

The Radio Drama of V-J Day



**Tense and gripping is this true story
of 15 desperate hours when men
died in vain**

by MORTON SONTHEIMER

WORLD WAR II officially ended on August 14, 1945. But few people ever knew that the conflict rolled on for 15 hours after that, while the greatest radio drama in history took place—unscripted and unrehearsed—around the world.

In a bomb-wrecked building in Manila, I stood with a handful of Army Signal Corps officers and men who will never forget those 15 desperate hours. The conflict raged on because, despite the fact that the most powerful radio communications resources the world has ever known were all beamed on the same objective—Radio Tokyo—there was no response.

The mystery of that silence has never been entirely solved. The key seems to lie somewhere in the chaos, fear, ineptitude and robot-like discipline that lay over Tokyo.

The drama began at 9 A.M. Manila time on August 15, (8 P.M. August 14, Eastern Standard Time). In the midst of a routine radio-teletype conference between GHQ officers in Manila and the War Department in Washington, the teletype suddenly began printing: stand by for important message **** from Marshall to MacArthur **** you are hereby notified of Japanese capitulation ****

Then began what was to grow into a world-wide effort to re-establish direct radio contact between

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America and Japan, severed since the attack on Pearl Harbor. It centered in the bullet-pocked Radio Operations Room in Manila.

The Japanese Imperial Government had capitulated, but until we could get word to Tokyo to "cease hostilities," blood would continue to flow. In the islands, in Asia, on the high seas, desperate Japanese wouldn't stop fighting until their Emperor ordered them to do so.

Callous people might have said the war had been going on for six long years, so what were a few hours more? But you don't get that war-hardened when, save for a few miles of safety, your own blood might be pouring into the mud.

A master sergeant outside the Operations Room made the urgency articulate. "Don't snafu that message," he said. "I got a kid brother up on the perimeter, and I'd hate to lose him now."

Our radio operators began trying to establish contact with JUM, the Tokyo station that had handled commercial traffic with the U. S. before the war. Over and over again, in English and in Kana and Romaji, the two adaptations of the Japanese language to Morse Code, they hammered out a single call: JUM from WTA (Manila) we have an urgent message for you.

JUM did not reply.

"Get any Tokyo station, then!" the Radio Officer ordered.

But Tokyo ignored us.

Maj. Gen. Spencer B. Akin, MacArthur's Chief Signal Officer, had a battleship in Manila Bay send out a call to JUM on the international distress frequency. The Air Force sent the call on our meteorological frequency, which the Japs were known to listen to assiduously. But from Tokyo came no reply.

Finally, after seven hours, Akin enlisted the aid of stations all over the world. Berne, Madrid, Lisbon, New York, Washington, Alaska, Honolulu, San Francisco, Moscow, Chungking—all started keying the same words to Tokyo: we have an urgent message for you.

UPTOWN IN MANILA, people were celebrating victory. On Market Street in San Francisco, at Times Square in New York, crowds were deliriously hailing V-J Day. But not far from the tense group clus-

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tered around Position Tokyo in the Radio Room, another operator was receiving the day's casualty lists, every name a vain sacrifice in a war officially over.

Hour after hour, the same men remained at the keys or with headphones on. Once we broke into a conversation between Tokyo and Taihoku and got an acknowledgement. But before we could start our message, the Jap operator began sending us cryptographed Japanese military traffic. He apparently thought we were a Japanese station—in Manila, in August, 1945!

"It's no use," a harried Signal Officer said. "Dial back to JUM."

Any short-wave listener could have heard stations all over the world calling Tokyo, calling Tokyo, calling Tokyo. But JUM was blandly sending financial messages to Handelsbank, Stockholm.

The Operations Room Clock crept past 2300—11 P.M. In America it was the day after the war ended. On fighting fronts it was the same as yesterday and the day before. On the air, JUM was receiving from a Jap station in Singapore.

Once again we tried to break in. This time, our operator held up his hand for attention. "JUM just told Singapore to stand by," he said breathlessly. Then, "Tokyo acknowledges us!"

Immediately, urgent messages poured in from other radio stations, informing us that JUM had responded. Stations everywhere had been listening in on the great radio drama, and they all wanted to make sure that Manila didn't miss its cue.

Soon this message was going through to Japan over the signature, "MacArthur": Pursuant to the acceptance of terms of surrender of the allied powers by the emperor of Japan, the Japanese government, and the Japanese imperial headquarters, the supreme commander for the allied powers hereby directs the immediate cessation of hostilities by Japanese forces**

The first response from the Japanese radio was this inquiry: Are you going to send private messages?

When the American officers finally figured out that the Jap station was worried over a possible loss of revenue, they refused to answer.

But then Tokyo inquired: Do you

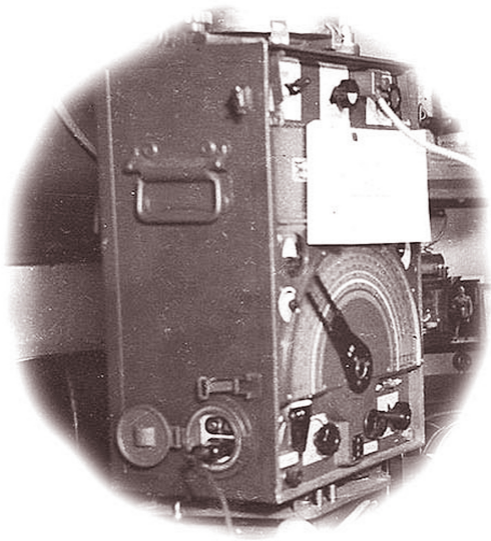
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want an answer to your message?

“Tell ’em ‘Hell yes!’ ” roared the officer-in-charge of Radio Operations.

The exhausted GI at the radio looked at the officer. The officer grinned. The GI wiped a drop of perspiration from his nose, leaned forward and keyed:

Y-E-S.



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