly communicated to the imperial high command. An air mechanic responsible for the maintenance of the crashed Betty was kept unidentified by his colleagues, suggesting a possibility that he deliberately caused these mechanical failures to prevent Japan from surrendering.⁽⁷⁹⁾

In the meantime, on 20 August, Captain Prince Nobuhito (one of Hirohito's brothers) met Kozono's deputies, and invited them to come with the prince to see the emperor, causing them to surrender.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Captain Kozono himself had been suffering with a series of bouts of malaria since the evening of 16 August. On the morning of 21, a medic gave Kozono an injection to detain him in a hospital. In the meantime, dozens of Kozono's officers flew onboard as many surviving warplanes as possible to the Army's Sasayama and Kodama airfields, while other dozens had to go there on foot. Those who reached Sasayama failed to obtain the co-operation of Army airmen there and returned to Atsugi on 22. On 23, a group of conformist Navy airmen flown from Atsugi landed at Kodama

79. Eiichi OKABE, *Midori Jujiki Kesshi-no Hiko (The Desperate Flight of Green Cross Aircrafts)*, Tokyo: Asahi Shimbun, 2017.

80. Kunio YANAGIDA, *Zerosen Moyu, Konshin-hen (The Blaze of Zekes: With All the Remaining Strength)*, Tokyo, Bungeishunju, 1990, pp. 541-543.

airfield to puncture the pneumatic tires of the aircrafts there. All these rebel officers were arrested on 26 August.⁽⁸¹⁾ However, this was not the end of the story.

Back on 24 August, Captain Sato of the naval engineering college was ordered to get Atsugi airfield's runway cleared of any obstacle before the Allied arrival, because the rebels had deposited more than 200 aircrafts on the runway. Captain Sato asked Akira Ando, who had been evacuating military factories, for help. They found about 200 armed airmen gathering around bonfires in the bush next to the airfield. Ando ordered his 250 men to start the job with 20 or so trucks and tractors. Shots began to be fired from the bush. Gradually, shots fell silent as Ando's men kept working undaunted, and their job was completed by 28 August.⁽⁸²⁾ A typhoon had swept across Japan to delay the arrival of the Allied advance team in Atsugi from 26 to 28 August. General MacArthur landed there on 30 August.

General Tanaka's Death

One of Naval Captain Kozono's airborne leaflets caused Major Kubota of Major Hatanaka's rebel team, to be resolved once again to fight on.⁽⁸³⁾ On 24 August, he led 67 officer students to occupy Kawaguchi and Hatogaya radio stations and to call on the people never to surrender. Junior NHK officials on duty misled the rebels to alert their superiors in Tokyo, who in turn alarmed the eastern district army, who caused power supply to be cut by 06:00.⁽⁸⁴⁾ General Tanaka of the eastern district army himself came over to these radio stations and spoke to the students in person, telling them to return to their school.⁽⁸⁵⁾ After the sun set, General Tanaka shot himself in his office overlooking the imperial palace.⁽⁸⁶⁾ This building eventually housed General MacArthur's office.

Conclusion

Key Factors in the Suppression of Mutinies

The series of mutinies in August 1945 which this paper has so far described would serve to prove the soundness of Chamberlin's "Blacklist" predictions of Japan collapsing

81. YANAGIDA, *The Blaze of Zekes*.

82. Naoki KOHDACHI, "Shusen-no Goseidan-mo awaya mizu-no awa!? Nihon Kaigun Saikyo Butai Hanran Jiken-no Shinso (Mutiny of Imperial Japanese Navy's Strongest Air Unit Nearly Bringing Emperor's Decision to End the War to Nothing)", Gendai Media, 14 August 2020. <https://gendai.media/articles/-/74688?page=5> <accessed 9 August 2024>.

83. MORISHITA, *Hidden History*, p. 50.

84. MORISHITA, *Hidden History*, p. 96; NHK, *History*, p. 648.

85. MORISHITA, *Hidden History*, pp. 103-104.

86. MORISHITA, *Hidden History*, p. 107.

into a failed state. It would have rendered Japan's democratisation unworkable and the occupied territories more susceptible to communism.

Key factors in suppressing the mutinies include (1) the Army leaders' confirmation of allegiance "no matter what" on 14 August 1945; (2) War Minister Anami's determination to sacrifice his life for frustrating any coup attempt; (3) General Tanaka's similar determination; (4) the steadfastness and cunning of civilians like chamberlains, NHK radio officials, and Ando's men against coup attempts; (5) the superior skills and luck on the part of the conformists over sporadic outburst and subversion within themselves, such as the eastern district army police and the Green Cross flight engineers.

Redefining the Duration of August Revolution

The risk of Japan collapsing into a failed state in August 1945 was so great that it would be necessary to redefine the length of the "August revolution", which Professor Miyazawa regarded as an event on 14 August. This paper suggests that the "revolution", which took the form of "restoration" of the emperor's government against the irregularly instituted military government, was a longer process up to the clearance of Atsugi runway by 28 August, just on time for the Allied advance mission to land there.

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DOI for this text: <https://doi.org/10.56092/AOQV6300>