

Army Signals World That War Is Over: The U.S. Army Signal Corps in Occupied Japan

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“Economically and industrially, as well as militarily, Japan was exhausted and depleted. Her governmental structure was controlled completely by the occupation forces and was operating only to the extent necessary to prevent social chaos, disease, and starvation.”¹

Thus General Douglas MacArthur described postwar Japan at the beginning of his tenure as Supreme Commander of Allied Powers (SCAP).

This August marks the 64th anniversary of Japan’s surrender to the Allies after World War II. While most know about the important role played by Fort Monmouth and the Signal Corps during the War, few know about the role played after it ended.

Dr. Carol Stokes from the U.S. Army Signal Center at Fort Gordon wrote about how the Signal Corps continued to serve after the War on duty with occupation forces in Japan. Stokes argued “It could be said the Signal Corps had the final word in the Pacific when a communications unit in the Yokohama Customs House rebroadcast to the world the Japanese surrender ceremonies aboard the USS Missouri Sept. 2, 1945.”



Tokyo headquarters for General Douglas MacArthur's Far East Command was located in the Dai-Ichi building. Photo: U.S. Army; Source: Truman Library.

The first order of business for the occupation forces was to disarm the Japanese military and gain control of communications, while Signal Corps cameramen

¹ *MacArthur in Japan: The Occupation: Military Phase*, Volume 1 Supplement (Prepared by his general staff, Washington, D.C., January 1966), v.

documented occupation activities in the country. The U.S. Army Signal Corps has maintained a presence in Japan ever since.

The 232d Signal Operations Company deployed to Yokohama in August of 1945, and the 4035th Signal Support Seaborne Communications Detachment deployed to Tokyo. Jointly, they comprised the First U.S. Army Communications Center with Shortly afterward, other small signal elements in Japan were absorbed and the unit was redesignated the 71st Signal Service Battalion. The unit was tasked with operating the long lines communication system in the Far East. Post, camp, and station communication



U.S. Army Signal Corps linemen lay communication wires in postwar Japan.

responsibilities were given to the Japan Signal Service Battalion, which was formed just prior to the 71st Signal Service Battalion activation.

The Japanese government and administrative systems were largely intact after World War II, and the United States used these to advance its own post-war agenda. This scenario was made easier because the Japanese people deferred to the leadership of the Emperor, who instructed them to obey the prerogatives of MacArthur and the occupying forces.

Kan Tagami of Hawaii served for nearly five years as personal interpreter-aide to General Douglas MacArthur. In this capacity, he was both witness and participant to the rebuilding of Japan after World War II.

Tagami described that the work done by MacArthur, and by all who served in the Occupation, was critical in rebuilding Japan, instituting democracy, and planting the seeds for its resurgence as an economic power.

According to Tagami, most Japanese did not view the United States as a harsh occupier, and this fostered a positive relationship between the two nations long after the occupation. Tagami argued that the Japanese people were grateful that the Americans were not treating the Japanese the way the Japanese might have treated the Americans.

Occupation was not a form of revenge or retribution for the Americans; the goal was to rebuild a nation on non-warring principles and re-integrate it into the world economy. While the occupation itself lasted years, rebuilding began immediately.



Joseph D. Keenan (w. overcoat & hat) and Supreme Commander for Allied Powers, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, leaving headquarters in the Dai-ichi Building.

Civilian Japanese employed by General Headquarters (GHQ) helped disseminate information on occupation and what was expected of the Japanese through existing newspapers and radio.

The United States emerged victoriously from World War II, but also as a changed nation. As historian Rebecca Raines wrote in *Getting the Message Through*, “there would be no return to isolationism and withdrawal from world affairs as after World War I.” Our prolonged presence in Japan is evidence of that.

The postwar occupation was an opportunity to turn Japan from an enemy to ally, and the Signal Corps was a part of it.