

This Day in History... August 14, 1945

President Truman Announces Japan's Surrender

After nearly six years of a world at war, the Japanese surrendered on August 14, 1945, effectively ending World War II.

By the summer of 1945, Germany had surrendered, ending the war in Europe. However, Japan refused to surrender and continued to fight. The Allies felt they had little choice but to launch a major attack. Experts estimated one million US casualties would be incurred in this invasion. Japanese losses would have been much higher.

However, the US had been secretly working on an atomic bomb, dubbed the "Manhattan Project," which was ready to be deployed that August. The Allies gave Japan one last chance – surrender unconditionally, or be destroyed. When they refused, the US dropped its first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6. Despite the loss of nearly 100,000 lives, Japan still wouldn't surrender. Three days later, the US dropped a second bomb on Nagasaki, claiming another 40,000 lives. (Historians from both countries agree that the atomic bombs actually saved American and Japanese lives.)



President Truman announcing Japan's surrender.



Americans celebrating Japan's surrender and the end of the war.

On August 10, in the wake of the extreme losses and concerns over another bomb, the Japanese government said it would surrender under the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. However, the number of changes they wanted made to it was unacceptable to the Allies.

Though the Japanese hadn't yet formally surrendered, this news was enough to begin celebrations around the globe. In London Allied troops danced in conga lines through the streets, while soldiers in Paris paraded on the Champs-Élysées singing "Don't Fence Me In." The people of Manila sang "God Bless America," while US troops in Okinawa fired every available weapon into the sky in celebration.

A little after noon on August 15, local time in Japan, Emperor Hirohito announced that he would accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration. In America (where it was still August 14), President Harry Truman delivered the announcement at 7:00 that evening, though the formal surrender ceremony wouldn't be held until September 2.

The moment the news hit, Americans began celebrating "as if joy had been rationed and saved up for the three years, eight months and seven days since Sunday, Dec. 7, 1941," as *Life* magazine put it. Huge crowds took to the streets across the country.

In Washington, DC, a large crowd tried to get into the White House grounds shouting, "We want Harry!" Eventually, the president stepped outside and announced, "This is the day we have been waiting for since Pearl Harbor. This is the day when Fascism finally dies, as we always knew it would." New York's Times Square had its largest gathering up to that time – about 2 million people. In the city's garment district, workers threw cloth scraps and ticker tape in celebration. Celebrations continued around the world for the next two days with fireworks and parades.

The official surrender ceremony was held September 2nd aboard the US battleship *Missouri* anchored in Tokyo Bay. Two Japanese officials, as well as representatives from the US, Great Britain, China, Russia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Canada, France, and Australia signed the surrender document. September 2nd has been celebrated as V-J Day or Victory over Japan Day in the United States. The United Kingdom celebrates V-J Day on August 15, in commemoration of the announcement of Japan's surrender.



Japan's formal surrender ceremony was held aboard the USS Missouri.

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