

1 The Asian Wars and Hokkaido

Wooden Fighter Plane Prototype Main Wing and Auxiliary Fuel Tank

The wing (two-thirds of the main right wing) and the auxiliary fuel tank hanging from the ceiling at center were components of a wooden fighter plane prototype created at the Industrial Research Institute of the Hokkaido Research Organization between 1943 and 1944. This was near the end of the Pacific War and demonstrated that Japan was attempting to continue the war effort despite its lack of resources.

The Asia-Pacific War killed and injured countless people. Here, we will take a closer look at this changing time period while considering the people and areas of the Asia-Pacific region affected by Japan.

During World War I, Europe's logistics network was cut off and once products from Hokkaido made their way to other parts of the world, the trading port of Otaru experienced rapid growth. The activities of labor unions involving people who worked at the port also became prevalent. The labor strikes of 1927 that began in Otaru Port and spread throughout the city gained support from across Japan. Noted author Takiji Kobayashi would write about their work and life. However, the Public Peace Preservation Act was promulgated following the start of general elections. As a result, a Special Higher Police was mobilized to vigorously suppress these movements and soon a time of war would be upon Japan.

In 1931, Japan was involved in the Manchurian Incident and in 1937, all-out war broke out between Japan and China. The year before, in 1936, the February 26 Incident occurred, becoming a harbinger of a new war, as evidenced by special army training drills being held on Hokkaido's Ishikari Plains. As the Second Sino-Japanese War became protracted, political parties were disbanded and the Imperial Aid Association was established in 1940, organizing people into neighborhood community associations. Eventually this would stain all aspects of schools, workplaces, and communities with the color of war.

War spread to Southeast Asia and the Western Pacific, becoming a major conflict involving multiple countries. Around this time many people were sent from Hokkaido to Manchuria, while people from the Korean Peninsula were forcibly brought to work in the mines and on civil engineering projects in Hokkaido. After the fall of Attu Island, American submarines began to wage war on ships in the waters surrounding Hokkaido. Once Okinawa fell in 1945, Honshu and Hokkaido both were exposed to bombing raids by American forces.

After Japan's surrender in 1945, a large number of Japanese military personnel and civilians began to repatriate from the battlefield and occupied areas, resulting in food shortages. This led the government to once again focus on the development of Hokkaido. Many people in Japan welcomed the new constitution that contained a clause against warfare and maintaining war capabilities. However, in 1950, the outbreak of the Korean War resulted in the creation of the National Police Reserve (which would later become the Self-Defense Force). The following year, the treaty of peace was signed together with the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, which resulted in American forces being stationed permanently in Japan. Soon the shadow of the Cold War involving the United States and Soviet Union would engulf Japan.



Opposition to Military Drills, General Elections, and the Public Peace Preservation Act

The extent of the damage suffered during World War I resulted in the ideals of disarmament, democracy and communism spreading around the world. Public debate about labor movements and disarmament began to take place in Japan, too, and general elections were held. However, the Special Higher Police mobilized under the Public Peace Preservation Act vigorously suppressed communist, worker and student movements. In 1925, problems arose with military drills conducted at Otaru Higher Commercial School and students called upon other students from all parts of Japan to vehemently oppose such drills.



The Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and Military Base Issues

As the shadow of the Cold War engulfed Japan, Hokkaido and Okinawa forcibly became the front lines of the conflict in Asia. Community members living near bases and training areas for the U.S. Armed Forces and Japan Self-Defense Forces protested and in 1960, a movement to throw out the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty spread nationwide. Court cases in Eniwa and Naganuma debated the Self-Defense Forces and Constitution, while live weapon drills still remain a problem in Yausubetsu to this day.