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Chapter 3

The China War

In 1931, taking advantage of the disunity of China, the Japanese Kwantung Army, already entrenched along its South Manchuria Railway concession, brushed aside local **warlords** and began the formal occupation of **Manchuria**. By 1937, Manchuria—renamed **Manchukuo**—although nominally independent was for all intents and purposes a Japanese colony. Japan's single-minded military leaders hoped to use it as a kind of industrial base plus granary, and as an outlet for Japan's surplus population. Emigration to Manchukuo was encouraged; by the mid 1930s more than a million Japanese colonists were in the region.

As the thirties rolled on, with Japan's trading economy still crippled by world depression, the military became even bolder, trying to add north China to their list of conquests. In July 1937, while practicing night-action tactics near the venerable Marco Polo Bridge (Luguoqiao) on the outskirts of Beijing, a reinforced company of Japanese infantry had a **firefight** with some Chinese troops in the area. Exactly who provoked the shooting remains obscure, but the militant "young officers" clique running the Kwantung Army was quick to seize on this minor skirmish as an opportunity to further aggression. The **small** Japanese force of some 7,000 troops in north China was quickly augmented. More regiments proceeded to occupy the Beijing-Tianjin area. With the encouragement of the high command in Tokyo, the Kwantung Army set out to conquer and occupy north China.

In an effort to strike at a weak point, China's Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek retaliated by sending his best German-trained divisions to assault the Japanese navy's landing forces in their long-established Shanghai enclave. The Japanese army and navy fought back with overwhelming force. Ultimately, almost 250,000 Chinese troops were killed and wounded as the fighting spread beyond Shanghai. The civilian government in Tokyo was as powerless to intervene as it had been earlier in the case of

Manchukuo. In fact, the new Konoe cabinet shifted its support to the military. The Kwantung Army extended its conquests to most of north China, establishing bridgeheads in Shanghai and elsewhere along the coast. The China Incident, as it was now called, had grown into a full-scale war.

Ironically, Japanese diplomats and semiofficial missions continued attempts to make some sort of settlement with the Chinese, despite the ultimate refusal of Prime Minister Konoe Fumimaro to negotiate with the government of Chiang Kai-shek. Many Japanese still believed that China could somehow become assimilated as a kind of supercolony. They hoped that the Japanese would develop a closer relationship with the Chinese than the colonizing Europeans had in the past century and well into this one.

The Kwantung Army had no such peaceable intent. As early as 1931, some army majors and colonels had attempted a massive assassination plot to destroy the entire civilian government. They were only dissuaded by the intervention of a senior general. Anticapitalist as well as antiforeign, they felt that Japan should go through a "Shōwa Restoration"—so called after Emperor Hirohito's Shōwa reign—which would result, ultimately, in a "purified" Japan dominating all of East Asia. The brief but bloody military revolts by young officers in 1932 and 1936, in which government leaders were assassinated, were enough to silence antimilitarist opposition.

The army that marched into China in 1937 was loyal, competent, and indescribably brutal in its performance. Called "the divine sword" by home-front propagandists, the armed forces were destined to conquer China in the interests of what the Japanese people were told was their divine mission. Discipline was administered by the same rough cadre of noncommissioned officers who had beaten and kicked their conscript charges into a tightly run military force back in the regimental depots of the homeland. Yet it is hard to imagine Japanese soldiery running amok in any of the wartime atrocities they perpetrated without either the orders or the tacit encouragement of the officers in charge. With few exceptions, the Japanese officers corps from the generals down trained its men to regard the Chinese they encountered—soldiers and civilians alike—as subhuman enemies. Troops were ordered to live off the land; bringing fire and desolation to Chinese cities and villages, while systematically looting the country for their subsistence. The Imperial Army was called *kōgun*; Chinese referred to it as *kōgun* [*hungjun*]*—the same sound with another character meaning "army of locusts."*

Toward the close of 1937 a large Japanese force moved out of Shanghai and up the Yangzi [Yangtze] River toward Nanjing. By 13 December the city was taken. For several weeks after, the victors carried out a program of mass killing and looting that has few parallels in modern history. While some Japanese units began methodically to massacre Chinese prisoners of

war, others fanned out through the city in an orgy of rape, murder, and pillage. At least 100,000 Chinese soldiers and civilians were killed. Evidence strongly suggests that some 20,000 women were raped. In commemoration ceremonies in 1994, the Chinese, who have long memories, set the death toll in the Rape of Nanjing at 300,000.

Whatever the exact body count, the capture and spoliation of the city offered a scene of horror. American and European missionaries and businessmen who were caught in the city later gave eyewitness reports of these acts of thuggery. (One of the witnesses was General Alexander von Falkenhausen, the German general who had been on loan to Chiang Kai-shek to train troops.) Photographs were surreptitiously taken while the massacre was going on; considerable film footage survived. Given the tight discipline of Japan's military, one must conclude that the Rape of Nanjing was not simply the result of soldiery suddenly gone wild but a deliberately planned program of terror devised by Japanese military commanders. Among them was Lieutenant General Prince Asaka Yasuhiko, a regular army officer of thirty years' service who happened to be Emperor Hirohito's uncle. General Matsui Iwane, the nominal commander of Japanese forces in the area and an advocate of Japanese-Chinese cooperation, was shocked by the deeds committed in his name. Ironically, it was Matsui who was hung for the crime after judgment by the International War Crimes Tribunal in 1946.

Although they felt at first that the War would soon end in their favor, the Japanese army command was increasingly frustrated—first by the refusal of the Chinese to surrender, then by the delaying tactics of Chiang Kai-shek, who ultimately brought his troops back into the western interior and set up a new capital at Chongqing (Chungking). Guerrilla groups sprouted behind the Japanese lines. Atrocities begat counteratrocities. Japanese commanders, provoked by unexpected Chinese resistance, grew ever crueler in the revenge they took on prisoners and civilians who fell into their hands. Their anger was exacerbated by several serious defeats inflicted on them by the Nationalist armies, notably at the battle of Taierzhuang in 1938, and by persistent attacks of Chinese guerrilla troops.

Probably ten million Chinese civilians were killed by the Japanese during this war, which lasted from 1937 to the enforced peace of 1945. Roughly one and a half million Japanese troops were sent to China in those years. Japanese strength on the ground was never less than 850,000. Japanese casualties were heavy, although the care given to the Japanese wounded held down the number killed in action.

As horrible in its way as the Holocaust was in Europe, the Japanese occupation of China continues to this day to spawn bitterness and *recrimi-*

nation. As some of these letters reveal, Japanese soldiers were systematically ordered to commit atrocities ranging from bayonet exercises performed on Chinese prisoners to the vivisection experiments conducted by the infamous Unit 731 in Harbin, whose ghastly work rivaled that done in Nazi concentration camps. Chinese men who survived were drafted by the thousands into the Japanese army to serve as laborers—or more aptly, beasts of burden. The fate of the women was worse. While thousands were impressed, like Korean women before them, into the officially sponsored army “Comfort Corps” (*Ianbu*)—itself nothing more than a network of brutally run brothels—others were indiscriminately raped and killed by soldiers on the march.

The men who perpetrated these deeds were ordinary conscripts. Most of them were farmers, city factory workers, or tradesmen who had never expected to be in China in the first place. Accustomed over the months to the tight discipline of the military and imbued with the idea that the Emperor’s army could do no wrong, they blindly followed orders. Many found what they had to do horrible and distasteful in the extreme, but in the climate of that time, few felt brave enough to protest. As the letters make clear, to speak out against this institutionalized cruelty was sure to bring severe punishment on the protester.

The entry of the United States into the Pacific War seemed for a while to bring hope to the Chinese. Yet, faithful to its policy of concentrating on the European theater, Washington did not at first commit too many resources to the China front. When Claire Chennault, the U.S. Air Force general of “Flying Tigers” fame, vowed that he could beat back the Japanese with airpower alone, General Joseph Stillwell, then commander in chief of the Allied forces in China, strongly advised Chiang Kai-shek against it. “The first thing the Japanese will do,” he warned, “if the air raids begin to hurt, is to advance further and capture the bases. Then you will be pushed back even further than you are now.”

This is exactly what happened. In early 1944 the Japanese army started its sweeping *Ichigō* (Number 1) Operation; Japanese troops surged out from their coastal bases in south China to make inroads deep into Guangxi, Guizhou, and Hunan provinces. The Nationalist armies sustained terrible losses in the course of this operation. But the guerrillas, both nationalist and communist, kept up the pressure. Each raid made local Japanese army commanders angrier and more determined to wreak bloody and indiscriminate vengeance on the Chinese population.

By 1945, when the Russians, by mistaken American invitation, entered the War, Japanese troops found themselves taking a good bit of their own medicine. Although some soldiers returned to Japan from the China War

boastful and arrogant, most brought with them a crushing sense of defeat and a permanent feeling of guilt for the atrocities in which they had participated. No one was anxious to talk about what had happened. Over the years, however, the troops who took part in these punitive expeditions had ample time to reflect on what they had done. The memories were not pleasant ones. The tendency of postwar Japanese citizens and governments has been to play down or even deny the fact that atrocities occurred; to write these letters required courage as well as candor.

The Red Circle Is the Heart; Don't Ever Stab It

In March 1942 a post was fixed in the ground in a corner outside the town in Shan County of Shandong Province. In a hollow next to the post cowered five captured Chinese soldiers, their hands tied behind their backs. They were painfully emaciated and absolutely filthy. Their faces twitched and their bodies trembled.

These prisoners were to be used as targets for bayonet practice by twenty-some raw recruits. During my training period with the **Kōfu** Regiment we used straw dummies as targets. Here on the battlefield they used live human beings. About to stab a human being for the first time in their lives, the new recruits were terrified-their faces sheet white. The tips of their bayonets quivered as they stood ready.

The prisoners were blindfolded and tied to the post. A circle was drawn in red chalk around the area of the heart on their grimy clothes. As the bayonet training began, the instructor bellowed out, "Ready? The red circle is where the heart is. That's the one place you're prohibited to stab. Understood?"

I had thought that the instructor had marked the area to make it easier for the new recruits to stab the heart. But that was my misunderstanding. It was to make the prisoners last as long as possible.

Several minutes later, shrill war cries echoed continuously outside the town. The prisoners, their bodies honeycombed with bayonet stabs, crumpled in a pool of blood.

War had transformed the instructors and the soldiers into frenzied murderers. This abnormal state of mind must be unfathomable to today's young people who haven't experienced war.

Kawano Masato, sixty-seven (m),
restaurant owner, Yokosuka

The Burning of Interpreter Chen: Chinese Eyes

In 1941 our platoon was stationed in a village called **Fuzhuang** Zhen in Hebei Province in China. I was a second-year private at that time. The

platoon leader, Sergeant "A," was using as his personal interpreter a Chinese named Chen. Chen had previously worked in Osaka as an electrician and was good at speaking the Osaka dialect. Small of stature and round of face, Chen made a good impression.

With the outbreak of the Greater East Asia War, army personnel were pulled out of various posts to form a mixed company. This unit was sent out to occupy the British concession in Tianjin. One night when the defenses were thin, our barracks was attacked with trench mortars and machine guns by the Communist Eighth Route Army. The flashes of explosives bursting in the dark were terrifying. With the coming of dawn, the Communist enemy abandoned the attack and retreated.

Around eight o'clock, interpreter Chen came to work as usual. Sergeant "A" called Chen to his office. Binding Chen's hands behind his back, he repeatedly tortured him, insisting that the previous night's attack was due to Chen's passing information to the enemy. The sergeant paid no heed to Chen's protestations that he had been home with his two children. Chen's face rapidly turned purple and swelled up. The sergeant calmly ate his breakfast in front of his disfigured prisoner.

Chen was dragged out to the open space next to the barracks. The local people, worried, watched from a distance. Ordered to guard him, I stood there, bayonet fixed. The sergeant shouted at the peasants, ordering them to gather around. He made an announcement: in reprisal for last night's attack and Chen's betrayal, Chen would be burned at the stake.

The sergeant always carried his revolver in his right hand. Any attempt at escape and he would shoot. Chen was at his mercy. His ankles were tied with rope and he was hung upside down from a log portal. Beneath his head some wood was piled and kerosene was poured on to it. The sergeant ordered soldiers to set fire. Chen hung there, his head and arms dangling down.

As the flames rose, his body twisted and his arms danced like grilled squid legs. That lasted for about thirty seconds. The local people's eyes seemed to be burning with rage at the barbarity of the sight, as Chen's blackened body hung in the smoke. The peasants wept as they placed his body on a plank and carried it away.

In those days the Chinese thought of the Japanese forces as "fearful Eastern devils" [*Dongyang kuizi*]. I heard later from the locals that Chen's two sons had lost their mother as well. They became orphans.

Matsugatani Toshio, sixty-seven (m),
retired, Chiba

The Devil and Buddha Coexist on the Battlefield

Both the Devil and the Buddha exist in war. The Devil enters into people's souls, but human beings must find the Buddha for themselves. The main character in the book *The Harp o/Burma* was someone who found the Buddha.

Five years ago we held our first reunion of wartime buddies. One man who was a new conscript in 1942 commented, "I was grateful to you, the squad leader, for telling me not to go back then." I had forgotten all about the incident.

One day, just after lunch, the private first class on duty notified us, "Assemble the new recruits for roll call." There was to be a stabbing execution of a prisoner on the outskirts of the city. All new recruits were to gather to observe this as a means of building up their nerve. As squad leader and assistant training instructor, I saw no need for this, and didn't allow my men to observe it. This man had recalled that incident to tell me he was grateful. Here was a soldier who had not lost his humanity.

I participated as a company headquarters signals NCO in the Taihang operations of autumn 1943. Thus I was often at battalion headquarters away from my company. I had to lug around with me a large case containing communications instructions and maps. I was armed with a bayonet and 1939-model pistol. Although the night temperatures on the border of Shanxi and Hebei provinces dipped low in September, the sun during the day was as strong as in midsummer.

Entering a village after our forces had passed through, I was about to deliver orders from the battalion commander. I stopped dead in my tracks. A boy about ten years old had fallen down, hit by a rifle bullet. Blood stained the whole front of his body from his chest to his stomach. He was foaming from his mouth. The harsh sun was beating down on his face. No one from the village was in sight.

"I'll make you feel comfortable," I said. I aimed my pistol at his temple and gave him a finishing shot. After making sure that the boy no longer moved, I ran at top speed to catch up with our troops as they moved out. As I ran, I muttered to myself, "It was for the best, it was for the best."

I wish that those who grow up without knowing war can develop a resistance to war.

Mori Ishichi, sixty-seven (m),
company employee, Sendai

“Where’s Daddy?” the POW’s Child Asks

While I was in Ronghe County in Shanxi Province the execution of prisoners of war always took place in a particular spot outside the city gates. **There** was no one around by the muddy Yellow River. In the spring, red flowers bloomed forlornly on the single remaining aronia tree.

The season was still chilly in 1939. Our first prisoner from the Eighth Route Army was pulled into our compound, prodded by the bayonet of a grim-faced Japanese soldier. The young Chinese man appeared to be less than thirty years old. He was leading a three- or four-year-old boy by the hand. The man’s swollen lower lip was dirty from the dust, but his wide forehead and deeply set features seemed to indicate he was a man of learning. The little boy, wailing at being pulled away from his father, had a rice ball put in his little hand and was taken piggyback outside the town by an old conscript on the orders of the company commander.

Even when sentenced to execution by a tiring squad, the man’s expression remained aloof. Silently he groped inside his inner pocket and pulled out an old pocket watch. He attempted to hand this over to the commanding officer with some sort of request. It was rejected. He looked around. Aiming at a broken gravestone, he raised his right hand up high and hurled the watch against it with all his might, smashing it. When he was tied to a thick pillar by a burly soldier, he cried out with a fierce expression on his face and yelled out his insistence that he not be blindfolded. Glared at by eyes flaming with anger, the young first-year private faltered.

At that moment, a noncommissioned officer dashed up energetically, in a probable show of bravado in front of his fellow soldiers, and took aim with his rifle from about three meters away. One shot. Two shots. The sound of the shots echoed in the quiet of the desolate field. The smell of gunpowder filled the air. The prisoner’s face pouring out blood was like a punctured pomegranate. He fell limp.

That evening when I returned in a roundabout way to my office in the state government agency where I worked, I found the little boy leaning against the white wall of my room, playing alone with a bamboo toy. Looking up at my face, he muttered in a lisp, “Where’s Daddy?” This little bird in distress had come to the bosom of the hunter to seek to live. For over six years until the end of the War, this orphan was always at my side and came with me wherever I was posted as a civilian official.

Hirakawa Zenzō, seventy-two (m),
university administrator, Narashino

Germ Warfare and Human Body Experiments

In the autumn of 1943, while I was working as a pharmacologist at the Linfen army hospital in Shanxi Province, Major General Ishii Shirō came to inspect the hospital. He was then the surgeon commanding the First Army Medical Section and was also commander of the infamous Unit 731 of the Kwantung Army in Manchuria.

After the inspection a dinner for Major General Ishii was given by the hospital director and other officers. A documentary film from Unit 731 was shown at the dinner. This film presented a succession of graphic data from experiments on human beings, for use in germ warfare and the treatment of frostbite in cold districts. One wanted to avert one’s eyes. Major General Ishii proudly explained his data to us.*

Also depicted were scenes of the wretched condition of the decimated Japanese forces in the Nomonhan Incident. We saw the surge of Soviet tanks as the sky darkened with Yakovlev fighter planes. We saw the exhumation of the body of Japanese ace pilot Chief Warrant Officer Shinozaki from its burial on the steppe.

Major General Ishii reportedly boasted that he would become a full general as an army surgeon.

When I look back at the brutal treatment given to military prisoners of war and the whole population of China after the invasion of China, I cannot but feel that the time-honored courteousness of the Japanese people and our sense of chivalry had sunk so low that Japanese soldiers had been reduced to a group of madmen. It is true that the state of mind of those involved in a kill-or-be-killed war is abnormal. Japanese, however, were particularly prone to flaunt a sense of superiority over the Chinese. Even in hospitals behind the lines there were cases where suspected Chinese spies were subjected to experimentation in surgical operations. The purpose was to improve the clinical skills of unseasoned young army doctors! For some reason, while flattering themselves that they were the world’s best peoples, the Germans and the Japanese were capable of outrageous behavior.

● Ishii’s Unit 731 performed a ghastly series of vivisections on Chinese captives throughout the War, for the alleged purpose of testing human endurance in a variety of situations. Equally appalling were the experiments on American POWs and others conducted at Kyūshū Imperial University by Japanese army and civilian doctors.

Regrettably, not **once** were we taught about the International Red Cross Convention during our military service.

Kimizuka Kiyoshi, sixty-seven
(m), corporate advisor, Narashino

Mystery of Atrocity on Zhujiang Riverbank

At the end of 1944, we departed Guangzhou and headed for Liuzhou in a **fleet** of small boats going upstream on the Zhujiang, five or six men to a craft. Our unit was an aviation detachment charged with staking **out** a position on a mountain and spotting enemy aircraft. We planned to obtain our equipment in Liuzhou and take up our posts. We passed by after the infantry units had been through. All the hamlets on the riverside **had been** laid waste. Most lay in ruins. The bodies of Japanese soldiers had been dumped on the riverside, and the combat dead floated in the slack water.

We were just about to reach our campsite for that night. Rocky mountains ranged along both sides of the river, making it look just like a Chinese ink painting. We made quick progress, telling **each other** that we **would be** helpless if we were shot at by machine guns from any of those rocky peaks. Just then we discovered what looked like **the** bodies of a dozen or so **Japanese** soldiers on a sandy hill on the right bank. Putting our boat ashore, we saw that there were a total of sixteen Japanese soldiers placed about a meter apart in two neat rows. Around them were scattered hats, torn coats, and cartridge cases from infantry rifles.

It looked as if two or three months had passed since their deaths. What made us catch our breath were the signs of violation on the dead bodies. All of the bodies were naked, their eyes gouged out, their noses and ears sliced off, and their stomachs **cut** open with their entrails pulled out. What was even more grotesque was that about ten centimeters of **the** flesh of their thighs had been cut off, exposing their white bones. Uniformly their left hands were cut off at the wrists and wrapped in white bandages. A short distance away on the sand **were the** dead **bodies** of a young Chinese man and woman, but they were dressed. The only wound on each was a single stab in the heart.

Feeling the eeriness, we quickly went back to our boat and followed our fellow soldiers. That night our conversation was full of theories about the

atrocity we had seen. Those soldiers must have been killed on the sand by enemy fire. Their flesh must have been sliced up in the hope that they wouldn't be able to walk even if they were to come back to life. Their left hands were missing because Japanese soldiers who came across the bodies cut them off to perform a memorial service. And the young Chinese man and woman must have worked for the Japanese forces. These were our conclusions. What I will never forget is the name Kurokoma embroidered on a hat left on that spot.

Nishimura Susumu, sixty-nine (m),
high school teacher, Shizuoka
Prefecture

Arranging for a Prisoner Couple to Meet

It was before the start of the Pacific War. During the operations in **Shanxi** Province in northern China I was working on routine matters in the rear area. One day I was called over by the **first** lieutenant of the information section. Some prisoners had arrived from the front, and one of them was asking for **something**. The lieutenant said that he had no interpreter and no way of finding **out** what the prisoner wanted.

I **started** by trying to communicate in writing, but I soon found out that the prisoner could speak English. My English wasn't too reliable, but it was better than my Chinese. I was able to find out the following.

He was a communications technician married to a woman doctor and had a loving family. When he went into military service, his wife became a military doctor, taking along their **one-year-old** child. He sobbed that he had lost sight of his wife and child in the disarray following the night attack. He was beside himself. He constantly heard the sound of his child's voice in his ears.

I also had a wife and child. "Shouldn't you have prepared yourself once you were called to duty?" I asked. He replied, "Your family is in Japan. If you die in the War they will get proper compensation. This is a war zone. There is no protection. Have you thought about that difference?" His way of speaking was blunt, but his expression showed no fear or hatred.

"I can understand your position," I said. "I am just a low-ranking soldier, so I will report what you said to my superior officer and do what I can for you." He nodded and calmed down.

Several days later, the woman military doctor and child arrived. The Chinese prisoner had already been transferred. When I told the first lieutenant that I wanted to take them to him as quickly as possible, he made an immediate decision. Armed with a single bayonet and a special-issue handgun. I was given the duty of transporting five prisoners.

This first lieutenant was a man of few words. But his casual way of getting to the heart of others' feelings while not showing off his rank let his men know they could rely on him.

Blessed with good weather, we safely reached our destination. After delivering my charges, I stole a brief glance at the emotional reunion of the prisoner's family before I turned back to return to my unit. I felt grateful for the peace of mind I gained in setting down my burden. That day's sunset was beautiful.

I was concerned about the later whereabouts of the prisoner and his family, but my fate was also in doubt. No matter what incidents were to occur, my impression of the sunset would not change, I was sure. I wonder if we can't bring about a world in which as many people as possible can live in ease and die with a sense of fulfillment.

Kuribayashi Itarō, seventy-five (m),
former high school teacher, Otaru

Don't Ever Get Caught Again

A prisoner of war was sent all tied up to Baofeng in Henan Province, where I had been posted from regimental headquarters in Lushan. We low-grade noncommissioned officers had received no word on this prisoner. For the time being we sat him down on the earthen floor of the noncommissioned officers' room. When supertime came around I sent to the mess for the same food as mine. Telling the prisoner to taste for poisoning as he ate, I loosened his bonds. He must not have eaten for quite a while, for he gobbled up his food. Expecting some order to come the next day, I posted a night watch so that he wouldn't escape-I told the prisoner not to even think of escaping.

The next morning, I received orders from First Lieutenant "T" to execute the prisoner. If I took the prisoner to the outskirts of the village, the local residents would see us. As this had been enemy territory until a few months

ago, there might be some enemy soldiers among the local inhabitants. It was obvious that executing the prisoner would incite the negative feelings of the inhabitants. At that time there were fifty soldiers under First Lieutenant "T" in the Baofeng garrison. These were all castoffs or rejects collected from each company. The three noncommissioned officers, including myself, had all been wounded and just released from the hospital. So we were in no condition to be sent to the front lines.

Among the prisoners were two Koreans, one of whom couldn't speak Japanese. With the first prisoner in a horse-drawn cart, we went outside the town. Many of the local inhabitants lined the road, watching us with hatred in their eyes. It sent a chill down my spine. I thought I could take care of the prisoner by a large tree and moved ahead toward it. As I asked the prisoner where he was from, how old he was, and why he was captured, I felt compassion for this man, who was my own age. I decided to let him go. My self-justification was that by letting him go I'd be getting the local inhabitants to calm down. This might insure the safety of the Baofeng garrison.

I told the prisoner that I was letting him go, so he should never return to this place again. He should go and live a healthy life elsewhere. He wept as he repeated his thanks, "Xie xie." I aimed my rifle at the sky and shot three times and made my way back. When I turned around, the prisoner waved and bowed to me over and over again. Then ran off like a streak of lightning.

When I reached the village, everyone welcomed me with smiles, saying, "Gentleman, thank you for your trouble." I don't know how they had seen what I had done.

This happened in March 1945.

Uchida Keiji, sixty-six (m),
camera shop owner, Odawara

Unforgettable--the Blood Spurting From That Chinese Boy's Chest

I was doing Christian missionary work in Rehe Province in Manchukuo in May 1945 when I was drafted and posted to a guard unit at Shanhai Guan. A single company of about a hundred men was posted to a place with

facilities for a permanent regimental station. Thus we had **everything** in abundance in terms of food and equipment and could eat as much as we wanted. Each day was uneventful, with no enemy attacks or punitive expeditions.

One day, two peasant boys were **captured** and brought to our post. There had been no trouble to speak of. Yet the garrison commander tried to create an incident so he could claim credit for his actions. At that time I had been assigned to be **the interpreter** for the unit, so I was ordered right away to interrogate the two boys. I found out that they were only local peasant boys--two brothers aged eighteen and sixteen. They had no ideological leanings, and it was obvious to me that they were not underground activists for the Eighth Route Army. I told my sergeant that the commander should release them.

But the commander's idea was to punish them as underground operators for the Eighth Route Army, whether they were or not. In this way he could have it noted as an achievement for him and his company. My suggestion was rejected. That night the boys were held in a cage hastily built to serve as a detention cell. It was in the crawl space under the guardhouse. Guards **were** put on duty day and night, but the guard on night duty, accustomed to peaceful conditions, must have dozed off. Late that night the two boys broke out of their cage and ran away. The flustered guard chased after them and captured the younger boy, but the older brother escaped into the darkness.

Angered by this, the commander called all the troops to the back yard early the next morning and ordered the boy's execution in the presence of the entire unit. Under the baking hot rays of the August sun, the boy was made to strip to his waist and sit on the edge of a deeply dug pit. Suddenly the commander said to me, "Give him his last words in Chinese." I had been staring at the commander, desperately trying to keep from loudly shouting out, "He's not an underground activist! He's just a naive peasant boy. He should be released!" A strong voice called out in my head, *You're a missionary; nren't you? You should save this innocent boy.*

But if I had raised my voice it was a sure thing that **the frenzied commander** and the **other officers in charge** would immediately execute me as a traitor as well. My mind was in disarray. My body shook. At the commander's voice. I staggered like a sleepwalker to the boy and knelt down.

During my interrogation of him the previous day, I had given my word to him, saying, "You are innocent. I'll do my utmost to get you **released**." He fixed his eyes on me. What was I to tell him? In Chinese, I said, "I was powerless and couldn't save you. I'm a coward and can't do anything. All I

can do is pray to my God. You should pray to the god you believe in, too." Until **then** he had been calling out "*Maaya! Maaya!*" [Mother! Mother!] but now he closed his eyes and fell silent.

The youngest soldier in the company was ordered to stab the boy to death, but holding his bayonet at the ready, he was unable to move. "I'll do it," said a sergeant, and jabbed the point of his bayonet into the boy's naked chest. The boy's face paled, and blood spurted from his chest.

I still feel a deep sense of grief and guilt, and I am unable to forget the vivid color of the boy's blood.

Futabashi **Masao**, seventy-two (m),
preschool director, **Numazu**

Stories About Nanjing Shocked a Young Girl's Heart

In the early fall, just after Japan's surrender, I was a third-year student at a girls' middle school in Kishiwada. It was the most **difficult** of times. School was closed. There was no more food left in the neighboring farming community. We were barely staying alive by eating the vines of squash and sweet potatoes that we cultivated beside the road. My mother and I went to Niigata to buy some rice. After riding a train so crowded that even the lavatories and luggage shelves were jammed with people, we finally arrived at a farming village. Because there was no glass **left** in the windows of the train, soot from the locomotive blackened the passengers' faces when we went through tunnels. We traded some money and our best kimonos for a little rice.

That night we stayed in a cheap village lodging house. Everyone slept in one large room under a huge mosquito net. I was beginning to fall asleep, exhausted, when **five** or six men started drinking. They were all recently discharged soldiers who were now professional black **marketeers**. Each **bragged** about his exploits in the War.

It was unbearable to listen to them. They laughed coarsely about the many Chinese women they had raped, and one told about seeing how far into a woman's body his arm would go, pushing his arm all the way in up to the armpit.

I shot up off the mat like a windup doll and tried to rush out of the room, tearing at the mosquito netting. In a panic, my mother grabbed me, warning

me to stay quiet because who knows what might happen. I kept quiet. And still the men went on and on.

"Where was that?"

"Nanjing, we had the most fun in Nanjing. We could do anything we wanted and steal anything we wanted."

They said that when the soldiers got tired and hard to command during marches, **their superior officers** would **urge** them to **persevere** a bit more, promising them that they could do anything they wanted in the next town.

I remembered joining in **the** parade to celebrate the fall of Nanjing, waving a handmade flag. Now I couldn't bear it. I had used things we needed dearly to fill comfort bags to send our soldiers; I had made talismans and thousand-stitch belts; I had written letters nearly every day to thank and encourage our soldiers. I was so shocked by what I heard that I couldn't sleep at all that night. I don't think all our soldiers were like those men. My uncle was a kind man who died young at Guadalcanal.

Those soldiers who did such **terrible** things in Nanjing and in other places are now probably traveling and enjoying themselves, playing croquet in seniors groups. I beg of you, please write the truth about the War.

Ozaki Junko, fifty-five (f),
housewife. Yokohama

Death in the Water During Night March

On 14 May 1944, our Twenty-seventh Army Division was continuing its march toward the crossing point at Changtai Guan, by the Huai River, along the Beijing-Hankou line in Henan Province. Torrential rains had fallen since that morning. The roads had turned to mud and the route toward our destination was made extremely **difficult**. Having won many battles in **some** twenty days as part of the Beijing-Hankou action, the soldiers were all exhausted.

The night march in the pouring rain was conducted in pitch darkness. It might **have** been possible to take refuge during daytime had the commander so decided, but orders are coldhearted. As the companies ahead bogged down, the companies at the rear were brought to a standstill, overflowing the highway. The water from the break in the embankment of the Huai River flowed over the road. It was hip-deep in the low-lying places. The temperature normally reaches summertime levels in May in central

China, but the abnormal weather caused near-freezing conditions. Valuable time elapsed. By the time each rear company started to evacuate the area, it was too late.

A mere few lines in the war history tell of this event in which 166 men were lost, drowned and frozen during one night's march. This incident was reported in the newspapers, but these deaths were treated as deaths from disease contracted at the front.

It was unbearable to look at the bodies like mud dolls on the road and in the lowlands the following morning. There wasn't a single officer among the dead. Most were new recruits and soldiers who handled the horses, those who were most exhausted from being driven the hardest. Overwork caused their deaths as much as the flood and the cold.

Matsumura Tatsuo, sixty-eight (m),
former company employee, Tokyo

Two Women Soldiers With Musical Instruments

I think it was about June of 1943. A reporter in the Jinan bureau of *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper, I was stationed as a war correspondent during **opera-**tions on the Shandong Peninsula in a village in Sushui County. The commanding officer in Jinan was Lieutenant General Dobashi of the **Twelfth Army** corps.

We were told that some women soldiers had been captured and that we should attend their interrogation by the company commander. Two girls were held in a room in a shabby mud-walled house. When we arrived, they were brought out to face the commander. They appeared to be about twenty years old and had fine-featured faces. These girls would be quite pretty if they wore normal clothes, I thought. As it was, their light blue uniforms were dusty and dirty, and their faces lacked color.

"Where and how were you captured? Which unit are you with? As women **soldiers** what were your duties? You don't even have any rifles, but do you still call yourselves **soldiers**?"

Among the war correspondents was a fellow whose Chinese was good, and he interpreted. The women soldiers showed no timidity and answered **readily** without any appearance of fear. Their voices were lovely.

"We are with the Eighth Route Army and our commanding **officer** is Xu

Xiangqian. We belong to the XX squad of 00 company. Our duties are to perform drama and music. We carry no weapons because our duties are to entertain and encourage the soldiers in the unit and to win over the masses. We carry musical instruments." They showed us their Chinese flute and fiddle.

"Commander, it's best to release them. I can't see that releasing them would have any effect on the overall situation," I said. The commander answered, "You're right." The two women soldiers said, "*Xie xie*," and pressed their palms together in thanks.

I must have heard the women's names, but I have forgotten what they were. I wonder if they were able to return safely to their unit.

Takahashi **Rentarô**, seventy-eight (m), former newspaper reporter, Hanamaki

A Memorial to Three War Buddies

On 28 December 1937, a force of twenty-five men led by a platoon commander was dispatched to a village in Lingshi County, Shanxi Province, for pacification activity and to scout enemy movements. While we were resting, we were suddenly hit by a concentrated attack. Enemy soldiers from a mountaintop to the west strafed us with machine guns. The enemy numbered over a hundred. Deciding that we were at too much of a disadvantage to counterattack, the platoon leader retreated and assembled his men in a safe location.

A roll call indicated that three were missing. The interpreter stated that "A" and "B" were standing guard, while "C" was returning fire from the roof of a house. We waited for them, but they didn't return. Dusk was falling. Fearing that staying put might lead to more casualties, we started back. We took a long detour without stopping to sleep or rest and reached our defense post the next morning.

At battalion headquarters, a rescue unit of three hundred men led by the battalion commander was assembled and immediately set off. Reaching the village **where** the attack had occurred the day before, they made a search. They found out that our three fellow soldiers had been taken prisoner by the

enemy and their weapons and ammunition had been snatched from them. In the -10° centigrade cold, they were stripped of their army uniforms and, hands tied behind their backs, they were massacred. It was unbearable to look at the numerous scars of beatings and stabbings on their bodies.

Their war buddies knelt down and wept at how painful and wrenching it must have been for them. This killing of human beings who are close together--this is what war is. Though they were fighting for our country, I wonder if any of the soldiers who witnessed this had a liking for the War. Didn't they feel at heart that, if they could, they would like to quit and **go** home? I'm sending this in as a memorial for the repose of the souls of the three soldiers.

Tanaka **Norio**, sixty-eight (m), retired, Mie Prefecture

As Proof of Repentance

"Stories About Nanjing Shocked a Young Girl's Heart" [pp. 75-76, above] was a reproach, as well as a demand for some response from the generation that experienced the battlefield. Finding out the shameful reality--such a far cry from the image of the imperial forces cherished in her pure girlish heart--she must have been greatly shocked, particularly during the unsettled time **after** Japan's defeat.

I was also sent to the Chinese front in 1939. We were told that we were to give up our lives for our country and not expect to return. I was attached to a unit **full** of veterans. They had taken part in many engagements in various places since their unit had landed in Shanghai in the face of the enemy. The following three points were immediately impressed on our minds: (1) if we don't kill, we will be killed; (2) the lives we have today we may not have tomorrow; (3) even if we can eat today we may starve tomorrow--one night a prince, the next night a pauper.

Although there may have been some differences due to an individual's rationality and nature, I think this instinctive way of thinking was held in common by all soldiers. No one dressed it up as a holy war for peace in Asia. It was a place where impulsive acts and massacres were committed. It was only natural that the propaganda directed at the homeland, which glorified militarism, was in sharp variance to the reality of military forces

invading another country. War itself is most brutal and wretched.

Even so, by the time I was sent to war, military discipline had become strict, so there were no cases like the stories of Nanjing. Yet battlefield surroundings change people. Don't we all have things, whether many or few, that we don't want to recall? We are probably thinking that at this point we not only don't wish to brag about our experiences, but we also don't want people to pick at our old wounds. People may think that we take this casually. But my proof of repentance is to pledge my opposition to war with emphatic feeling and to search my soul about the war of aggression that caused such immense damage to another country.

Inoue Hitoshi, sixty-eight (m),
company owner, Tokyo

Imperial Army Comfort Women

In 1938 I was conscripted in an emergency call-up to the transport regiment in Hiroshima. In the following year, 1939, I was assigned to the Thirty-ninth Division, took intensive training in the Chinese language, and joined the invasion battle of Yichang. Each troop movement was almost always followed by a group of women from Korea. Tucking their hems up high, they balanced their single suitcases on their heads and trudged along, trailing after the marching forces.

When there was a break in the fighting, it was time for the engineers to rig up a rush-mat enclosure. Practically all of the houses were destroyed. It seemed strange that only the tobacco fields were bright green. The long queue of soldiers outside the rush huts contrasted weirdly with the roving sentries carrying fixed bayonets. After an hour or so passed, there would be a trench mortar attack from the Chinese forces. A trumpet would sound the general alarm. Trousers still lowered, soldiers would run helter skelter. The women in the rush-mat huts, used to these attacks, immediately threw themselves face down on the ground, using their suitcases for cover. Some were killed by stray bullets, but the military took no notice.

Their armbands reading "Imperial Forces Comfort Women" still dirty,

once again they would trail silently behind the marching troops. The soldiers put a bit of their dreams in their brief interludes with the comfort women between battles. While our forces were on standby status in Jingmen, I reported this scene in a mimeographed newsletter called *Advance Guard*. The next day I caught hell from the military police, but the comfort women read it avidly. The women who survived the War must be grandmothers by now.

Kaneko Yōichi, sixty-nine (m),
retired, Yamaguchi Prefecture

After Live Experiment

With the start of the Sino-Japanese Incident in 1937, I landed in Shanghai in the face of the enemy as a raw recruit. Since then I was part of the central China operations, literally walking one step of 75 centimeters at a time, pushing into Nanjing, Xuzhou, Dankou, and Yichang. This happened when I was a member of the pacification unit in Xinyang, north of Hankou. I was gathering intelligence on the enemy and working on pacification of the local inhabitants. One day, a Chinese who was thought to be an enemy spy was sent to our unit. He was said to have been caught on the advice of a local informant. He was tortured but refused to confess. Finally, he was used as experimental material for the military doctors and veterinarians. They injected air into his blood vessels.

In a cave halfway up a mountain medics injected air into his vein. We watched the air bubbling in as the blood vessel bulged out. He just lightly coughed and didn't die. The veterinary officer cocked his head, saying that a horse dies right away from this. After about thirty minutes, they decided to stab him to death.

The Chinese man said something before he was stabbed to death. I asked the interpreter later and found out that he had said, "*An hao ren.*" These words meant that he was a good person and not a spy.

Yokoyama Tsuneza, seventy-two
(m), former civil servant,
Shizuoka Prefecture

The Chanting MP Buddhist: My Grandfather's Teachings

I was **born** in a family of successive generations of fervent followers of the Nenbutsu Buddhist sect. As my father had died when I was very young, I grew up under the influence of my grandfather. When I was departing for the Wuhan front as a reserve conscript, my **grandfather** came to see me off at the station and handed me an envelope, saying, "Read this with care after you have a chance to feel settled." I took it out to read when I was alone on the deck of the troopship as we crossed the East China Sea.

"Fate allowed us to be connected as grandfather and grandson for twenty-some years," he had written, "but we must be prepared for this to be our parting in this life. As we have had the good fortune to be **born** in a family of believers of this blessed sect, it would be most **regrettable** if we are parted in the hereafter. Let us intend to go together to the Land of Happiness by **believ-**ing in **the** Original Vow of the **Amida** Buddha. . . . Consider the place you fall to be Paradise and advance along with prayers to **Amida**."

My view of life and death during my military **service** was determined by these words. I had no need for a thousand-stitch belt or a **sacred amulet**. Running over to the first enemy soldier I sniped at, I saw that he was a naive-looking raw recruit clutching some communications gear. What came rushing out of my mouth were the words "*Namu Amida Butsu*" ["I take my refuge in **Amida** Buddha"]. As a member of the military organization, I dutifully obeyed the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors and the Field Service Code, but I was never **able** to believe in them. This was because since before that time my belief in the Buddha transcended life and death as the foundation of my soul.

When I was reassigned to the military police and was given a private room in **Nanjing**, I copied the Nenbutsu onto a piece of straw paper with brush and ink, put photographs of my parents below it, and tacked this up on my wall. Using this as a substitute for a Buddhist altar, I offered my morning and evening prayers. One commander on his inspection tour even bowed deeply before my paper altar when he greeted me. I did not succumb to the temptations of money, women, or desire for glory so **readily** available to military police in an occupied territory. My grandfather passed away shortly after I **left** for the front.

Ishii Hisao, seventy (m), farmer,
Gifu

Despicable Acts Against an Old Woman

My unit was the fourth platoon of the 108th Independent Infantry Battalion's Machine Gun Company in the Fifty-eighth Division. We were posted to **the** first company in May 1942 and entered Zhangjiagou, central China. On New Year's Eve that year, the main force of the company led by first company commander Captain **Kōriyama** was suddenly mobilized on a punitive expedition. The night air was piercingly cold after a rainfall.

About 5 A.M. the following morning, New Year's Day, we arrived in a village three kilometers from the enemy position. We immediately prepared for battle. The heavy-weapons unit left the packhorse unit there and mounted an attack. But not one shot was fired back. The enemy camp was deserted. It was a silvery world of heavy frost as far as the eye could see. We were instructed to bow in the direction of the Imperial Palace to pay our New Year's respects from afar. The company took a long rest period of one hour, during which we had breakfast.

However, the packhorse unit of our machine-gun squad was nowhere around. The **packhorse** unit follows directly behind the advancing attack unit; the attack unit loads equipment not immediately necessary for the attack onto the **pa&horses** just before it goes into action. The machine-gun platoon was disgraced. The normally smiling face of our platoon commander, Second Lieutenant Tsurutome, turned red with rage. That face looked like three monkeys' red rear ends bunched together.

He gave me orders, saying, "Private Kushige (my former name), lead those guys over here, on the run." Carrying my revolver with me, I began to run, slipping on the frozen puddles. When I finally reached the village, I could hardly believe what was happening there. "Hey, Kushige, since you've come all this way, see what's going on." The platoon orderly led me to the doorway of a house.

The soldiers had dragged an old woman from her sickbed and had pressed her to undress. It appeared that the old woman had stayed alone in the village in order to protect her house even if her life depended on it. The soldiers threatened to set fire to her house and, in the bitter cold, took the clothes off **the** lower half of her body. Making her sit on a chair, they picked at her private parts with their swords. As she bled, the old woman trembled with fear.

I became **agitated** and yelled out, "You idiots! How would you **feel** if she was your mother?" At the same time, I handed her the trousers that

they had taken off. The color returned immediately to her face.

It was New Year's Day, but thanks to the behavior of the five soldiers in the packhorse unit, the platoon leader ordered us to fast all day. Of course he also fasted. All of us felt about to faint.

Uchara Masao, sixty-six (m),
retired, Ōmuta

Death in Battle: A Korean Squad Commander

I pray every morning and evening to a small memorial tablet on the Buddhist altar in my home. This has gone on since my demobilization in December 1947. On that handmade tablet is written "Army Sergeant Suzukawa Natsue." He was my subordinate and he was from Korea.

On 2 March 1945, our unit encountered the Chinese Nationalist forces at a village called Daxin Zhuang in Shandong Province. Getting the jump on the enemy, the Japanese forces laid siege to the main force of the enemy detachment in the village. At about 3 P.M. my company charged their position as Suzukawa, the squad leader, climbed onto a roof to give his commands. Just at that moment his chest was struck by a single bullet, which killed him immediately, and he fell from the roof. In that instant the late afternoon sun shone on the brilliant red streaks of his fresh blood seeping into the mud wall. His body lay below.

Someone said, "Squad Leader Suzukawa was fond of Ishii, wasn't he?" Ishii was a first-year recruit under Suzukawa's command. He had trained Ishii, who had died in battle early in the War. I could well understand Suzukawa's feelings of loss and rage.

For over forty years I have not been able to forget Suzukawa. Of course I remember the circumstances of his death, but also branded in my mind are his everyday expressions. And when I think of his emotions at having to carry a gun and die fighting for another country, I am haunted by a complex sense of remorse. I wonder how his parents lived. No doubt they received no compensation for his death.

Hirata Yūichi, sixty-six (m),
former elementary school teacher,
Kumamoto Prefecture

"Neither Side Wants to Kill the Other"

In response to a request—"pleasant memories and experiences from the battlefield"—I would like to provide an anecdote showing a human touch.

Soon after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese Incident, the South Manchuria Railway Orchestra received orders to entertain the troops at the front lines and entered a village near Datong that was famous for its stone Buddhist images of Yungang. Although this was the most advanced position of the Japanese forces, near Inner Mongolia, it was only a small unit of thirty or forty men. The unit commander was a slightly built man about thirty years old who had been a schoolteacher. The village comprised a mere fifty or sixty houses, located on a slight rise. About forty or fifty meters below was a small unit of Chinese Nationalist troops. Despite the fact that each side knew of the other, they had not shot at each other for over half a year. It was a surprise to me that if our forces threw down some cigarettes to them, they would throw some fried sweets to us. The unit commander smiled guilelessly, saying, "Neither side wants to kill the other."

A performance featuring the orchestra was organized. A stage was erected in the village square from desks and boxes covered with straw mats. Several mats were laid out for the audience. The local residents streamed out with pleased faces to sit on the mats. Children, women, old people--the entire community no doubt--showed up. Our soldiers had to stand around the edges to watch.

"I wanted to show these unusual musical instruments to the local people," the commander said in a moving way.

I have no way of knowing what happened to this unit and the village. But I put this heartwarming scene in the context of the War that I experienced.

Fushimi Yoshio, seventy-nine (m),
former South Manchuria Railway
employee, Kasukabe

A Warmhearted Commander

In 1938 our infantry unit prepared to be sent to the battle front on the continent. We were reviewed for tactical efficiency by the platoon leader.

Our second lieutenant was a conscript officer just out of cadet training. About eight years older than the men, he looked irritatingly clumsy, even to those of us who had barely managed to learn what we were taught as first-year conscripts. In front of his subordinates, who were lined up at attention at dusk on the snowy drill ground, he was **vehemently reprimanded** for his lack of leadership ability by the battalion commander, a man noted for his courage and **initiative**. Our lieutenant's epaulettes trembled and his saber quivered. A wave of apprehension **flitted** across the minds of the soldiers who were about to head to the battlefield under his command. We wondered what would happen to us under such a commander.

We were sent to the front in China. Here also, our platoon, led by this mild-mannered lieutenant, was viewed askance by the careerist company commander and shunned by the other platoons. Yet in battle, the soldiers showed fearless bravery. In each battle, we soldiers, led by our squad leaders, would leave our lieutenant behind and storm the enemy camp to foil the company commander. Complaining in his heavily accented voice that "my soldiers won't obey my commands," our lieutenant had entirely lost his dignity as a superior officer. But we subordinates had seen through to his true state of mind: he did not want to get any of us killed.

During the forty-some years since the War's end, we have been overjoyed at his attendance at our annual reunion of wartime buddies. Having been promoted to captain by the end of the War, he remained an **officer** who was incapable of being pompous. He was just a good **fellow** soldier. Forced to wear a stiff military uniform, even though his command abilities as a military officer were clumsy, he **held** his subordinates together by his warmheartedness. It was this that enabled them to display boldness in action.

Senga Tōjū, seventy (m),
company executive, Nagoya

Told to Grasp a Living Heart

Going up the Yangzi River, I alighted at Jiujiang. Like Arita in Kyūshū, it was a pottery town, but the roofs of the buildings had been blown off by Japanese bombs. Pieces of pottery were strewn everywhere as if military

boots had trampled on them. Crushing the pottery shards, I walked for twenty minutes and arrived at a building said to have been the barracks for Chiang Kai-shek's forces. Across the large training ground from the nurses' quarters where we were housed was a series of target circles, and further beyond **rose Lushan**.

Taking my orders from the medical corpsman, I started providing treatment and giving injections. When the bandages of the evacuated wounded were taken off, we found that their flesh was full of pus and maggots. On the mornings after night duty, I would go to throw out the contents of the lovely flower vases picked up from the town, which we used as bedpans.

An old man was brought to our quarters. We all took to calling him Ni-ni. He brought us our meals by the bucket and cleaned the hallways and stairs for us. In the barracks a woman helped with the soldiers' laundry and cleaning. She had a six- or seven-year-old boy, and reminded of the children they had left behind in Japan, the soldiers would give the boy caramels from their care packages. They fondly called him Li-li.

There was always a soldier with a fixed bayonet guarding the entrance to the barracks. If he thought that the Chinese who entered didn't bow properly, he would give them a double slap in the face. As this was an everyday occurrence, I became numb to this behavior.

One day I received a notice to go to observe heart surgery from the person in charge of the emergency operation room. Told by the army surgeon to feel the heart, I realized for the first time how strong a heartbeat is. When I left the operating room, there were two more Chinese covered by blankets and seated on chairs. I couldn't tell their gender. This was vivisection. My heart aches each time I recall this. I wonder if I should have written this; perhaps I should have kept it in my heart forever.

Yamaki Tamotsu, seventy-four(f),
former nurse, Hachioji

Tomorrow's Mountains in Steep Taihang

In May 1941, my first posting was to the battle at Zhongyuan. As a **mountain** artillery soldier in the attack forces, I crossed over the Taihang **mountain** range by foot, leading a horse carrying a caisson loaded with ammunition. I was a first-class private in the spring of my twenty-second

year. The newspapers of the time reported, "Mountains yesterday, mountains today, and mountains tomorrow in the steep grades of Taihang." To fight meant to walk. I scrambled up one mountain and then another, biting my lip. My army boots tore. When it rained I covered up with a poncho and continued to drive forward.

No matter how far we **penetrated**, we didn't encounter the enemy. A mere foot soldier, I had no way of knowing what the big picture of war operations was, but the Japanese army was slowly tightening its iron ring encircling the **enemy**. As the drive across the mountains was so hurried, our supplies couldn't catch up to us. The unit gradually began to starve. We would slurp up a handful of rice made into gruel and dissolve powdered miso paste in hot water to stave off starvation. Burdened with their loads of disassembled heavy gun carriages on their backs, the army horses stood with difficulty, shaking from salt deprivation.

We were single-minded. Dismissing all other thoughts, our hearts were emblazoned with just one word: *homeland*. As we got close to the front lines, the heavily wounded from the infantry units were brought down by stretcher one after another. Those who had died in combat were covered by a tarp and carried on the swaying backs of horses to the rear.

Our unit finally pushed our way deep into Shanxi and charged into a hamlet called Xiyangcun, if I recall correctly. We were astonished by the many rifles that were dug up from the ground in that village. These had the chrysanthemum crest clearly carved into them: they were the weapons of Japanese troops. A unit had advanced into this remote **area** of Shanxi **before** us and had met a crushing defeat. One of our units had returned to earth along with their rifles without anyone knowing about it and without making a mark on history. Looking up to the heavens, we prayed for the souls of those unfortunate fellow soldiers.

Narita Takeo, sixty-nine (m),
company employee, Kawasaki

The Forceful Last Will of a Fallen Enemy Soldier

At the end of May of 1940, Japanese forces **massed** on the eastem bank of the Hanshui tributary to the Yangzi River. Undaunted by the enemy's barrage of heavy mortars and machine-gun fire, Japanese troops began a furious charge to

cross the river and head for Yichang, their destination. The advance was so sudden that some units were bombed by mistake by our own aircraft.

Three or four days into the push across the river, I came across the dead body of a fleeing Chinese soldier, lying face up on a footpath between paddy fields. An infantryman right behind me shouted, "Hey, this one's still alive." I turned around as he said, "Hell, I'll put him out of his misery," and aimed the bayonet attached to his rifle at the heart of the Chinese soldier. At that moment, the Chinese soldier grabbed the blade pointed at his own heart and, summoning up his last bit of strength, refused to let go. The infantryman could neither push forward nor pull back. Taken aback by the force of will of the Chinese soldier in his death agony, the infantryman lost his spirit to stab him.

Loosening his grip on the bayonet, the Chinese soldier, still grasping the blade with one hand, shook his other hand and pleaded in a moaning voice that his life be spared. We were in the midst of pursuing the enemy unit, so we couldn't dally. Leaving the scene as it was, I followed the rest of our detachment.

We charged into Yichang on 12 June after a desperate struggle. A short while later there was a phenomenal flooding of the Yangzi River. From upstream of the splendid natural stronghold of the Taihang gorge, countless bodies of massacred men and women, old and young, floated down on the torrents of water, giving off a foul stench. I wonder what had gone on in the territory not occupied by the Japanese forces.

Honda Kōtarō, seventy
(m), shop owner, Tokyo

Without Even Confirmation of Names

A middle-aged man came to see me. He had read my account of military service during the war and said he wanted to hear in detail about conditions at that time. His father, who had been sent to the China front with the Hinoki Unit, had died from malnutrition at the supply base hospital near Ishu River in Hunan Province.

As a noncommissioned medical officer I took part in the battle at Xiangkui which **began** in May 1944. At the time of the **Yangjiao** battle in July, I was evacuating wounded and ill patients of the Hinoki, Hiro, and

Arashi units* to the field hospital set up in the Yangjiao suburb. That was where the tragedy occurred. Supplies from the rear area were cut off, and basic food needs were not met. In this situation, in which none of the hospital functions could be met, cholera broke out. In less than a month most of the patients died. The death count has been said to be four thousand or even five thousand, but it is not known. Desertions and suicides occurred in this extreme situation, and men died without confirmation of their names.

The dispensary where I was, a hastily built ward of straw mats laid on the earthen floor of a private house, held about six hundred patients. They died a week after cholera broke out. The six medical corpsmen who had looked after the six hundred patients were ill themselves from malnutrition and in no condition to move. The dead were left behind, their bodies rotting. I don't recall preparing an official record of the names of the dead patients or death reports to send to detachment headquarters. The other aid stations must have been the same. Under such extreme conditions, even the identification tags that all soldiers should have had could not be put to use.

My visitor said his father was a noncommissioned officer in the Hinoki Unit. I feel sorrowful at the thought of my visitor who, even after forty years, still wishes to find out something about his father's last moments.

Tobita Toshio, sixty-seven (m),
company executive, Kyoto
Prefecture

*Japanese units of battalion strength were often identified by code or generic names, e.g., the Hinoki [Cypress] unit or the names of their commanders, e.g., the Yamamoto unit.

Shoot Even Without Confirmation

This happened in January 1939 during security patrol at Hanshui on the central China battle lines. The previous night there had been a river crossing, suggesting an enemy attack. The response to our desperate communication requesting support from company headquarters was that support was impossible; orders were to defend our position to the death until the following morning. The platoon commander instructed the sentries to consider all who came from ahead to be the enemy; we were told to shoot or stab without challenge,

not to yield an inch. With these strict orders, two men from each squad stood on sentry duty two hundred meters apart on the forward embankment.

In the deep darkness the sound of dogs barking far away was eerie. Sounds and lights that seemed to be signals crossed each other. Menacing gunfire echoed from the opposite shore. Early in the morning there was a loud rustling in the grasses beyond the fog-covered embankment, as if a large army force were approaching. However much I looked, I could see nothing, and only heard the noise. *Shoot!* As I got off two shots, the soldier ahead called out "*Aizu!*" to which I replied with the password, *Byakko*. From ahead I heard a pained shout, "I've been hit! I've been hit!" It was the company commander and two fellow soldiers.

"Are you first-year conscripts?" "Yes sir." "Why did you shoot without challenging?" "We were taught that in emergency cases it was all right to shoot without challenging." "Idiots, where did you hear such a regulation?"

Weak-kneed, we eventually went on guard duty. We were shocked that we had wounded three men with two shots. If, risking our lives, we had downed the enemy as ordered, we would be considered heroes, but our firing on our own troops would lead to a court-martial. It was regretful, but it would be better to commit suicide than live with the shame. Just as I poked my rifle muzzle against my throat, my squad buddies, who had found out about the accident, came rushing over. They took away my weapon until my agitation subsided, and I was shut up in a room. They put me under strict guard. My buddies said that since the company commander hadn't received the communication, and the platoon commander was the one who had issued the order, if I were to die, they couldn't live either.

One week later I was told to go outside, where I found a buddy from my hometown. When I gave him my account, he counseled me saying, "It's not unusual to be shot at from behind. If you kill yourself over something like that, you'll run out of lives, no matter how many you have." His words helped me get back on my feet.

Tanno Midori, seventy (m),
farmer, Nihonmatsu

Assailants and Victims

From the spring of 1942, as a soldier I spent harried days in punitive expeditions against the Chinese Communist army in Shandong Province in

China. One of our regular operations was what could be called the labor **procurement** operation.

We surrounded a village at dawn and made wholesale arrests among the peasants. Setting aside women, old people, and children, we handed over all the men to our commanding headquarters. It was only after I was repatriated that I found out that these men became the Chinese **forced** laborers who faced tragedy in the mines in various locations.

The operation was ruthless and terrible. Not even a single ant was to escape the tightening circle of us soldiers, some carrying lights--large bottles whose bases had been sheared off by heating the glass, which we held upside down with candles stuck in the necks---and others loudly banging oil cans or washbasins. But at that time we thought in a matter-of-fact way that this was what war was like. Later, I was interned in Siberia. My four years of forced labor, I think, was a measure of atonement for my wartime actions. We were assailants as well as victims.

Yamada Ichirô, sixty-seven (m),
dye works owner, Tokyo

Strike by One-Star Privates

According to the phrase "consider superior officers' lives as the Emperor's life," soldiers were expected to give up our lives if so ordered. Yet there was one time when the lowest-ranked, one-star privates went on strike.

The Fourteenth Division Medical Corps Motor Transport Company was made up of transport soldiers with hardly any training. When we were sent to the front some of us didn't even know how to cook the rice in our rations. The company was divided into three platoons. Each platoon's first squad was the stretcher unit, and its second squad was the horse wagon squad. The wagons transported stretchers hung on two levels. This was in 1937, at the start of the Sino-Japanese Incident.

The company commander was a vicious drunk and often behaved disgracefully in front of the soldiers. When we were in march formation, he would make us walk extra distances, insisting that we overtake the unit ahead by takiing a side road and circling around in front. On foot and carrying their heavy **equipment** on their backs, the soldiers suffered great pain. The frequent boos from the rear and calls of "You idiot!" fell on deaf ears.

One day we were lying on the ground, totally exhausted, on standby alert. The commander rode up on **horseback**, ordering us to help the engineers with bridge building. Not a single man stood up. There is nothing more pitiful than a superior whose orders are not obeyed. The unit commander came over on his own horse and, from his saddle, whipped the company commander. Then he departed.

The company commander of the infantry stretcher company rode up. "The infantry is engaged in battle on the front lines. We must quickly build a bridge so that we can send reinforcements. I'm sorry to put you through all this trouble, but please help us out." One after another the soldiers stood up and waded into the river. That company commander was worldly-wise, and his concern for the men-in the mornings, he called out, "Have you eaten?" even to those of us in a different company---made him popular among the troops.

Maruyama Kôshirô, seventy-two
(m), farmer, Nagano Prefecture

The Tank Swayed Like a Small Boat

In June 1942, Japanese troops with the Number 4 Cavalry Brigade as their main force planned an operation to outflank and exterminate the Number 28 Combined Force of the Chinese army in northern **Henan** Province. I participated in this operation as driver of the brigade tank commander's tank. Our forces began our movements at midnight, and, engaging in fierce battle at every point, we encircled the town where the enemy command post was located. The tank forces were deployed near the town's western gate.

The foot soldiers of Number 72 Cavalry Regiment carried out several daring assaults but were unable to achieve results. The enemy consisted of crack troops **under** the command of General Gao Shuxun. It was an opponent not easily resisted. Eventually the sun tilted to the west. Changing our tactics, our forces attacked by opening up the eastern gate enclosure. With tanks accompanied by infantry, we crashed against the city gate to break through. Acting in concert with the units standing by, we charged. The enemy was finally routed, and they surged through the eastern gate in retreat.

The tank force was immediately ordered to give chase. We **hurried** to

change **our course**. When we neared the eastern gate **area**, **ahead** was a mass of foot soldiers and cavalry rushing for their lives in retreat. On the road ahead lay the dead bodies of many **Chinese** soldiers. We progressed around these bodies but were unable to avoid them all. The only way to go was over the bodies of the war dead. Making up our minds, we passed over them. I gripped the drive **shaft** and closed my eyes. There was a **soft** impact. The tank swayed gently. It felt like being on a small boat as it plowed through the waves. In my heart I prayed "*Namu Amida Butsu*" to the Buddha and went ahead.

When we had been in pursuit for a while, we came across a worn-out **Chinese** soldier kneeling on the ground, his hands pressed together. We stopped the tank. Our commander directed the soldier to hang his rifle on the **radio** antenna. When he had done so, the commander said, "Go off, you're free." He stood to attention, saluted, and made an about-face to the right. **Then** he dashed off. It must have been fifteen or twenty minutes since we had run over the dead bodies.

In the special circumstances of a battlefield, we **could** not afford to reflect on the situation with humanity. **All** we could do was act as we were commanded.

Suhara Seiichi, sixty-eight (m),
labor association member, Inasawa

China's Mata Hari, the Girl With the Hair Ornaments

Fourth Company commander First Lieutenant Yoshida, a seasoned officer who had landed at Hangzhou Harbor, was known for his operational skill. As platoon commander of the Second Company at the time, I was often with him, and many times I copied his battle tactics. During the turning point of the first Changsha battle, we were chased by enemy forces several dozen times larger than ours. Volunteering his unit to bring up the rear, First Lieutenant Yoshida got into hand-to-hand combat against the Chinese forces' volunteer unit. The flesh of his rear end was blown off by an enemy grenade and he was sent to the Hankou army hospital.

This hospital **employed** many Chinese girls to **help** care for the patients who had difficulty moving about. First Lieutenant Yoshida was cared for by

a girls' high school graduate who spoke good English, was bright, kind, and a rare beauty to boot. Her clothing was simple, but he said she always wore elaborate hair ornaments. After recuperating for some three months, Lieutenant Yoshida was released from the hospital and resumed his command of the Fourth Company. The girl found it hard to part with the lieutenant, and, resigning from the army hospital, followed his unit, to the envy of us young men.

She settled into our encampment. When asked to do something, she immediately answered, "*Mingbai*" ("I understand"), and accomplished the task with efficacy. We took to calling her Mingbai. Here also Mingbai always wore hair ornaments and went about her work so diligently that she made herself highly useful.

In December 1941 the second battle for Changsha commenced. Lieutenant Yoshida and I advanced to Changsha once again. But Mingbai had disappeared. No one knew her whereabouts. This battle turned into a series of difficult struggles from the start. Although we finally took Changsha, it was only after we'd suffered extremely heavy casualties.

In analyzing the reasons for the failure of this battle, one of the causes given was that the enemy's ninth battle section chief, Xue Yue, had detailed information about our forces. The reasons for this were investigated. Mingbai's name surfaced as a possible source of the information. Lieutenant Yoshida was accused of engaging in acts aiding and abetting the enemy, demoted to private and sent back to Japan. Later gossip pegged Mingbai to be a brilliant spy from Chongqing who was called the **Mata** Hari of China. When I recall that she always wore hair ornaments that she didn't let anyone touch, I wonder if she was hiding a microphone there.

Kawakami Tokio, sixty-nine (m),
former **civil** servant, Tochigi
Prefecture

Devil Sergeant's True Heart

I was drafted on 1 February 1945. Enrolled in the Nishiyama Company of an independent garrison in the Kwantung Army, I was placed under the command of a tough "devil" sergeant from hell. After three months of arduous training consisting mostly of antitank attacks, we had our first

target practice with live shells. Two out of three of my bullets hit the target, and I was made a light-machine-gunner.

My hardship increased after I became a gunner. Six-kilometer marches lugging a light machine gun were difficult, and during exercises I had to run at the head of the troop. I was also exhausted from the time it took me every night to keep the machine gun in good working order. If we **were** lax in our care, the devil sergeant would slap our faces and scold us, saying, "I can replace you draftees with a **single** red card, but I can't immediately replace a light machine gun. It's a valuable weapon."

On 8 August, upon reports that the Soviet Union had entered the War, we were ordered to the Soviet border. On the way we passed evacuating [Manchurian] colonizers. Our courage was boosted by their saying, "We're counting on you, soldiers," as they waved to us.

We neared the front. Suddenly, a voice shouted, "Enemy air attack!" and the devil sergeant yelled, "Take shelter in the sorghum field." I **jumped** into a creek, but with the weight of my machine gun, my feet slipped, and I tumbled down. The gun sank into the muddy water and I couldn't **retrieve** it. It was then that I heard the sergeant say, "Hey, Nakamura, what are you doing? Hurry up." "My gun has sunk into the water and I can't reach it." "Get the gun later. Hurry up, you'll get shot." I crawled up the bank of the creek and ran to the sorghum field. Behind me was the sound of **machine-gun** strafing. *Da-da-da!* it chased after me. Just as I ducked for cover, the bullets landed close to my body, *busu, busu!*

When humans come face to face with death, we finally learn their true nature. To me the devil sergeant from hell turned into a Buddha, a saintly sergeant from heaven.

Nakamura Toshio
seventy-two (m), retired,
Shimonoseki

Shot-Thought of Time Left Me

It was about 4 P.M. on 15 August 1945. I was clinging to a riverbank, breathing the sickening fumes of the grasses, in battle against Soviet troops across the river. The location was near the Yusong Bridge on the outskirts of Chongjin in north Korea. (The cease-fire order had not yet reached the front line units.)

I had been leaning out to scout the movements of the Soviet troops when suddenly I felt excruciating pain along with a great bursting. It felt as if hot tongs were gouging out my right ear. I had heard that if a bullet hits you above the neck you have an eighty to ninety percent chance of not surviving. "Damn it," I thought, resigning myself to unavoidable death. I was amazed that this made me feel serene.

I slumped down on the spot. The fleeting time I had **left** seemed **infinitely** valuable. Bleeding heavily, I was trying to think with my muddled senses. Having to die at the young age of twenty-six had never seemed more regrettable than at that time.

A medical corpsman rushed over to treat my wound. As he bandaged me up, he assured me that the bullet had missed any vital parts. I would be all right. At this, I was immediately revitalized. My nerves grew tense. The gunfire from the Soviet forces suddenly subsided. Instinctively I sensed that this battle would end at sundown. A feeling of ease and equanimity welled up inside me.

I looked at my **fellow** soldiers. Relief spread over their fear-strained faces. The sound of gunfire stopped. The battle was over. Two or three cigarettes glowed in the dusk.

When I think back on that time, having been near death, I am keenly thankful for the happiness of being alive now and of having peace.

Katō Shunroku
sixty-six (m), union officer,
Ichikawa