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# Japanese Prisoners of War in America

Arnold Krammer

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FEW AMERICANS today recall that the nation maintained 425,000 enemy during the Second World War in prisoner-of-war camps from New York to California. The majority of these captives were Germans, followed by Italians and Japanese. The incarceration of the 5,424 Japanese soldiers and sailors in the United States,<sup>1</sup> most captured involuntarily during the bloody battles of the South Pacific, tested the formidable ingenuity of the War Department. The very first prisoner of war captured by American forces was Japanese. Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki, the commander of a Japanese midget submarine which had participated in the attack on Pearl Harbor, abandoned his damaged craft and swam for shore. As he crawled up onto Waimanalo

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<sup>1</sup>For further information about the German prisoners of war in the United States during World War II, see Arnold Krammer, *Nazi Prisoners of War in America* (New York, 1979); Arnold Krammer, "German Prisoners of War in the United States," *Military Affairs*, XXXX (April, 1976), 68-73; Arnold Krammer, comp., *Public Administration of Prisoner of War Camps in America since the Revolutionary War* (U.S. Public Administration Series, Vance Bibliography P-626, Dec. 1980); and Erich Maschke, ed., *Zur Geschichte der deutschen Kriegsgefangenen des Zweiten Weltkrieges*, vol. X: Herman Jung, *Die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen in amerikanischer Hand-USA* (Bielefeld, 1972).

There are virtually no scholarly accounts available on either the 53,000 Italian POWs or the relatively small number of Japanese prisoners held in the United States during the same period. In fact, the very number of the Japanese prisoners is in question according to official sources. The figures range from 569 (George G. Lewis and John Mewha, "History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776-1945," *U.S. Dept. of the Army Pamphlet No. 20-213* [Washington, D.C., June 1955], 148), to 3,260 ("Investigations of the National War Effort," *H. Rep. 728*, 79 Cong., 1 sess., [June 12, 1945], 6). A detailed examination of the Records of the Provost Marshal General's Office (Record Group 389), at the Modern Military Branch of the National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as MMB-NA), resulted in the figure used in this study: 5,424.

Beach on Oahu, he was captured by one of the nervous military patrols positioned to repel a feared full-scale invasion. When it finally became evident that the disheveled POW knew less about Tokyo's war plans than did his captors, he was moved under heavy guard to a hastily constructed detention camp at Sand Island, Hawaii, where he remained until his transfer to the mainland on February 29, 1942. For the next six months, as German and Italian POWs poured into England and the United States from the battlefields of North Africa, Ensign Sakamaki remained the only Japanese military captive in American hands. In July 1942, he was finally joined by nine others.<sup>2</sup>

To house the incoming prisoners from Europe—who would eventually arrive at the rate of twenty thousand per month by mid-1944—the War Department's Provost Marshal General's Office rushed to create a network of permanent POW camps as well as hundreds of small branch camps designed as satellites around the larger camps to bring the prisoners close to potential work sites. Whenever possible, the permanent camps were located at or near existing military bases. Each camp averaged 2,500 prisoners, and adhered generally to the requirements of the Geneva Convention that the layout and food, sanitary, and health services be identical with that provided to American armed forces.<sup>3</sup> The camps were finished even as the first thousands of Germans and Italians began arriving at the Norfolk, Virginia, port of embarkation. From the Pacific theater, the Japanese prisoners numbered only fifty-two.

There were several reasons for the substantial disparity in the number of prisoners from Europe, and those few from the Pacific. Foremost was the fact that unlike the German and Italian prisoners of war, who had been schooled in the provisions of the Geneva Convention,<sup>4</sup> the average Japanese soldier was molded to prefer death to sur-

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<sup>2</sup>U.S. Office of the Chief of Military History, "United States Army Forces: Middle Pacific and Predecessor Commands during World War II, 7 December 1941–2 September 1945," mimeographed manuscript, No. 17007, Center of Military History, Historical Records Branch, Dept. of the Army, Washington, D.C., Vol. XXIV, part 2, chap. 9, pp. 182–183; and Kazuo Sakamaki, *I Attacked Pearl Harbor*, trans. by Toru Matsumoto (New York, 1949), 49–50.

<sup>3</sup>Martin Tollefson, "Enemy Prisoners of War," *Iowa Law Review*, XXXII (1946), 51–77.

<sup>4</sup>The Japanese had not ratified the Prisoner of War Convention of the Geneva Accords of 1929. As a result, neither American POWs in Japan nor the Japanese in the U.S. were protected by international law, though the War Department never wavered in the belief that U.S. adherence to the Geneva Convention would somehow benefit the 16,100 American captives in enemy hands. *Ibid.*, 53. Despite the early realization that the Japanese government did not

render. Moreover, the official Japanese Military Field Code commanded each Japanese soldier to remember that "rather than live and bear the shame of imprisonment by the enemy, he should die and avoid leaving a dishonorable name!"<sup>5</sup> Capture by the enemy, even if wounded or unconscious and unable to move, was equated with irrevocable shame. Japanese soldiers were directed to save the last round of ammunition for themselves or to charge the enemy in a suicidal assault. Even on very rare occasions when a Japanese soldier might have been unable or unwilling to take his own life, the Pentagon's official histories of the war candidly admit that he might not have survived the heat of combat: "American troops, who were fearful of the widely publicized treacherousness of the enemy, were reluctant to take prisoners."<sup>6</sup>

Major battles in the Pacific theater often accounted for no more than a dozen Japanese captives, as against thousands of enemy killed. During the Burma campaign, for example, Commonwealth and American forces captured only 142 enemy prisoners (most of whom were badly wounded or unconscious) while killing 17,166!<sup>7</sup> On Guadalcanal, between January 1 and February 15, 1943, the American XIV Corps took only eighty-four Japanese prisoners, thirty-three of whom were too sick or wounded to walk.<sup>8</sup> In fact, from the opening

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intend to comply with even the most basic humanitarian provisions of the rules of war (see "Investigations of the National War Effort," *H. Rep. 1992*, 78 Cong., 2 sess. [Nov. 30, 1944], 33-37), the War Department distributed to each Japanese captive a translation of the "Geneva Convention Relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War, July 21, 1929," which had been prepared by the Spanish embassy in Washington, D.C. (The full text is in Provost Marshal General's Office, "Prisoner of War Operations Division," Office of the Chief of Military History, file 4-4.3, AA, TAB 1. This excellent collection of records is available on microfilm as Library of Congress no. 51437 and is hereafter cited as PMGO, "Prisoner of War Operations.")

<sup>5</sup>Tokyo Gazette Publishing House, *Field Service Code* (Tokyo, 1941). This code was adopted by the War Ministry on Jan. 8, 1941.

<sup>6</sup>John Miller, Jr., *Guadalcanal: The First Offensive* (Washington, D.C., U.S. Dept. of the Army, Historical Division, 1949), 310. In a frank, confidential intelligence memo on the problems of interrogating Japanese prisoners of war, the army conceded that "it took the promise of three days leave and some ice cream [to tempt U.S. soldiers] to bring in the first live prisoner." U.S. Fourth Army, Headquarters, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, "Interrogation of Japanese Prisoners in the Southwest Pacific," Intelligence Memo no. 4, July 22, 1943, Information Derived from Japanese POWs, Record Group 165, Records of the War Department, General and Special Staffs. MMB-NA.

<sup>7</sup>Miller, *Guadalcanal*, 310-311.

<sup>8</sup>U.S. Office of the Chief of Military History, "The Provost Marshal's Office: Campaign of the Pacific, 1941-1947," chap. 6, mimeographed manuscript, OCMH, file 1 (C), 8-6.

salvo of the Pacific campaign, through the Battles of the Java Sea, Coral Sea, Midway, Guadalcanal, Savo Island, Bismarck Sea, New Guinea, Kula Gulf, Bougainville, Tarawa, and Makin, a grand total of only 604 Japanese were taken prisoner by the Allied forces. Not until the beginning of the Philippine campaigns in October 1944 did the number of Japanese prisoners of war approach the five thousand mark, including a twenty-nine-year-old sniper captured on Eniwetok—the only Japanese woman soldier taken prisoner in the entire war.<sup>9</sup> The war was nearly over before significantly large numbers of Japanese soldiers, usually malnourished and disillusioned, surrendered to Commonwealth and American forces.

The second reason for the low number of Japanese prisoners in the United States was the War Department's decision to turn the majority of its captives from the Pacific theater over to its allies. Since American forces lacked both the personnel and the rear-area facilities to detain large numbers of prisoners, an agreement was reached with Australia in September 1942 by which all captured Japanese—except for those whose potential military intelligence value necessitated their shipment to the United States proper—were turned over to the Commonwealth of Australia. In return, the United States assumed a proportionate share of the cost of their maintenance (through lend-lease aid), and was responsible for their final disposition at the end of the war.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the Japanese prisoners who arrived in the U. S. were either brought in for special interrogation or because they were closer to the United States when captured than to the holding pens in Australia or New Zealand.

The Japanese prisoners arrived in America at Angel Island, California, a small mountainous island in San Francisco Bay. A quarantine station of the Immigration Service before the war, Camp Angel Island was converted by the army into a temporary transit center for the incoming groups of Japanese captives before they were routed to the main interrogation center at Tracy, California. While at Angel Island the prisoners were deloused and their belongings disinfected;

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<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*; Roy E. Appleman, *et al.*, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (Washington, D.C., U.S. Dept. of the Army, Historical Division, 1948), 383–384, 465–467, 473–474; and the *New York Times*, May 30, 1945, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup>Office of the Chief of Military History, “Administrative History, Chief Provost Marshal, United States Army Forces in the Pacific, 6 April 1945 to 31 December 1946” (mimeographed manuscript, OCMH), p. 14, 8–5. 1.

forms were processed and serial numbers assigned, and the prisoners given a much-needed medical examination. The majority of cases of malaria, syphilis, skin disease, intestinal worms, and minor combat wounds were treated in camp, and those few who required more serious treatment were cared for at Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco. When it came time to fill out the mandatory postal card to inform their families of their safety, and to file their names with the International Red Cross Prisoner Information Bureau, nearly all the Japanese captives resolutely requested that their families in Japan not be advised of their imprisonment.<sup>11</sup> Better they be considered dead than dishonored by captivity.

Then, finally, came their first meals in America, and the prisoners were astonished at the quality and quantity of their food. Indeed, they found themselves better fed in captivity than in their own army. A typical menu was that offered at Camp Angel Island on September 16, 1944:

- Breakfast:* Sausages, rice, browned crusts, apples, coffee, milk, sugar.  
*Lunch:* Sukiyaki, cabbage salad, rice, caramel pudding, water.  
*Dinner:* Spaghetti and hash, baked tomatoes, lettuce and tomato salad, rice, cakes, cocoa.<sup>12</sup>

While it would not be long before both the Japanese and German prisoners demanded menus more to their national tastes—which the War Department, anxious to protect the interests of American prisoners in enemy hands, quickly produced<sup>13</sup>—the newly arrived Japanese captives had every reason to be calmed by their treatment thus

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<sup>11</sup>Their government, moreover, aided the Japanese captives in maintaining their anonymity, much to the frustration of the International Red Cross whose task was to facilitate communication. In its summary report the Red Cross lamented that: "In the official bureaux at Tokyo, nominal rolls of Japanese prisoners and prisoner mail were left untouched . . . the information bureaux would have acted more cruelly had they sent next of kin news that would have brought them far more sorrow than relief." International Committee of the Red Cross, *Inter Arma Caritas* (Geneva, 1947), 104.

<sup>12</sup>Report of Inspection, Japanese Prisoner of War Camp Angel Island, by the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Special War Problems Division, Department of State, September 16, 1944, R.G. 389, MMB-NA.

<sup>13</sup>Another reason for providing the prisoners with menus more suited to their national tastes was the belief that they would eat more and throw away less. Camp authorities were notified by Washington on July 1, 1944, that the Japanese were to receive substantially more fresh vegetables and rice; the German POWs more pork, wurst, and fish soups; and the Italians, spaghetti and a diet heavily seasoned with paprika, onions, and olive oil.

far. For the few days until their shipment to the Tracy interrogation center, the Japanese spent their time listening to the camp gramophone, playing cards and Mah-Jong, and whispering among themselves as they strove to understand the ulterior motives of their captors.

The American authorities did, indeed, have ulterior motives. Aside from Washington's general adherence to the Geneva Convention, which, admittedly, was losing its appeal as atrocity stories began to pour in from enemy camps, the War Department was following a specific and calculated plan of treatment. Since the main reason for the prisoners' shipment to the United States was for interrogation purposes, the confidence of the incoming POWs had to be won over. The task appeared formidable: the prisoners feared and despised their captors, both militarily and culturally—no less, in fact, than they were themselves hated in return. Moreover, the captives loathed themselves for their failure to die in combat. Yet army intelligence quickly detected an encouraging pattern among these seemingly overwhelming obstacles.

The POWs' psychological makeup evolved into three distinct phases. Immediately upon capture, and up to forty-eight hours afterwards, the Japanese prisoners were of little value to the American interrogators. They were certain that they would be tortured and killed, and were either unresponsive or the information they offered was confused and unreliable. After several days, the army found that a second phase set in, as the prisoners realized that they were not to be tortured or in any way mistreated. This was the moment that the intelligence officers awaited; the prisoners' fear was changing to gratitude and they were anxious to reciprocate by talking freely. For the next ten days to two weeks, the prisoners were most receptive and informative. Then came the third and final phase, when the Japanese captives grew accustomed to the plentiful food and kind treatment, and became annoyed at being questioned. Continued interrogation only drove them into a shell of indifference and they were no longer reliable sources of military information.<sup>14</sup>

The interrogation of the Japanese prisoners taught army intel-

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<sup>14</sup>Details of individual interrogations may be found in *CINCPAC-CINCPOA Intelligence Bulletins*, Japanese Source File, Operations, Archives, U.S. Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

ligence officers several additional curious lessons. For example, no threat of physical violence or solitary confinement succeeded in extracting information from a prisoner as effectively as the simple threat of forwarding his name to his relatives in Japan. Another lesson was the captives' realization that they knew no rules of life which applied in this situation. They were dishonored and their life as Japanese had ended. When their earnest requests to be allowed to kill themselves were denied, many discarded their traditional views and became model prisoners. An American official later recalled that "Old [Japanese] Army hands and long-time extreme nationals located ammunition dumps, carefully explained the disposition of Japanese forces, wrote our propaganda and flew with our bombing pilots to guide them to military targets. It was as if they had turned over a new page; as if, having put everything they had into one line of conduct and failed at it, they naturally took up a different line."<sup>15</sup> One group of Japanese prisoners of war changed its outlook so dramatically that the men announced that "they had been badly misled by the Emperor and the Japanese military clique . . . and wished to fight back to Japan side by side with Allied soldiers!"<sup>16</sup>

Still another important lesson discovered in the interrogation of the Japanese prisoners was that, unlike German or Italian captives who had to be questioned in isolation before older prisoners had the opportunity to intimidate them or alter their stories, the new prisoners were far more willing to talk freely after being consoled by those captured before them. Time and again it was found that the old prisoners advised the new ones to disclose everything to the authorities lest they all be blamed for lying or falsifying military information. One American army report noted that on numerous occasions, "a Japanese prisoner who had been doubtful regarding certain points would come of his own volition the following day and state that he had discussed the point with other members of the same group and his version was right—or wrong—as the case might be."<sup>17</sup> Having learned these lessons about Japanese captives at the interrogation outposts on Guadalcanal and New Guinea, American intelligence officers now

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<sup>15</sup>Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword* (London, 1967), 28–29.

<sup>16</sup>Oka Naoki, Shioda Shōbei, and Fujiwara Akira, eds., *Sokoku o teki to shite—ichi zai-Bei Nihonjin no hansen undō* [The Fight against the Fatherland—The Anti-War Activities of a Japanese in America] (Tokyo, 1965); and the *New York Times*, July 8, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> "Interrogation of Japanese Prisoners in the Southwest Pacific," 5–6.



brought them to bear on select prisoners being shipped from Angel Island to Tracy.

There were two interrogation installations in the United States during the war: Fort Hunt, a former Civilian Conservation Corps camp about seventeen miles from Washington, D.C., and Byron Hot Springs, an isolated spot west of San Francisco near Tracy. Both were kept so secret that architectural plans used by construction workers were labeled "Officers' School," although these men must have wondered why officers needed eight-foot fences, hidden microphones in the long rows of cells, barred windows, and heavy gates at the entrances from the main highway. The locations were known only as "P.O. Box 1142" and "P.O. Box 541," respectively. While, strictly speaking, these interrogation centers contravened or, at the very least, "bent" a dozen or so articles of the Geneva Convention of 1929 relating to the rights of prisoners of war, the War Department was convinced that not only was the potential military information well worth the international ramifications but also that the treatment of American prisoners in Japanese hands could not have been made much worse by violations of the Geneva Accords. In any case, the interrogations were so shrouded in secrecy that there was little chance of disclosure.<sup>18</sup>

The interrogations were generally conducted in an informal atmosphere by American intelligence officers, many of whom were Japanese-American specialists from the army's Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) in Minnesota.<sup>19</sup> It was a closed society; each of the forty-five interrogators was assigned to one prisoner whom he continued to interview until the authorities were satisfied that no further military information could be learned from the captive. The few surviving time sheets indicate that the interviews usually lasted from forty-five minutes to an hour and were conducted at a rate of two or three each day for a week or more.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>John Hammond Moore, "Getting Fritz to Talk," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, LIV (1978), 264-265. So secret was this installation that its existence was not revealed to the public until mid-1947. *New York Times*, July 11, 1947, p. 34.

<sup>19</sup>Masaharu Ano, "Loyal Linguists, Nisei of World War II Learned Japanese in Minnesota," *Minnesota History*, XXXV (1971), 273-278; and Tamotsu Shibutani, *The Dilemmas of Company K: A Sociological Study of Demoralization* (Berkeley, 1978).

<sup>20</sup>For a complete list of the American interrogators at Tracy, their aliases, and the names of the Japanese prisoners to whom they were assigned, see R.G. 165, General and Special Staffs, G-2, Captured Personnel and Materiel Branch-Misc-y, P.W. Camp Tracy, folder 4, 1945, MMB-NA.

Yet, however informal these interviews, the interrogators were well aware of the seriousness of their task, and approached each Japanese prisoner in deadly earnest. Every question was planned, and the interrogators followed a lengthy and detailed checklist of questions concerning military equipment, fuel, rations, morale at the front as well as at home, rumors, personalities of commanders, postwar expectations, and so forth.<sup>21</sup> The resulting reports, by contrast, were brief—usually two or three single-spaced pages—concise, and frequent. Rather than chance the accumulation of critical military information, the interrogators nearly every four days forwarded their findings: a potpourri of items ranging from the deteriorating quality of Japanese clothing to the number of boiler rooms in the enemy aircraft carrier *Hiryu*.<sup>22</sup> As the war progressed and the number of incoming Japanese captives increased substantially, so did the number of interrogations and reports. During 1944 the number of Japanese prisoners of war interrogated at Tracy were as follows:

January	13		August	174
February	5		September	74
March	36		October	101
April	132		November	75
May	105		December	129
June	87			
July			TOTAL	
	146			1,077 <sup>23</sup>

When it was clear that the prisoners had no further information of value, they were assembled into groups and shipped to several POW camps across the country.

The War Department's network of prisoners-of-war camps by mid-1943 had reached five hundred main and branch enclosures and covered the nation from coast to coast. Their prime task, of course, was to house the thousands of Germans and Italians arriving each month from the battlefields of North Africa, which reached 360,000 by 1944. Since the number of Japanese prisoners was so small, they were simply shunted to existing camps as space and transportation became available. Although they would appear in dozens of camps,

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<sup>21</sup> "Outline for Interrogations" (mimeographed, May 1945), box 651 (Tracy); "A Guide to Preparation of Interrogation Reports" (mimeographed, May 1945), *ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> "Information and Opinions from Various Japanese Naval Ps/W, Obtained in U.S.," January-March 1943, Reports A-10 to A-13, *ibid*.

<sup>23</sup> "Report of Activities, MIS Section, P.O. Box 651, Tracy, California, for 1944," *ibid*.

often just in transit, the bulk of the Japanese spent the remaining war years in one of three camps: McCoy, Wisconsin; Clarinda, Iowa; and Angel Island, California. While the largest and most representative was McCoy, the distribution of the Japanese in the United States was as follows:

<i>CAMP</i>	<i>SERVICE COMMAND</i>	<i>OFFICERS</i>	<i>NCO</i>	<i>ENLISTED</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>
Angel Island	9	24	71	312	407
Clarinda, Iowa	7	—	73	982	1,055
McCoy, Wisconsin	6	3	10	2,749	2,762
Meade, Maryland	3	1	—	1	2
Kenedy, Texas	8	91	499	—	590
Madigan General Hospital, Wash- ington, D.C.	9	3	—	2	5 <sup>24</sup>

Camp McCoy, which began, typically, as a CCC camp in 1935, was located some five miles from the small town of Sparta, Wisconsin. It was ideal as both a training center and a prison camp since it was isolated yet located on the main line of the Milwaukee Railway between Milwaukee and Minneapolis, as well as on the branch line of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway. Commissioned as an internment site by the Provost Marshal General's Office in March 1942,<sup>25</sup> McCoy within weeks became the new home for 293 enemy aliens brought in by the FBI (106 Germans, 5 Italians, and 181 Japanese), and one Japanese prisoner of war (none other than Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki from Hawaii). Eventually, he would be joined by nearly three thousand other Japanese military prisoners, as well as some one thousand Germans, and five hundred Koreans who had been captured serving with the Japanese. Despite the apparently substantial numbers of enemy prisoners at Camp McCoy, they constituted only a small segment of the tumultuous events taking place there. Thousands of soldiers—indeed several hundred thousand soldiers—were trained at McCoy and prepared for shipment overseas.<sup>26</sup> The few thousand foreign prisoners of war, relegated to a remote area of the military post and heavily guarded, went almost unnoticed.

<sup>24</sup> "Semi-Monthly Report on Prisoners of War as of 1 August 1945," PMGO, "Prisoner of War Operations," TAB 116.

<sup>25</sup>HQ Camp McCoy to the Provost Marshal General, March 27, 1942, Camp McCoy, MMB-NA, R.G. 389.

<sup>26</sup>Ironically, it was to Camp McCoy that the 100th Battalion, a Hawaiian Nisei unit, was sent without weapons in the nervous early days of the war. Later it became part of the much-decorated 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

The world for the Japanese prisoners consisted of Compounds 1 and 2 (with the Germans in Compounds 3 and 4, and the Koreans in Compound 5). Within each compound were two rows of old CCC barracks with approximately fifty army double-decked bunks in each. Several additional barracks were used as mess halls, and one barrack in each compound was fitted as a day-room and equipped with furniture, playing cards, a gramophone, and an assortment of Japanese-language books donated by the YMCA. Each camp was required by the Geneva Convention to maintain a canteen where, during certain hours, the prisoners could purchase toothpaste, shoe polish, handkerchiefs, candy, crackers, cigarettes, soft drinks, and locally grown produce at the prevailing market price. In some camps even beer and light wines were permitted at the prisoner's own expense.<sup>27</sup>

Each enlisted POW received eighty cents a day to spend at the camp canteen. A trifling sum by today's standards, perhaps, but during the war years it would buy eight packs of cigarettes or eight bottles of beer. Officers were paid a graduated salary based on rank—lieutenants, \$15 per month; captains, \$25; and majors through generals, \$35—despite the fact that American POWs in Japanese hands were rarely paid anything. A later agreement with the Japanese government that was publicized as the Army's Prisoner of War Circular No. 28, 6 May 1944, listed the following higher salaries for captive Japanese officers, though they were now to be charged for the cost of their food, clothing, laundry, and orderly service:

Army	Navy	Monthly Pay	Equivalent grades in United States	
			Army	Navy
Taisho	Taisho	\$128.91	General	Admiral
Chujo	Chujo	113.29	Lieutenant General	Vice Admiral
Shosho	Shosho	97.66	Major General	Rear Admiral
Taisa	Taisa	81.08	Colonel	Captain
Chusa	Chusa	62.90	Lieutenant Colonel	Commander
Shosa	Shosa	45.51	Major	Lieutenant Commander
Taii Itto	{ Tokumu Taii	40.53		
Taii Nito	{ Taii Itto	37.11		
Taii Santo	{ Taii Nito	32.23	Captain	Lieutenant
	{ Taii Santo	28.71		
Chui Itto	{ Chui	28.00	First Lieutenant	Lieutenant junior grade
Chui Nito	{ Tokumu Chui			
Shoi	{ Shoi	25.00	Second Lieutenant	Ensign
	{ Tokumu Shoi			

<sup>27</sup>Maxwell S. McKnight, "The Employment of Prisoners of War in the United States," *International Labour Review*, L (1944), 57. The POWs were entitled to purchase beer even

Since War Department regulations (and common sense) prohibited the prisoners from obtaining real money which might enable them to bribe guards or make good their escape, their pay was maintained in a U.S. Treasury Trust Fund (#218915), and all sums were paid to the captives in canteen coupons.<sup>28</sup>

While the military was responsible for the overall maintenance of the prisoners' existence, nearly everything else, the daily amenities of life, were supplied by a religious or humanitarian organization—usually the YMCA. The War Prisoners Aid of the YMCA, as the captives soon learned, constituted an influence over their lives second only to the U.S. Army. The Japanese prisoners, no less than the Germans, Italians, and Koreans, received from the YMCA such items as their stationery, musical instruments, library books, sports equipment, phonograph records, hobby materials, handicraft tools, and religious items of all sorts. No requests were too insignificant. During one of his monthly inspection visits to Camp McCoy, for example, the representative of the YMCA, Dr. Howard Hong, noted that the prisoners appreciated his organization's earlier donations of Japanese volumes for the library, the colored crepe paper and thin wire needed by those making artificial flowers, and the Mah-Jong sets and Go games. But he cited the need for incense sticks for Buddhist services; a clarinet, flute, snare drum, and large harmonica; and some tennis equipment. He closed his report with the conclusion that the "Health and morale among the prisoners are excellent."<sup>29</sup>

Yet beneath this idyllic surface, there were serious problems in the Japanese prisoner community. A major difficulty was the strain which existed between the three nationalities imprisoned at McCoy. The

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when their camps were located in "dry counties" where the sale of alcohol was prohibited to Americans. Local regulations, such as prohibition, did not apply on federal property. See, for example, *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, June 20, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup>U.S. Dept. of War, *Enemy Prisoners of War* (Technical Manual TM 19-500, April 20, 1945), chap. 4, sec. 111, para. 8-10.

<sup>29</sup>Howard Hong, "Report on Visit to Prisoners of War Camp, Camp McCoy, Sparta, Wisconsin, January 5-7, 1944," Inspection Reports: Camp McCoy, R.G. 389, MMB-NA.

After describing the soup, chicken dinner, and ice cream served to Japanese prisoners in one American camp he visited, the General Secretary of the International YMCA announced to Swedish newsmen that, "The Japanese prisoner of war camps in the United States are the cleanest [I] have seen anywhere in the world." [*New York Times*, April 5, 1944, p. 10.] Some embittered observers noted that "the Japanese prisoners of war were being treated with far greater consideration than American soldiers who happened to be black." [Shibutani, *Company K*, 355.]

Japanese maintained an aloof distance from the Germans in the adjoining compound, separated as much by their respective racist ideologies as by reminders that Germany and Japan had been enemies in the First World War. The German prisoners, on the other hand, openly ridiculed their Japanese allies, often gesturing or mimicking across the fence that separated them. Every evening was potentially explosive since they all shared the same canteen, barber shop, and PX facility. "After dinner, they gulp their daily ration of two bottles of 3.2 beer and soft drinks," camp commander Lt. Colonel Horace I. Rogers told a reporter from *Collier's*, "but for each race, the other is nonexistent. They never look at each other, even in furtive curiosity. They hate each other."<sup>30</sup> Relations between the truculent Japanese and the more cooperative Koreans were even more acrimonious and deeply rooted in the centuries of discrimination and subjugation by the Japanese over their peninsular neighbor. The capture of the Koreans gave them an opportunity to assert their national independence. Visiting State Department, Red Cross, and YMCA officials were always pleasantly surprised to learn that the Koreans generally requested nothing more than Christian Bibles and cloth to make Korean flags—requests that the authorities were understandably happy to grant.

Visiting officials to the camp were soon gritting their teeth when it came to meeting with the spokesman for the Japanese prisoners—who, at Camp McCoy, was Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki. The complaints by the Japanese were petty and unending. They did not want to work with American women in the camp laundry; they resented being housed with three Marshall Island natives; they demanded coal for the barracks stoves instead of the wood made available by the camp authorities; they wanted more books and dictionaries; they did not want American personnel present in their barracks during Saturday morning cleaning; and on and on. On several occasions, the Japanese went over the head of the American camp commander, Lt. Colonel Horace Rogers, and lodged complaints with the Spanish embassy in Washington, D.C., which undertook to look after their interests. Each such complaint was immediately followed by a visit from the Spanish consul in nearby Chicago who would investigate the charges and help smooth out the difficulties.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Robert Devore, "Our 'Pampered' War Prisoners," *Collier's*, Oct. 14, 1944, p. 57.

<sup>31</sup>"Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, by Señor Gonzales, Span-

Finally, there were major divisions and animosities within the Japanese prisoner community itself. The most persistent and difficult problem was the rivalry between army and navy personnel. While such rivalries are common to all armed services, they were especially prevalent among captured survivors of a society based on the veneration of the warrior, and exacerbated by the need to blame someone for their nation's military defeats. Naval prisoners far outnumbered those from the army, and each incoming group of Japanese sailors from the battles of Midway or the Coral Sea increased the preponderance of naval prisoners over their increasingly hostile army colleagues.

Another problem among the prisoners derived from the timing of their capture. The later in the war they were captured, the greater the implied resistance to the enemy, and the less shame and dishonor for having been captured. Consequently, each arriving group of prisoners viewed those who greeted them with arrogance and disdain, forcing yet another layer of hostility on an already highly anxious and introspective prisoner community. Each party was aware that the next layer of hostility was only as far away as the next arriving group of captives.

Lastly, there was the ever-present question of honor and suicide. While suicide in a prison camp was not as glorious as death on the battlefield, to some, death by any means was preferable to living with the shame of failure. "Our desire for suicide, however, was thwarted on every hand," recalls Kazuo Sakamaki rather melodramatically, considering the tiny number of self-inflicted injuries among the Japanese POWs. "We had no knives to cut our throats. We had no ropes to hang ourselves with. Some of us banged our heads against every object in sight; some men refused to eat. And yet we did not die. . . . Our life was a dilemma. We wanted to die and yet we could not die. We wanted to kill ourselves and we could not."<sup>32</sup> This issue was

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ish Consul in Chicago, Illinois, September 30, 1944," Inspection Reports: Camp McCoy, R.G. 389, MMB-NA.

<sup>32</sup>Sakamaki, *Pearl Harbor*, 81-82. One prisoner who killed himself at McCoy apparently did so by accident. According to a teletype to FBI Headquarters from the Milwaukee Division, Chief Petty Officer Ichiro Yamashita evidently found a dud bazooka rocket while working around the camp artillery range and smuggled it into his barracks. For six weeks he kept it as a souvenir. On October 16, 1944, Yamashita walked through his barracks calling for volunteers for a camp wrestling match and banging the rocket shell on the edges of the passing metal bunks. The shell exploded, killing Yamashita and injuring five others. (Report to author from Special Agent William E. Tribble, FBI Headquarters, July 15, 1980, p. 17.)

nearly always at the boiling point and was kept there by a small number of unruly hard-liners who rejected any compromise with their required fate. On occasion they went so far as to challenge the authority of their ranking POW officer, the venerable naval Lt. Commander Kametaro Matsumoto, for attempting to promote peaceful hobbies among them. While their challenge failed to dislodge the old officer, or ferment suicidal militarism among the prisoners, or swing control from the naval to the army officers, the event helped highlight the problems with which the American authorities had to contend.

The War Department had a solution to these difficulties: put the prisoners to work. The captives would be kept occupied and, it was hoped, too tired to contemplate mischief. They could also help alleviate the domestic labor shortage caused by the shipment of millions of Americans overseas. The Geneva Convention permitted belligerents to utilize the labor of able prisoners of war, officers excepted, so long as their labor did not aid directly in the war effort. Such work fell into two broad categories: maintenance of military installations and contract work for private employers. With the initiation of the government's labor program on January 10, 1943, the German, Italian, and Japanese prisoners of war immediately began performing a variety of menial and clerical jobs within their own compounds and on military bases across the nation. They crated and packaged supplies, took inventories of equipment, operated laundries and sawmills, loaded creosote poles, marked surplus property, worked on company trash details, toiled at general construction work, did kitchen work, and served as orderlies to their senior officers. Contract labor was a different matter, though no less important. Farmers and small businessmen located near POW camps petitioned the local office of the War Manpower Commission for groups of twenty or more prisoners, although the regulations, certifications of need, objections from labor unions, and bureaucratic delays often exasperated all but the most labor-starved employers.

The more than five thousand Japanese prisoners posed a particular problem. Unlike the German prisoners who went to work with the knowledge that it was not only unavoidable but perhaps even preferable to idleness, the Japanese proved to be poor workers. They were wracked by inner conflicts, indecisively led by their noncommissioned officers, and, most importantly, distrusted by their captors. Anti-Japanese sentiment was implacable in some American communities.



When, for instance, the War Relocation Board released three Japanese Americans from an internment camp on the West Coast and shipped them to the labor-starved town of Marengo, Illinois, the residents arose in a storm of protest. The three startled farm boys from California were marched back to the train station by an angry mob led by the mayor, the president of the Park Board, and the commander of the local post of the American Legion.<sup>33</sup> Officials recognized that this community, or others like it, would likely respond no better to the appearance of Japanese military captives. The result was that the overwhelming majority of Japanese prisoners worked on military posts, under guard, rather than on contract work in the civilian sector. To overcome the reluctance of some commanders to make maximum use of their Japanese prisoner-of-war labor, General Wilhelm D. Styer, commander of the U.S. Army in the Western Pacific, thundered: "We must overcome the psychology that you cannot do this or that. I want to see these prisoners work like piss ants! If they do not work, put them on bread and water!"<sup>34</sup>

Yet a portion of the Japanese prisoners, in some cases as many as fifteen to twenty percent, simply refused to work. On a few occasions, the cause was strife within the prisoner community, especially the refusal of army prisoners to take orders from naval prisoners. But most of those who refused to work did so on the grounds that their labor would assist the American war effort. Some feigned illness while others refused to work. Nearly every routine camp report to the Provost Marshal General's Office (PMGO) mentions such recalcitrant prisoners.

The problem was how to get the prisoners to work without violating their rights or jeopardizing the safety of American prisoners. For the first two years of the war, the War Department prevented POW camp commanders from exercising any more pressure than a reprimand, an admonition, the withholding of privileges, and, in extreme cases, a court martial. Generally speaking, these were useless gestures that held no fear for combat-hardened enemy soldiers. Finally, in October 1943, the PMGO reinterpreted Article 27 of the Geneva Convention to permit the use of reasonable pressure in getting prisoners to comply with a work order. Called "administrative pressure," the pol-

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<sup>33</sup>*Chicago Tribune*, April 26, 1943, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup>Quoted in Lewis and Mewha, *Prisoner of War Utilization*, 253–254.

icy authorized the camp commander to impose a restricted diet and reduced privileges for any recalcitrant prisoner. This was not a punishment, the War Department reasoned, since the prisoner could terminate the pressure at any time simply by complying with the order; such “administrative pressure” was just an inducement to obey a proper command.<sup>35</sup>

Given this new latitude, prison camp commanders now met each potentially explosive situation with vigor. At Camp McCoy, for example, even the normally “generous and kind”<sup>36</sup> Lt. Colonel Rogers startled his Japanese POWs by his swift action. According to an amused delegation from the Spanish consulate:

On May 30, 1944, about 22 Japanese officers ordered their men not to work. Colonel Rogers spent several hours in attempting to persuade the officer prisoners to change their minds. That night he approached the 90 non-coms and asked them whether they would cooperate with him. After 9 had absolutely refused to cooperate he put them in the guard house for the night and made no attempt to interview the rest.

The next morning the prisoners staged a sit-down strike, refusing to turn out for roll-call, breakfast or work. After issuing a clear warning to the non-coms, Colonel Rogers ordered out his troops with bayonets and forced all prisoners to march at the double five miles to a place of work, to work all morning without the usual 10 minutes rest every hour, and to return to the camp at the double at noon. The prisoners of course became exhausted and about 12 stragglers received minor bayonet wounds. A few were so overcome that they had to be picked up by a truck which was ordered along for the purpose. This treatment effected a cure, for a spokesman for the non-coms informed Colonel Rogers that there would be no further trouble.<sup>37</sup>

Each incident had to be handled individually. Normally, prisoners who refused to obey a work order were sentenced to the stockade for fourteen days; in extreme cases the prisoners spent fourteen days at hard labor. In rare instances when the number of striking POWs ran into the hundreds and posed the threat of a camp uprising, the troops were called out. On only one occasion—when three Japanese naval

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<sup>35</sup>General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff, “Regulations Governing Prisoners of War,” *Prisoner of War Circular No. 1* (Sept. 24, 1943), pp. 43–6, TAB 6; General J.A. Ulio, The Adjutant General, to all Service Commands, Oct. 27, 1943, “Administrative and Disciplinary Measures for Prisoners of War,” TAB 14; and U.S. Dept. of War, “Policies Governing Administration of Disciplinary Punishment of Prisoners of War,” *Prisoner of War Circular No. 34* (June 24, 1944), PMGO, “Prisoner of War Operations,” TAB 8.

<sup>36</sup>Sakamaki, *Pearl Harbor*, 55–56.

<sup>37</sup>“Report on Visit to Prisoner of War Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, by Señor Gonzales.”

prisoners being treated for tuberculosis at Denver's Fitzsimons General Hospital rushed their guards—were prisoners shot dead on the spot.<sup>38</sup>

Curiously, the War Department's greatest fear never materialized. From the moment that the first shiploads of prisoners arrived in the United States, the government worried that thousands of escaped Nazi and Japanese prisoners would sabotage and rape their way across the country while American military forces were locked in combat overseas. Elaborate precautions were taken in the location and construction of the camps, and camp commanders were encouraged to find the most efficient balance of security measures from among such options as additional floodlights, patrolling war dogs, the censoring of prisoner mail, sporadic bed checks, a network of prisoner informants, shakedown inspections, and a general aura of firm military discipline. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, the symbol of domestic security, heightened public anxiety by warning that "even one escaped prisoner at large, trained as he is in the techniques of destruction, is a danger to our internal security, our war production, and the lives of our citizens!"<sup>39</sup> Communities which hosted Japanese prisoners, such as Sparta, Wisconsin, near McCoy, were constantly warned to be especially vigilant and to report immediately any suspicious activities. "The Japanese, with their reputation for trickiness and sneakiness," the authorities cautioned, "are apt to make a greater attempt to disturb our homefront security than the Germans ever did."<sup>40</sup>

Despite the many obstacles to prisoner escape—substantial security measures; a fatiguing labor program; an array of artistic, musical, athletic, educational, and spiritual outlets; and the most compelling obstacle of all: there was simply nowhere to go—some captives still sought to flee. Since most prisoners in the U.S. were German, they not surprisingly accounted for most of the escapes, 1,036.<sup>41</sup> Some escapees merely walked away while a guard's attention was directed elsewhere,

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<sup>38</sup>*New York Times*, Oct. 31, 1944, p. 21.

<sup>39</sup>J. Edgar Hoover, "Enemies at Large," *American Magazine*, CXXXVII (April 1944), 97; *New York Times*, May 21, 1945, p. 21.

<sup>40</sup>*Sparta Herald*, June 11, 1945, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup>These figures might seem alarming at first glance, but considering that there were more than 360,000 German POWs, the 1,036 escapes constitute less than one percent. The War Department was justifiably able to boast a lower ratio of escapes than that achieved by the federal penitentiary system with its permanent walls and the latest in security devices. "Investigations of the National War Effort," *H. Rep.* 728, p. 10.

while others cut fences, passed through the camp gates in makeshift American uniforms, smuggled themselves out aboard commercial delivery trucks, jumped over the compound fences from barracks rooftops, climbed out of hospital windows, or tunneled underground. The Japanese, to the government's astonishment and relief, seldom attempted to escape. Unlike the Germans who were breaking out at the monthly rate of three escapes per ten thousand captives, the Japanese attempted only fourteen escapes throughout the war, all from McCoy.<sup>42</sup> The first to flee was Terumasa Kibata, who slipped away from his work detail, ten miles north of the camp, on July 3, 1944. While the records indicated that Kibata suffered from shell shock and was probably not in full control of his faculties, a near-hysterical search was initiated by the police, military authorities, and FBI. Two army planes were brought in for air surveillance. Even before this collective weight could be brought fully to bear, a bewildered Kibata wandered back into camp the day after his escape. He explained to the startled guards that he had hoped to "catch a train," though he was unsure about his destination or purpose for escape.<sup>43</sup>

The next escapes did not occur until nearly a year later. During the early morning hours of May 22, 1945, three Japanese POWs, Takeo Nakamura, Kokei Tanaka, and Hajime Hashimoto, all twenty-four years of age, dug under a fence enclosure in what was probably the most well-planned escape of them all. They had plotted since September of the previous year, stealing a Texaco road map from the glove compartment of the camp ambulance, a pair of bolt cutters from a storage area, and extra food from the mess hall. When finally apprehended, Nakamura had a duffel bag filled with enough items to cover a two-page list by the FBI, and included a styptic pencil, sixteen assorted fish hooks, a hundred "U.S. Army" matchbooks, and seven changes of socks.<sup>44</sup> A Wisconsin farmer spotted him a week after his escape as he poled down the Mississippi River on a makeshift raft near the town of Prairie du Chien. His comrades did not make it that

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<sup>42</sup>Tollefson, "Enemy Prisoners of War," 63n. There are, however, a score of "less serious" escapes on record; prisoners who just wandered away from their work sites or who felt the need to walk through the woods by themselves for a couple of hours. They usually rejoined their work group without even alerting their guards, or turned themselves over to the camp authorities (who were usually unaware that the prisoners had escaped in the first place) to accept their fourteen days in confinement in exchange for a few hours of freedom and privacy.

<sup>43</sup>Report to author by FBI Special Agent Tribble, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-4.

far. They were captured several days later, less than twenty miles west of the camp and near the community of West Salem, as they marched along Highway 16 in their Japanese uniforms with the letters "PW" stenciled in bright yellow on both front and back.<sup>45</sup>

No sooner had local farmers begun to relax than two more Japanese broke out in early July. The populace was warned that the POWs would try to steal food from local farms or take milk from cows in pastures, and that "these men, with their strange philosophy of 'dying for the Emperor,' could cause a great deal of damage. Residents in the county are urged to report anything they may see or hear that might aid authorities to track down the Japs."<sup>46</sup> After being gone about a week, one escapee was captured at a local farm where he had knocked at the back door, rubbed his stomach to indicate to the startled farmwife that he was hungry, and was given some bread by the terrified woman who then dashed to the telephone. The highway patrol took him into custody as he waited politely at the back door for the next course. His comrade was apprehended on July 17 on the outskirts of West Salem, Wisconsin, where he was discovered by a Chicago & Northwestern railroad policeman huddled in a boxcar. He offered no resistance and, in the vernacular of the front-page news announcement, "the Nip was returned to confinement."<sup>47</sup> Immediately, however, another Japanese prisoner slipped away. The local population, doubtless beginning to wonder about the highly touted security measures at McCoy, girded themselves for yet another "desperate Jap on the loose."<sup>48</sup> The police and FBI were alerted as usual, dog patrols scoured the countryside, and two days later the escapee was sighted while creeping along the outer perimeter of the camp on his hands and knees. Apprehended without resistance, he told his captors that he escaped for fear that he would be beaten by the other prisoners who suspected him of being an informant. He was nonetheless returned to his compound with unknown results.

Four more escapes occurred before the end of the war, but all the captives were returned in a matter of days. The last Japanese prisoner to escape during the war was Yuzo Ohashi, a recent captive from Iwo Jima. Early on the morning of August 29, 1945, he slipped away from

<sup>45</sup>*Monroe County Democrat*, May 24, 1945, p. 1; *Sparta Herald*, June 4, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup>*Monroe County Democrat*, July 5, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>47</sup>*Sparta Herald*, July 9, 1945, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup>*Monroe County Democrat*, July 19, 1945, p. 1.

his work detail and, under the mistaken belief that “Mexico was located about 300 miles south of Camp McCoy,” spent the next four days moving south and foraging for food. He was apprehended on September 2—the day of Japan’s official surrender—at Cashton, Wisconsin, about twenty-two miles south of McCoy. He told his guards that Japan had clearly lost the war and that he did not wish to return home in shame. It was escape, Ohashi explained, or suicide.<sup>49</sup>

As the end of the war with Japan approached, American authorities worried about the possibility of mass suicides among the POWs. Imaginations ran wild, fueled by stories about the mass suicides on Iwo Jima and Okinawa; the riots by the Japanese prisoners at Camps Featherston and Cowra in New Zealand;<sup>50</sup> and by the appearance of a lengthy alarmist article in the *Rocky Shimpō*, a Japanese-language newspaper published in Denver, which predicted a dreaded mass suicide of the prisoners at Camp McCoy.<sup>51</sup> Despite such fears, the end of the war passed uneventfully with no suicides among the POWs.

With Japan’s surrender came the question of democracy in postwar Japan. The public mood was perhaps best summarized by a Texas cowboy in a “man-on-the-street” opinion poll, who stated that “You can’t civilize or educate Germans or Japs in a short length of time. We’ve got to give them a new form of government so we might as well start making Democrats out of them right now.”<sup>52</sup> The War Department agreed. As early as April 1945, the Special Projects Division of the PMGO had considered a program to reeducate the Japanese prisoners despite a ban on such activity by the Geneva Convention. Following a secret study conducted among the Japanese POWs at McCoy, Clarinda, and Angel Island, the PMGO determined that

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<sup>49</sup>Report to author by FBI Special Agent Tribble, p. 16.

<sup>50</sup>Charlotte Carr-Gregg, *Japanese Prisoners of War in Revolt: The Outbreaks at Featherston and Cowra during World War II* (New York, 1978).

<sup>51</sup>*Rocky Shimpō* (Denver), Dec. 25, 1944 (microfilm reel no. MJ-117, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.) There is no evidence that the prisoners had access to the *Rocky Shimpō* or any of the other Japanese-language newspapers published in the U.S. (*Hawaii Hochi*, *Los Angeles Do ho Weekly*, *San Francisco Nichi Bei*, or *Salt Lake City Nippo*). Indeed, while the War Department authorized the prisoners of war to receive approved newspapers in German, Slovak, Polish, Croatian, Serbian, Spanish, Russian, and Hungarian, no Japanese-language newspapers were offered. (U.S. Dept. of War, “Newspapers and Magazines for Prisoners of War,” *Prisoner of War Circular No. 52* [Nov. 29, 1944], PMGO, “Prisoners of War Operations,” TAB 8.

<sup>52</sup>*Huntsville Item*, Aug. 16, 1945, pp. 1, 10.

such an indoctrination effort would not only provide the American occupation forces in Japan with reliable government officials, but would serve as a laboratory to test the educational and rehabilitation programs under consideration for the postwar period. The project was secretly authorized by the Secretary of War on July 18, 1945, after which the prisoners were screened, evaluated, and the most cooperative among them selected for reeducation. The potential converts to democracy, a total of 205 men, were then sent to one of three specially designated "re-orientation centers": Camps Huntsville, Kenedy, or Hearne, Texas.<sup>53</sup>

The program was directed by Lt. Colonel Boude C. Moore, born in Japan to missionary parents, educated in the United States, and resident of Japan from 1924 until 1941. He was assisted by Dr. Charles W. Hepner, a luminary from the Far Eastern Branch of the Office of War Information, who had spent some thirty years in Japan. Together they organized a dazzling program of lectures by the faculty of nearby Sam Houston State Teachers College, with simultaneous translation into Japanese; study of the English language and literature; comparisons of American and Japanese newspapers, books, and magazines; and the translation of material for distribution to the Japanese prisoners not participating in the program. The most important activity was the assignment every two weeks of a new "study topic" which required group and individual research and discussion. The topics ranged from an assessment of Japan's civilian and military morale to the comparison of various segments of Japanese and American ways of life. Moore and Hepner hoped that these exercises would cause the prisoners to consider the nuances of the subjects and require some measure of democratic input by all members. They also believed that the reports would serve as a barometer of the POWs' morale and allegiance to the Emperor.

Augmenting these pursuits was a heavy dose of American music, newspapers, movies and cartoons, and such recreational activities as softball, table tennis, and baseball. The prisoners were also encour-

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<sup>53</sup>PMGO, "Re-education of Enemy Prisoners of War, Japanese Program" (Dec. 15, 1945), p. 18, OCMH. Camp Kenedy, a branch camp of Fort Sam Houston, was used earlier to house more than a thousand Japanese internees from Latin America. See Bernard Gufler to State Dept: "Report on Civilian Detention Station, Camp Kenedy, Texas, May 22, 1942," file 254, Camp Kenedy, R.G. 389, MMB-NA; and Edward N. Barnhart, "Japanese Internees from Peru," *Pacific Historical Review*, XXXI (1962), 169-178.

aged to attend Sunday religious services in an effort “to replace their traditional Emperor-worship with a more positive philosophy, and to show them the close relationship between democracy and Christian principles.”<sup>54</sup> When the program ended in December 1945 and the POWs prepared for repatriation home, the authorities believed that a significant, if unknown, number of the prisoners had embraced the principles of the American dream. Unfortunately, no follow-up investigation traced the careers of the Japanese “graduates” and their impact, if any, on postwar politics.

No sooner was the war over than Washington began repatriating Japanese POWs as promptly as shipping permitted.<sup>55</sup> While Japanese prisoners in the Philippines, Hawaii, and Okinawa were not released for another year—due as much to Allied fears for the security of postwar Japan as to the need for cheap labor—the prisoners in the U.S. started home less than a month after the war ended. Beginning in October 1945, the Japanese POWs at McCoy, Clarinda, Hearne, Kenedy, and Huntsville were sent to a cluster of holding camps at Lamont, California. There they kept busy with the usual military post-related tasks as carpenters, cooks, and janitors and also as contract workers on local farms. By the end of December 1945, vessel space became available for 1,120 men (including 675 sick and badly wounded) and the captives were trucked to the Los Angeles Port of Embarkation for immediate shipment overseas.<sup>56</sup> Each departing man was fingerprinted once again, his records updated, and his belongings searched for “contraband” or money in excess of the 500 yen (\$125) or 200 yen (\$50) which the officers or enlisted men respectively were allowed to bring back to Japan.<sup>57</sup> A week later, on January 5, 1946, another 1,462 Japanese departed; on January 20, three days after a third group of 441 prisoners left Lamont for Los Angeles, that camp was deactivated.<sup>58</sup> Also during January the remaining 2,376 Japanese

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<sup>54</sup>Colonel Moore’s final report made the expansive claim that “the maximum percentage of prisoners in the camp attending any one Sunday service was 42 per cent plus, and the average attendance was over 25 per cent.” PMGO, “Re-education of Enemy Prisoners of War,” p. 18.

<sup>55</sup>Memo from Lt. Col. Kunzig, June 18, 1946: “Retention of Japanese Prisoners of War in the Pacific Areas,” file (TS), 383.6, Records of the Office of the Adjutant General, R.G. 407, MMB-NA.

<sup>56</sup>PMGO, “Prisoner of War Operations,” TABs 3, 6, 22, 24.

<sup>57</sup>Walter Rundell, Jr., *Military Money: A Fiscal History of the U.S. Army Overseas in World War II* (College Station, Texas, 1980), 183.

<sup>58</sup>Memo, from Major C.N. Elliot, Assistant Adjutant General, to the Prisoner of War Divi-



prisoners departed from a similar system of camps in Corcoran, California, to the piers of San Francisco and Japan. A single Japanese prisoner remained to recover from his wounds, and on June 1, 1948, he waved an indifferent farewell to Angel Island from the railing of his departing ship. It was over. For the 5,400 repatriated Japanese captives,<sup>59</sup> however, numerous difficulties still lay ahead.

The events which greeted the returning Japanese were bitter-sweet. The emotion of seeing the port of Uruga and Mt. Fuji was mixed with shame of returning alive from enemy captivity. Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki became something of a public figure, not only as a former POW, but as the first Japanese prisoner of the war. "Everyday, letters poured in," Sakamaki recalls, quoting from a representative sample:

Your past is not wrong at all. You need not feel ashamed. On the contrary, we owe you thanks. With a new heart, please work for a reconstruction of our beloved country.

No wonder we lost the war, Mr. P.O.W. No. 1. Although I am a mere merchant, I know how to commit hara-kiri. A man who does not know what shame is, is a beast. If you want to die now, I will gladly come and show you how it's done.

Which is the more manly life—live long and cheap, or live short but glorious? Shame on you.

And finally,

I cannot understand how you could return alive. The souls of the brave comrades who fought with you and died must be crying now over what you have done. If you are not ashamed of yourself now, please explain how come. If you are ashamed of yourself now, you should commit suicide at once and apologize to the spirits of the heroes who died honorably.<sup>60</sup>

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sion of the PMGO: "Prisoner of War Camp Labor Report, 19 February 1946," file Lamont, California (Japanese), R.G. 389, MMB-NA.

<sup>59</sup>Of the original 5,424 Japanese prisoners in the U.S., 24 died in captivity and, with the exception of 3 still buried in the Fort Sam Houston National Cemetery, 3 at Fort Riley, Kansas, and 1 at the Presidio in Monterey, California, all bodies were returned to Japan by 1954. (PMGO Report, "Deceased Enemy POWs Interred in the United States Corrected to 19 April 1951," file 66A3055, container #17, R.G. 389, MMB-NA). Of those who died in captivity, two apparently killed themselves, three were shot during an escape attempt at Denver's Fitzsimons General Hospital, one died in an agricultural accident, and the remaining eighteen succumbed to earlier war wounds or natural causes. PMGO, "Prisoner of War Operations," pp. 28, 229.

<sup>60</sup>Sakamaki, *Pearl Harbor*, 108–109.

Many years passed before Sakamaki and his more than 1,500,000 fellow former prisoners of war held by Russia, China, Britain, and the United States<sup>61</sup> became comfortably integrated into Japanese society, a process made far easier for those who had been held in the United States. They returned better fed and clothed than their comrades in other Allied camps. They were also more emotionally stable and often had at least a smattering of the language of their new occupiers. Summing up his four years of war, Sakamaki described a metamorphosis which startled even himself:

My steps were these: all-out attack, failure, capture, a sense of dilemma, mental struggle, attempts at suicide, failure again, self-contempt, deep disillusionment, despair and melancholy, reflections, desire to learn and yearning for truth, meditation, rediscovering myself, self-encouragement, discovery of a new duty, freedom through love, and finally, a desire for reconstruction.

I claim no credit for this transformation. I wish to preach to no one. I only hope that this will show to all . . . that man is capable of being made anew. . . .

The key to it all, Sakamaki concluded, was the concept of democracy. "I learned it as a prisoner. It was the best education of my life."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup>For further information on the experiences of Japanese prisoners in Russian, Chinese, and British hands, see Nakamura Taisuke, *Siberia yo sayonara, Shiberia yokuryu ninenkan no kiroku* [Farewell to Siberia, a Record of Two Years' Internment] (Tokyo, 1966); Uchimura Gosuke, *Iki isogu Sutarin goku no Nihonjin* [Getting By: The Japanese in Stalin's Prisons] (Tokyo, 1967); Nakazono Eisuke, "Kokkyo naisen, nihonhei made kachuni," [The Nationalist-Communist Civil War: Japanese Soldiers Caught in the Middle], in *Mainichi Shimbun* (Tokyo), Aug. 15, 1965; and Yuji Aida, *Prisoner of the British*, trans. by Hide Ishiguro and Louis Allen (London, 1966).

<sup>62</sup>Sakamaki, *Pearl Harbor*, 129, 133. However difficult Sakamaki's reintegration into post-war Japanese society, the onus of having been captured in battle did not prevent him from reaching a position of corporate responsibility and financial success. After the war, Sakamaki joined the Toyota company and rose to become chief of its operations in Brazil. Today, the sixty-year-old businessman—still a life-long champion of democracy—heads the Japanese-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce in São Paulo.