

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S ESSAY I WILL FLY ON WINGS OF PEACE

President Ikeda grew up during World War II, and here he shares some of his worst wartime memories. These experiences led him to a life dedicated to peace. 'I am determined to fly on wings of peace around the globe, as long as I have strength, as long as I have life,' he writes in this essay.

BY DAISAKU IKEDA, SGI PRESIDENT

April 1, 1937. I clearly remember the date because it was also the day I started fourth grade. That day, a Japanese newspaper held a grand ceremony to name and launch an aircraft it was sponsoring in an attempt to set a long-distance speed record for air travel between Tokyo and London.

The flight was also to be part of the celebrations for the coronation of George VI of England. I went with the rest of my class to Tokyo's Haneda Airport, located nearby, to watch the event. A large crowd had gathered.

At the ceremony, the plane was named *Kamikaze* or *Divine Wind*. I will never forget how loudly and excitedly I cheered when the *Kamikaze* rose into the clear skies after festive balloons and doves had been released in celebration.

The Japanese-designed-and-built aircraft set a world record by covering the distance between Tokyo and London, including stops in between for refueling, in 94 hours, 17 minutes and 56 seconds (51 hours, 19 minutes and 23 seconds of actual flying time). During a monthlong tour of Europe, the *Kamikaze* also made goodwill visits to Brussels, Berlin, Paris and Rome, where it was welcomed by huge crowds.

In August two years after the *Kamikaze's* record-setting flight, two other Japanese newspapers jointly sponsored an around-the-world flight by an airplane dubbed *Nippon*. It had goodwill visits scheduled in cities in North America, South America, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

Once again, a large crowd of well-wishers gathered at Haneda to see the plane off. I remember going to the airport with my schoolmates for this event, too, and that we carried little Japanese flags.

The *Nippon* crossed the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans and traversed five continents, setting an around-the-world record by covering a distance of more than 31,000 miles in 56 days.

The *Kamikaze* and the *Nippon* were engraved in my young mind as wings of peace; they flew through the skies to build bridges of goodwill and friendly relations with other nations of the world.

But a little more than two years after the flight of the *Nippon*, on Dec. 8, 1941 (Japan time), the Japanese military launched an air attack on Pearl Harbor and initiated the Pacific War.

That morning, my family and I heard a voice on the radio say: "This is a special news bulletin. The Army and Navy Department of Imperial Headquarters announced at 6:00 a.m. today that the Japanese Imperial Army and Navy..." Our faces darkened with anxiety as we listened to the announcement of Japan's initiation of hostilities against the

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United States.

When the broadcast was over, my father said with a sigh, “So now we’re at war with America as well.” He looked at my oldest brother, who had just been discharged from active duty and returned home from China. He must have worried that my brother would be shipped off to war again.

That day, the whole school was buzzing with news of the Japanese victory at Pearl Harbor. But in fact, that day was the start of an oppressive, gray time in our lives. Blackouts were later put into effect, and towns grew dark. Even lights at home had to be covered with a dark cloth.

A year after the war with the United States began, my brother was called back to active duty by the Army and sent to serve overseas again. I will never forget the words he said to me, “Daisaku, there is no glory in war.”

My three other brothers, all older, were also drafted in quick succession. The early victories of Japan’s forces proved to be fleeting, and the war began to turn harshly against us.

But the reports from the battlefield were filled with flowery rhetoric of heroic feats — so that the Japanese people never knew the real situation. “Retreat” became “repositioning of forces,” and cruel deaths in battle were “glorious sacrifices,” using a term that in Japanese invokes images of jewels being smashed and their fragments scattering with exquisite beauty.

Eventually, the Air Force of the Imperial Navy formed a special attack force called the Shimpu (or, as it is more popularly known, Kamikaze) Tokkotai. These were the young men who flew suicide missions, the *Kamikaze* pilots. Their planes carried only enough fuel to reach their target — enemy ships — and when they did, they were expected to crash into it, to destroy or disable it and its personnel as their plane exploded and they sacrificed their precious lives. How ironic that the same name of the plane that had made that historic goodwill flight years earlier should be used to such an utterly different end.

From around November 1944, the U.S. Air Force began regular bombing raids on Tokyo. During a huge air attack one night in April 1945, I left the air-raid shelter where I’d taken refuge and began running toward Tokyo Bay. When the sun came up the next morning, I found that I was the only one in my family to have returned home. It occurred to me then that my mother and father and the rest of my family might all have died, and I was filled with remorse and self-recrimination for not having found a way to stay at their side.

Then, around noon, my mother appeared, and eventually my father returned, too. Everyone in my family was safe, and we all grasped each other’s hands in joy and relief.

Our home in Kojiya had been destroyed as part of the forced evacuation policy, and the small dwelling we hastily built in Magome was burned down during the air raids. Each time I fled among the burning ruins, I remembered my brother’s words: “Daisaku, there is no glory in war.” He never returned to us alive.

I hated war. And I hated the leaders who incited people to war. I asked myself what I could do to make sure that such a tragedy never happened again.

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Then one day, my life's course was set. I met Mr. Toda, who upon his release from prison stood up to bring happiness and peace to the people.

Thirty-four years ago today, on Dec. 2, 1964, I began to write my novel *The Human Revolution* in Okinawa, which had suffered more in the war than any other place in Japan. I began the novel with the words "Nothing is more barbarous than war. Nothing is more cruel."

"A world without war" has been the constant cry of my heart. I continue to write to drive that message home and to build bridges of friendship. I am determined to fly on wings of peace around the globe, as long as I have strength, as long as I have life.