

V-J Day – Victory over Japan

In Tokyo Bay, aboard the battleship Missouri on 2 September 1945, Japan surrendered ending WWII. In addition to the representatives of the Empire of Japan and the United States, other nations participated in the ceremony. Those countries were China, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, Australia, Canada, France, the Netherlands and New Zealand. President Truman officially declared the day as V-J Day, Victory over Japan Day. Some nations celebrated the end of the war in the Pacific at noon 14 August because that is when the Emperor of Japan accepted the conditions of the Potsdam Declaration and issued his Imperial Rescript on Surrender. US General Douglas MacArthur accepted the surrender on behalf of the Allied Powers. Admiral Chester Nimitz signed on behalf of the United States. The signed document was delivered to President Truman on 6 September 1945 where a formal ceremony was held accepting the document the following day.

Following Germany's surrender, the Allies met in Potsdam, Germany to determine peace settlements, among other issues. On 26 July, President Truman, British Prime Minister Churchill and Chinese leader Chiang Kaishek drafted a document defining the terms for Japan's surrender. That document became known as the Potsdam Declaration. Soviet leader Stalin was not part of the declaration since the Soviets never declared war on Japan. Japan ignored the ultimatum for several days. On 6 August, the US dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, destroying much of the city. Nagasaki was bombed three days later. On 15 August Japan officially announced its surrender.

The war with Japan started, of course, with the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii on 7 December 1941. The attack destroyed or damaged 20 American naval vessels including eight battleships. More than 2,400 people died in the attack. President Roosevelt called it 'a date that will live in infamy'. On 8 December, Congress approved Roosevelt's declaration of war on Japan. Following the attack, Japan's navy gained control of much of the Pacific including capturing islands near Australia. The turning point of the war in the Pacific was the battle of Midway. Japan's Yamamoto's plan of attacking Midway was to bring US war ships to Midway where he could destroy them. The opposite happened with Japan losing four aircraft carriers in the battle while the US lost only one, the Yorktown. This left four carriers to lead the offensive against Japan in the Pacific. In my research, I found an interesting article on how this battle was of world-wide significance. The war for the Allies was not going well, Japan was gaining control of the Pacific, Germany was invading Russia to capture oil supplies, German and Italian armies were threatening the Suez Canal. Britain was afraid of losing India to the Japanese. It was feared that China, without US aid, would negotiate peace with Japan and that Russia might also negotiate peace with Germany. The Battle of Midway changed that and led to the defeat of Japan.