

End of WWII

Following the unconditional surrender of Germany on 7 May 1945, the Allies met in Potsdam, Germany from 17 July to 2 August 1945 to decide what happens to Germany. The Big Three countries were represented by President Harry Truman for the US, Prime Minister Winston Churchill for Great Britain and Premier Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union. Following a British election, newly elected Prime Minister Clement Atlee replaced Churchill at the conference, an interesting side note. By this time, the Soviet Union controlled much of eastern and central Europe including the countries of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. The Potsdam Agreement aims were the democratization of Germany, dismantling the Nazi party, creation of the four zones of Germany as defined in the Yalta agreement, established how Nazi war criminals were to be put on trial and German war production plants were dismantled or destroyed.

In early August, US airplanes dropped 720,000 pamphlets over 12 Japanese cities warning the populations to surrender or face devastation. On 6 August 1945, an atomic bomb codenamed Little Boy was dropped over Hiroshima. The US ratified the United Nations charter on 8 August. On 9 August, the US dropped the second atomic bomb on Nagasaki. Also, on 9 August, the Soviet Union declared war against Japan. The following day, Japan sent a message stating it was willing to talk surrender terms. On 14 August, Emperor Hirohito recorded a radio message to the Japanese people saying that the war should end and that they must "bear the unbearable." On the same day, photographer Alfred Eisenstaedt took the famous picture of an American sailor kissing a woman in a white dress during the V-J celebrations in New York City. Interestingly, the August Revolution in Vietnam began, with the revolt against French rule. On 16 August, Emperor Hirohito issued a decree ordering all Japanese forces to cease fire. By the end of August, General Douglas MacArthur had established the Supreme Allied Command in Tokyo. The formal surrender of the Japanese occurred on 2 September aboard the USS Missouri.

During my two-year tour in Misawa, Japan from 1966 – 68, there were still some people who resented us being on their soil, mostly older people who had lived through the war. The younger generation, my age group, were much more accepting and I became friends with several of them. During my off-duty time, I volunteered at a Japanese middle school, helping teach the English language. The students were wonderful.

For those of Norwegian ancestry, the trial of Vidkun Quisling started on 20 August 1945 in Oslo, Norway. Quisling was the Nazi collaborator who nominally headed the government of Norway during Nazi occupation. He was found guilty of charges including embezzlement, murder and high treason against the Norwegian state, and was sentenced to death. He was executed by firing squad at Akershus Fortress, Oslo, on 24 October 1945. Quisling has become synonymous with the word traitor ever since.