

Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims
Special Exhibition

Akatsuki Corps in the Face of Apocalyptic Fires:

Hiroshima and the Child Soldiers
of the Suicide Attack Squad

March 1, 2024 to February 28, 2025

We walked through
the city of death.



Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall
for the Atomic Bomb Victims

Free
Admission

Akatsuki Corps in the Face of Apocalyptic Fires:

Hiroshima and the Child Soldiers of the Suicide Attack Squad



At the start of the Pacific War, the Japanese military advanced rapidly. However, by 1944, as the war situation grew more severe, the prospect of a decisive battle on the mainland loomed. To reinforce personnel under these circumstances, the Army established a special cadet system. Partly due to an incentive allowing them the chance to become junior officers by skipping a grade, young military-minded boys between the ages of 15 and 19 volunteered from all over the country. Some were assigned to the Army Marine Training Division of the Army Marine Headquarters, commonly known as the Akatsuki (Dawn) Corps.

Originally, the Army Marine Headquarters transported troops and supplies by ship, but the Marine Training Division was responsible for training soldiers to use a newly developed suicide attack boat for ramming enemy vessels, known as the Maru-Re. The small plywood boat was just 5.6 meters long and carried depth charges on its stern.

On August 6, 1945, the child soldiers were still training daily in preparation for their fate. However, what awaited them was not a suicide attack, but the dropping of an atomic bomb by the U.S. military.

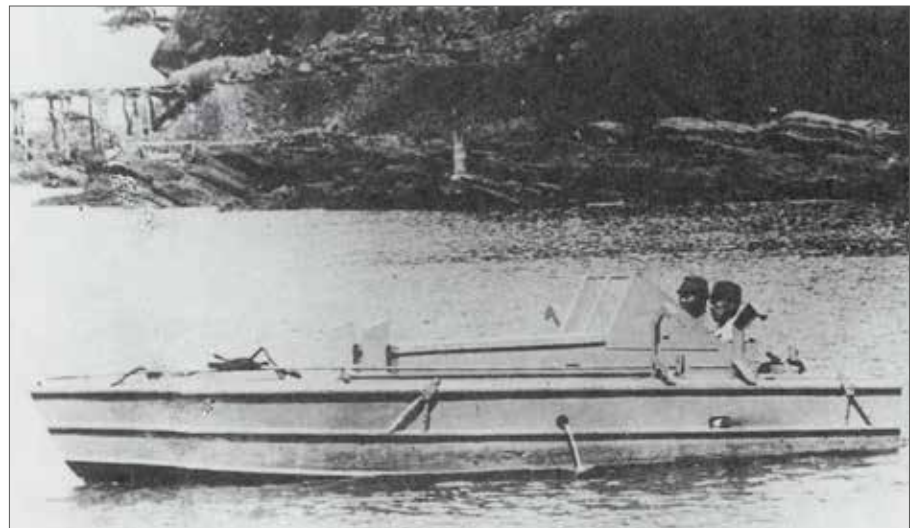
Since it was about 4.8 km away from the hypocenter, the Akatsuki Corp was the only functional military unit remaining in Hiroshima. Upon learning Hiroshima had been destroyed, Commander Bunro SAEKI ordered his entire unit to go to the city less than an hour after the blast, saying, "Even if you have to abandon your main duty, stand up and give aid to the city of Hiroshima." Along with the others, the child soldiers used their Maru-Re and other boats to rush to the city of Hiroshima. Their duties included clearing debris from the streets, caring for the victims, and handling the corpses.

Having prepared for suicide attacks, what did the child soldiers experience in Hiroshima, the city of death? This exhibition explores the mindset of these young soldiers.



Special Cadet Recruitment Poster
Collection of Edo-Tokyo Museum

Approx. 20 minutes from Hiroshima Station (South Exit)
 By Streetcar: Take the streetcar headed for Miyajima-guchi or Eba and get off at Atomic Bomb Dome.
 By bus: Take the Hiroshima Bus bound for Yoshijima and get off at Hondori.
 ※ No parking available.



Training with the Maru-Re

From "Military History of the Maru-Re: Records of the Army's Waterborne Suicide Attacks"

Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims

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Hours: Mar-Jul: 8:30 am to 6 pm
 Aug: 8:30 am to 7 pm (8/5, 8/6: 8:30 am to 8 pm)
 Sep-Nov: 8:30 am to 6 pm
 Dec-Feb: 8:30 am to 5 pm
 Closed: 12/30-31

