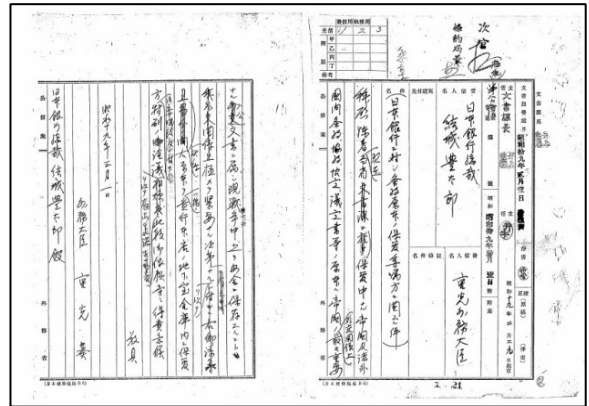


Evacuation, Incineration, Requisition, and Return of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Documents

Upon hearing the word “evacuation,” one might think of shuffling schoolchildren to safety. But the term does not refer only to people. Documents have also been evacuated in dangerous times. Thanks to the hard work of many individuals, many Japanese government documents from before the Second World War are still around for us to examine today. Using the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a case study, let’s explore how government documents were evacuated and preserved during wartime.

- The Evacuation of Important Documents

In March 1944, Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to move original copies of treaties that were held in the archives of its Documents Division into a safe place. The underground vault at the Bank of Japan’s headquarters was chosen as the location to house them. **Image 1** shows the draft of Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu’s official transmission about the plan (*kōshin*) (***Note 1**) to the Bank of Japan’s president Toyotarō Yūki. The transmission requested that the documents be accepted. Shigemitsu noted how vital official documents related to treaties with other countries were for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and how it is very important that they be protected from the war: “They are some of the most important official documents for the Empire’s foreign relations, and it is of utmost importance that they be safely stored during this war.” This transmission was sent on March 1, 1944. Subsequently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs entrusted original copies of treaties to the Bank of Japan.



[Image1] Title: 4. Jōyaku Genpon tō sokai kankei (Nippon ginko e ishoku) [Evacuation of original copies of treaties, etc. (Entrusting to the Bank of Japan)], (6th image), Reference Code: [B12080780200](#).

A month later, on April 1, 1944, it was decided that other official documents would also be evacuated. Vaults owned by Saitama Bank’s Satte branch along with a privately owned storehouse in the Minami Saitama were to be used. It was decided that disposable records and documents would remain in the ministry’s stacks and that the highly important official documents would be gradually evacuated after being classified by time period (new records from 1927 and later, old records from 1926 and earlier). They were moved from April 26 to May 20. While at first the plan was to evacuate the vast majority of documents from the ministry, in the end only 33,000 volumes of documents were evacuated. These documents could be saved from being destroyed in war.

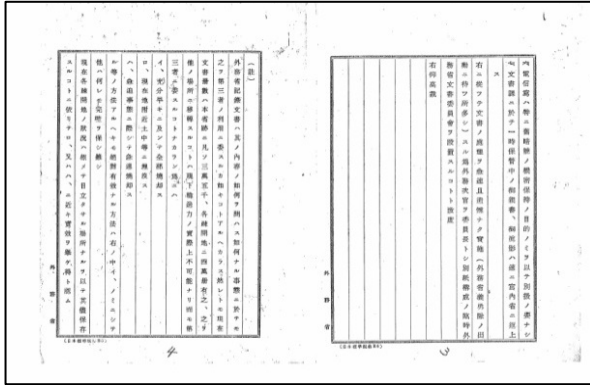
-Documents Destroyed by Fire during the War and Documents Incinerated Immediately before the War’s Conclusion

Some items held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Documents Division were destroyed in a fire on January 8, 1942. A much greater number of documents would be wiped out in wartime bombings. For example, an air raid on May 25, 1945 torched multiple office buildings of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and only one four-story library building was spared. At this time, approximately 20,000 volumes of documents were destroyed.

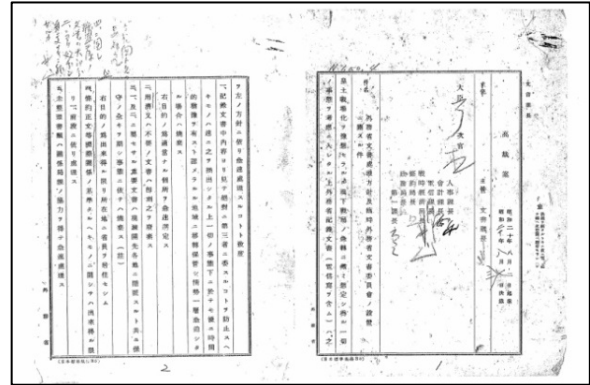
On August 2, as it looked like Japan would certainly lose the war, a document handling policy was drafted that stated:

“Archival documents that absolutely should not be entrusted to third parties should be extracted and moved to another place for storage. When the situation has grown more intense they should be incinerated.”

This proposal was approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on August 7, a day after an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. **Image 2** shows the proposal document requesting the approval for decision-making to be submitted to a cabinet meeting (*kōsaian*) (***Note 2**). It resulted in approximately 8,000 volumes of highly confidential official documents from after 1940 were promptly incinerated between August 10 and 15. The burning was carried out by not only the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but also by other ministries, government agencies, and local municipalities. In the Department of War and the Ministry of the Navy, for example, the thorough incineration of confidential documents when the war ended resulted in a large number of important records being lost.



[Image 2-2] Title : 1. Ippan oyobi zatsu (fukumu kōsaian)[General and Miscellaneous(Including proposal documents requesting the approvals for decision-making to be submitted to a cabinet meeting) (45th image).



[Image 2-1] Title : 1. Ippan oyobi zatsu (fukumu kōsaian)[General and Miscellaneous(Including proposal documents requesting the approvals for decision-making to be submitted to a cabinet meeting) (44th image), Reference Code : [B12080780100](#).

-Surveying, Censoring, and Requisition by the GHQ

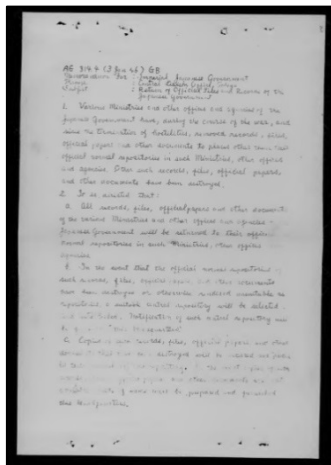
September 2, 1945, a document of surrender was signed by Japanese government representatives and the Allied Powers, putting Japan under the occupation of the General Headquarters, otherwise known as the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ). In early November 1945, the GHQ began to survey and censor surviving documents. The GHQ’s Lieutenant Colonel Erskine spent three days, starting on November 6, meeting with the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Documents Division, acquiring detailed information on the evacuation and fire destruction as well as the incineration of ministry documents. On November 9, a day after the meeting ended, representatives from GHQ’s signal corps began to inspect and tour sites from which documents were evacuated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Documents evacuated to the private storehouse in Saitama prefecture were collected on December 13, 22, and 24.

On January 3, 1946, upon an order from the GHQ, efforts began to return all evacuated official documents to the government. **Image 3** shows part of a memo relating to this order. The Washington Document Center (WDC), a joint institution of the U.S. Army and Navy that requisitioned Japanese government documents and publications, was in charge of inspecting and censoring the returned documents. The Advanced Party of the WDC, led by Major McFarlane, visited government ministers and agencies from January 4, inspecting and censoring documents. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was visited by them from January 15. At this point, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs thought that documents would just be inspected and not confiscated.

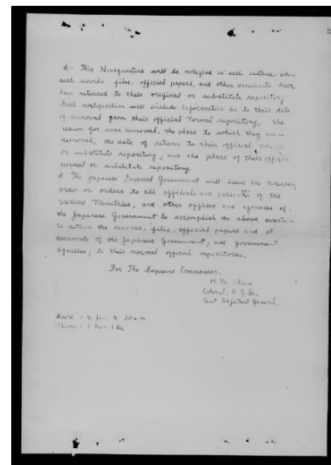
However, a summary order dated February 5, signed by Colonel Munson, arrived at the ministry. It stated that the WDC had acquired the authority to move documents and would requisition them and that the Japanese government could use the documents stored at the GHQ as necessary. On February 8, Captain Chaze of the WDC, who had

inspected and censored documents that had been evacuated to Saitama the previous day, came to the ministry and demanded that forty-three bags of documents be immediately handed over. Staff at the ministry negotiated for time to create a catalogue of the documents in the bags and succeeded in getting them to allow until 1:30 PM the following day. This enabled them to create a list of the requisitioned documents under the supervision of the person in charge from the WDC before handing them over. These documents were stored at the WDC office in the Yūsen Building. Some of them were moved to the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in Ichigaya (formerly the auditorium of the Imperial Japanese Army Academy) and used as evidence during the tribunal. These documents included important materials related to foreign relations, prisoners of war, and the International Red Cross. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hoped that the documents would be returned after inspection and censorship, in the end the majority went to the United States.

Such requests continued until 1948. In the end, a total of 1,305 volumes were requisitioned: 102 original copies of treaty agreements, 757 archival files, 298 reports and 148 miscellaneous items. Some of these documents were demanded by the International Prosecution Section (IPS) which were collecting information for the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, and the GHQ’s Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS). A considerable number of other returned documents from government ministries and agencies and some prefectures were similarly requisitioned after being submitted to the GHQ, where documents were inspected and censored.



[Image 3-1] Title: Kanchō kōbunsho oyobi kiroku fukki nikansuru ken [Regarding the Return of Government Ministries and Agency Documents and Records] (AG314. 4(3 Jan 1946) GB), (3th image), Reference Code: [A15060079700](#).



[Image 3-2] Title: Kanchō kōbunsho oyobi kiroku fukki nikansuru ken [Regarding the Return of Government Ministries and Agency Documents and Records] (AG314. 4(3 Jan 1946) GB), (4th image).

-Repeated Demand for Return

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs began demanding documents be returned April 1948 (officially in September 1949) and some of them were placed back in Japanese control gradually. In 1950 with the cooperation of the GHQ Diplomatic Section’s Glenn W. Shaw, a former professor at Osaka University of Foreign Studies who had been imaging ministry’s documents in microfilm, 37 volumes of originals were returned. From April 1952 to March 1953, six more batches of documents were placed back in Japanese control. The first two portions were respectively returned by the GHQ’s Diplomatic Section and ATIS (before the Treaty of San Francisco went into effect), and the last four portions by the America Legation. This was approximately half of the total number of documents that had been requisitioned from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In October 1954, the U.S. Department of State told the U.S.-based Embassy of Japan that it would like to return 51 copies of documents used as evidence at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East as well as approximately 450 boxes of requisitioned documents that were held at the Federal Records Center in Alexandria, Virginia. In December 1954, the embassy received ten documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in January 1955, the documents used as evidence at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East with 68 other documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the United States. The documents were subsequently sent to the ministry in Japan. Remaining documents could not be immediately received due to the cost of shipping. When the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Documents Division went to the United States in November 1955, a government official accompanying him confirmed that there were approximately 7,000 boxes of requisitioned documents held at the Franconia Warehouse of the U.S. State Department. 16,800 requisitioned documents held in Alexandria and Franconia were returned at once in 1958, and they included 15,595 Army and Navy documents (***Note 3**) and 133 Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents. They were received by the National Institute for Defense Studies (***Note 4**).

Subsequently, as a result of the Japanese government's persist requests to the United States to return documents, roughly 2,700 documents primarily related to the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Department of War and the Ministry of the Navy were returned in 1973 and these documents became part of the holdings of the National Archives of Japan in the following year (*** note 5**).

Thus, the pre-war historical materials that are available today survived through evacuation, incineration, requisition and return (***Note 6**).

[Note 1] *Kōshin* are divided into “outbound transmissions” (*ōshin*) and “inbound transmissions” (*raishin*). The former refers to items sent from the Documents Division by the minister or vice minister. After being drafted by the government official in charge and going through the supervising division head and supervising bureau head, they would be approved by a minister or vice minister. Their style was based on that of telegraph, with the exclusion of a very limited number of cases (ones involving the Imperial Household Ministry and the cabinet, for ambassadors and ministers of other countries). *Kōshin* and telegraph drafts were corrected by the department head. Heads were instructed to correct the drafts with a pen or brush.

[Note 2] A *kōsaian* is a document agreed upon within the ministry. It is a proposal document requesting the approval for decision-making to be submitted to a cabinet meeting.

[Note 3] Of these 15,959 documents, 6,722 were Army documents and 8,873 were Navy documents. These included not only documents that the U.S. military requisitioned from the Department of War and the Ministry of the Navy, but also those confiscated from units at the war front.

[Note 4] Returned documents shipped from Baltimore by a U.S. government agency on February 25, 1958, were received by the Defense Agency on April 3 in Yokohama. Subsequently, on August 5, 133 documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were moved from the Defense Agency to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[Note 5] According to a count conducted in January 1973, the unreturned Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents were 41 original copies of treaty agreements and 556 volumes of documents and records. However, the items were not included among the documents that were returned the same year and moved to the National Archives of Japan the following year.

[Note 6] While this paper only covers documents, books were also evacuated, incinerated, requisitioned, and returned.

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