

Document 02

Two Views on the War Dead

Whether it be between nations or between peoples, war is a clashing confrontation of hate. While there may be variance in degree, responsibility for it must lie with both sides. But in the last World War, the victorious nation one-sidedly imposed all responsibility for the War on the other and then convened judgment. Even now, they have yet to take responsibility for the barbaric use of the atomic bombs to kill masses of noncombatants. They justify their action by saying that it hastened the end of the War.

Japanese now enjoy the prosperity that has come after recovery from the misery of a one-sided defeat. Yet many are under the illusion that Japan alone bears responsibility for the War. I feel sad when I see the strong tendency toward censuring those of us who were participants in that War.

What should we think of the high-handed attitude the United States takes toward Japan's trade surplus that has arisen with the growth of our economy? The Japan-U.S. relationship is now very close. Nevertheless, U.S. hatred for Japan's economy grows ever stronger. If we consider that in the prewar days Japan and the United States were in a state of extreme political and economic confrontation, it is altogether too easy to imagine how much hatred the U.S. must have had for Japan then.

No people starts wars from preference. But since our country had taken this drastic step, we had no choice but to fight. The young people of today who live in peacetime conditions cannot possibly understand the state of mind of people living in wartime conditions. The various acts of cruelty and ignominy that we are told about were the monstrous acts of war (although we cannot blame them all on war). The acts of the occupying army in former Manchuria and in parts of the home country are also evidence of this.

That is why war is so frightening and so stupid. And it is right to desire that war should never be waged again. For this very reason, I wish to see a reversal of that trend toward spreading irresponsible denunciations against our country's past. We should not treat the deaths of those compatriots who fought so desperately in defense of our nation as no more than the deaths of curs.

—Taguchi Hisago, sixty-seven (m), retired, Fukushima Prefecture

In his letter, Mr. Taguchi says, "Do not treat the deaths of those compatriots who fought so desperately in defense of our nation as no more than the deaths of curs." I think that their deaths have ultimately been "treated like deaths of curs." I sympathize completely with Mr. Taguchi's thought that "war is so frightening and so stupid." I, too, cannot forget those many war dead who sacrificed themselves in the War. I pray from the bottom of my heart for their souls' repose in the other world.

Many who experienced the War and many families of the war dead believe, like Mr. Taguchi, that they "fought desperately in defense of our nation." I can understand their desire to believe that the deaths were not in vain, that they were meaningful. That belief is probably the only thing that keeps them going. How can they ever come to accept the deaths of their beloved husbands and sons? But were their deaths truly meaningful? If the War had been brought to a conclusion earlier, fewer people would have been sacrificed, and the atomic bombs probably would not have been dropped. No, if the War had never been waged, all that would never have happened.

Mr. Taguchi said "they defended our nation." But did they really? A Japan that was being criticized from all over the world had withdrawn from the League of Nations and commenced on its own a war of aggression. While I have no intention of denying my patriotism, I believe that we must draw a sharp line between right and wrong, even when it concerns our own country.

In Germany, Nazi war criminals are being sought out even now. In Japan, in the period before and during the War, education was "education with a purpose." It was geared only toward nurturing people to follow the national authority. The seeds of criticism were not cultivated. So, while I understand people's desire to believe that the war deaths were not in vain, I think the practice of praising the war dead as departed heroes worthy of religious veneration is extremely dangerous. That is treading the same path as teaching the young that discarding one's life for the nation is a praiseworthy act.

Those who died in battle are not special. I believe they are the same as those who died in the air raids and the atomic bombings. Those people who died on the home front had not engaged in killing others. I have no intention of denying individuals the right to worship at Yasukuni Shrine. That is for individuals to determine for themselves and it is their right. But I am opposed to protection of this shrine by the national government.

I hope that the people will take an interest in government and society so that they will never again have to say, as was said at that time, "When I realized what was happening, it was too late."

—Serizawa Nobuo, forty-four (m) company employee, Saitama Prefecture