

## The Second Sacred Judgment

Source: Hiroshi [Kaian) Shimomura, *Shusenki* [*Account of the End of the War*] (Tokyo, Kamakura Bunko, [1948], 148-152

The night of the 13rd passed by without the dream [of peace] coming true. . On August 14, Tuesday, in the anteroom in Prime Minister's Residence were the Cabinet members in anticipation of a regular Cabinet meeting at 10:00 a.m., exchanging the whisper in anxiety. Now against the peace talk sprouted all sorts of argument, throwing all the corners of the nation into chaos. Some hardliners, in collaboration with right-wingers, ultra-nationalists and middle-ranking military officers, were beginning to stir about restlessly.

It was near 10:00. We received an order to call on the Court at 10:30 by His Majesty's request. It was shortly after the Prime Minister had reported the latest development and returned from the Court. Without a doubt, the order was a result of his visit. At any rate, we were told that there was no need to change the clothes because of the urgent order. In fear that it would be too much discourtesy to proceed in front of His Majesty [in that way], however, some borrowed neckties from their secretaries and others attempted to make an open collar shirt look like a closed one. Some even exchanged clothes with their secretaries. I was lucky to be wearing the national uniform. Keeping a medal hanging on it, I joined all and headed to the Court.

The Inner Palace of the Fukiage Imperial Gardens, a place I still freshly remembered when I had paid my sole visit to His Majesty for two hours before August 6, is a very simple house, with the entrance of the air raid shelter in front of its main entrance. The tunnel after descending to it is quite long, running straight for a while, and then turning to right to the conference room. Facing the imperial chair are two rows of chairs. From right to left are Prime Minister Suzuki, Chairman of the Privy Council Hiranuma, and then five to six cabinet members including Army Minister Anami, with Chief of the Army General Staff Umezu and Chief of the Navy General Staff Toyoda at its end. Behind them are the rest of the cabinet members and myself, and behind us are Chief of the Comprehensive Planning Bureau [Masasumi] Ikeda, Cabinet Secretary Sakomizu, Chief of the Army Military Bureau [Masao] Yoshizumi and his naval counterpart [Zenshiro] Hoshina, all sitting down and anticipating His Majesty's arrival. The sheer silence just before his arrival prevailed in the room, interrupted only by whispers. Soon, His Majesty arrived with the lead by Chief aide-de-camp [Shin] Hasunuma. After all paid to him their best respects by bowing deeply, Prime Minister Suzuki reported all the latest developments in a summary. The Cabinet meeting, he said, found about four-fifth of the members in favor of the original plan, but failed to reach a unanimous consensus. He deeply apologized of bothering His Majesty again and asked him to listen to some opinions against the plan and make another Sacred Judgment.

Following the Prime Minister's explanation, both of the Chiefs and the Army Minister, standing up one by one, made an impassioned plea in tears, insisting that we should qualify our acceptance out of fear that the plan as it is now might endanger our goal of preserving our national polity. Here I do not bother to detail it. Hearing this sort of opinion, I remembered the words "Koudou" (The Emperor's Way) and "Shindou" (The Loyalists' Way) which Prime Minister Suzuki always mentioned. "The loyalists deserve death should their Highness be disgraced," according to an ancient saying. No other words can express more correctly the feeling of the generals today than this word. Surely they deserve death. They have already dedicated themselves to His Majesty. But as the situation goes, His Majesty will be disgraced. Our national polity might be put in danger. Although I sympathized with their willingness out of their pride as military officers to search for a faint hope in another battle, I cannot but wonder if there would be any way out of the situation even without atomic bombs or the Soviet entry. Nowadays our problem gets much worse than simply seeing our Emperor disgraced. It is much and much worse than that. We are leading our homeland, our people, and even Japan itself to total destruction. In this time of losing everything, we should weigh the Emperor's Way caring for Japan and its 80 million people more than the Loyalists' Way.

I kept my eyes on Prime Minister Suzuki nearby me. I also looked toward Navy Minister Yonai. Admiral Yonai, now the Navy Minister, had long told us that few chances to win were left to the military, even less if another day passed by. Even at this point, the situation was many times as against us as against the other side, and he had called for a preservation [of Japan's power] as early as possible. Even from a point of view of pride, he refrained from any bravado and bravely – I dare to call it bravely – demanded that the sword we blandished be laid down. I felt that it was the very example which demonstrated true bravery. One day he said to me, "Toward the ruler the military insisted that we should single-mindedly redouble our efforts to carry the war to the victory. When asked if they had any estimate for a victory, they could not answer." True, man is a creature which cannot live without food. Nowadays the shortage of food is clear to all. The enemy's weapons have upgraded from air-fortress B-17s to super air-fortress B-29, even to atomic bombs. Our weapons have downgraded from cannons to grenades, even to bamboo spears. Which is the winning side? Now our national power is nose-diving.

I expected some argument in favor of acceptance after the opposition by Anami, Umezumi and Toyoda, but, given the previous Sacred Judgment, it seemed that there was no need for it. Soon, the time came for His Majesty's words. It was around 11 a.m. on August 14.

In our deep emotional state, none of us prepared a draft or transcript of His Majesty's words. I took a memorandum by recalling them from my fresh memory before my emotion cooled off. As they lie at the core of the drama leading to the

end of the war, His Majesty's words I am here describing are a product after referring to two hand-written memos by Minister Sakonji, and Education Minister Ohta, besides mine, and also being reviewed by Prime Minister Suzuki. Therefore, it can be said that the following text is the transcript closest to His Majesty's words:

### **His Majesty's Words**

"If there is any other opinion to be presented, I would like to make my own comment.

I have carefully listened to the opposition, but my idea has little changed from what I told before. As a result of taking into full consideration the circumstances in the world and at home, I conclude that it is impossible for us to continue the war any more.

There seemingly remain some doubts about the issue of the national polity, but I would interpret from the implication of the reply that the other side is considerably well-intentioned. I understand the opinions pointing out a touch of uncertainty in the attitudes on the other side, but I would not like to suspect so. In short, as the whole matter can be reduced to the faith and determination of our whole nation, I think it appropriate to accept the offer. Please think so, too.

Furthermore, it is fairly understandable to me that something like disarmament and military occupation is truly unbearable to the soldiers. But I would like to save my people's lives even at my expense. If we continue the war, the result will be that our homeland will be reduced to ashes. It is really intolerable for me to see my people suffering any more. I cannot be accountable to the spirit of our ancestors. If we choose peace, of course we cannot put our unconditional trust on the other side. But compared to the result of losing Japan itself we can at least hope for reconstruction as long as some seeds remain.

Remembering the bitterness and grief Emperor Meiji went through in time of accepting the Tripartite Intervention.<sup>1</sup> We, with the nation firmly united, should set out for a future restoration by tolerating the intolerable and bear the unbearable. I cannot be sadder when I think about soldiers dead at battlefields, those dead on their duty, and their beleaguered families. I am also deeply worried about the lives of those who suffer in war and lose their way of making their living. At this time, if there is anything I should do, I will do it. If it is to make an announcement to the nation, I will stand in front of the microphone at any time. As we have not informed people of anything so far, our sudden decision will be very disturbing to them. It is all the more so to the soldiers. It will be very difficult to sooth this disturbance, but, both the Ministers of the Army and of the Navy, please understand my feeling and make your best efforts to put the situation under firm

control. If necessary, I will go to public and explain. I think we need to issue an imperial edict, so I would like the government to draft it without delay.

The above is my idea.”

It should be my duty, as one of those who attended the Privy Council at the crossroads of the Greater Japanese Empire, an unprecedented Privy Council in history and perhaps also in the future, to record all the details. But that is beyond my power.

While listening to his holy words, from every corner of the room the sound of sobs prevailed. Every single word he uttered was impressive. As he pronounced his determination to save the nation even at the expense of his own life and loudly wondered how we can honor the spirits of our ancestors if our homeland is burned to ashes and our people are lost in the blazing fire of war, the sound of our sobs became louder. Furthermore, when he said he would do anything and stand in front of the microphone if necessary, I could not suppress my sobs and tears, loudly crying despite being in a public place. The members could barely get up from their chairs. Through the long tunnel back to the surface, in the car, back to the Prime Minister's residence, in our dens and in attendance at the Cabinet meeting, we could not suppress our tears every time we remembered the scene. Even in front of the press I could not stop shedding tears. Both the interviewers and the interviewee uttered few words, just shedding tears together. That night, next day and the day after another, I remembered and cried, and remembered and sobbed. Now one and half a month later, in writing this manuscript, I cannot help but remember the day and find myself overwhelmed by a flood of emotions with my pen hardly moving forward. I stop writing here tonight (September 26, 1945, 9:30 p.m.).

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<sup>1</sup>. A reference to the pressure from France, Russia and Germany on Japan to renounce its privileges in the Liaodong Peninsula won after the Sino-Japanese War in 1894.