



Military Occupation of Japan

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In August 1945, I was attached to the 33rd Infantry Division in northern Luzon. I had reason to be happy – I was a brand-new 2nd lieutenant, thanks to a battlefield commission, and our unit had recaptured Baguio City after five months of fierce fighting.

But I had just received word that my request for a transfer had been turned down. I was not looking forward to our upcoming invasion of Japan, and had hoped to be assigned to another theater. I was not one to shirk a fight, but my mother and three brothers had returned Japan after my father died in 1933. Even though they were Nisei, like me, there was a good chance that my brothers had been drafted into the Japanese Army. I dreaded the thought of meeting them on the battlefield.

Then on August 6, 1945, my world was rocked by powerful new developments. The good news was that United States had deployed the atomic bomb, a powerful new weapon which wreaked such enormous havoc that it promised to shorten the war. The bad news was that the bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima City, where my family lived. I was in a state of shock. Had my mother and brothers, whom I had not seen since 1938, survived the blast? I was sick with worry.

On August 14, Emperor Hirohito broadcast Japan's surrender. The war was over. Overnight, our military mission changed from making war to making peace, and the 33rd Division was designated to go to Japan as an Occupation Force. As a member of the MIS language team, I spent the next month lecturing American GIs about the Japanese people and their customs. With the war ending so suddenly, the U.S. military had to make an entirely new and unexpected shift from attacker to peacekeeper, although we still anticipated some guerrilla warfare and sabotage.

The mental shift was especially challenging for the average American soldier, since anti-

Japanese hatred had recently been at its highest as they geared themselves up for a bloody invasion. For the proud Japanese, I knew, it would be equally challenging to accept the humiliation and disgrace of being conquered and occupied.

I myself was eligible to rotate back to the mainland after almost two-and-a-half years of island-hopping under General MacArthur's command, but I volunteered to accompany the 33rd Division to Japan. I wanted to look for my family as soon as I got the chance.

Our division landed on the beaches of Wakanoura in Wakayama Prefecture in mid-September. Division headquarters were set up in Kobe City and division troops spread out over the nine-prefecture Kansai area. Our initial assignments were to locate and liberate American prisoners-of-war, and to demobilize and demilitarize the Japanese military while maintaining security. Our MIS language detachment acted as interpreters and translators for the division's dispersed units. Within a few days, we also made direct contact with local police and government officials.

During the first few days, we saw very few Japanese civilians in the cities. Most residents had been evacuated to the countryside or to the mountains when the urban areas had been targeted by U.S. strategic bombers. As word got out that the American soldiers were not the terrible savages they had been made out to be, inhabitants began to return to the cities. Many had a difficult time. Their homes had been destroyed, and they had no place to return to. The Japanese people had suffered through twelve long years of war, since Japan had invaded Manchuria in 1933. The country had few natural resources to begin with. With their imports cut off, and industries decimated by bombing, the population lacked the barest necessities. Medical facilities and transportation networks were virtually nonexistent, and hundreds of thousands of city-dwellers hung on the edge of starvation. Several survivors told me "it was easier to die than to live."

Amazingly, the Japanese people quickly learned that the U.S. Occupation forces were there to help, and the U.S. military authorities realized equally quickly that Japan as a defeated nation welcomed the change. Overnight, bitter enemies became close working-partners, and the Nisei linguist soldiers played an important role in cementing this relationship.

For the short period that I was in Japan, from September 1945 to January 1946, I was a team leader, supervising about 20 Nisei linguist soldiers. Most of them, however, were quick studies who understood the importance and responsibility of their roles, and and



enjoyed their work tremendously. I also served as personal interpreter for Major General Clarkson, commander of the 33rd Division, and as advisor to his general staff since, I also conducted liaison with top-level officials of the Japanese government, many Japanese leaders sought my assistance in communicating with U.S. military authorities. Several of the officials I met during the early stages of the Occupation become my friends, and we maintained close personal relationships over 20 to 25 years.

About two weeks after arriving in Japan, I was able to get permission from my division commander to travel by Jeep to Hiroshima to look for my family. I arrived in early October and found my mother and brothers in our partially-damaged family home on the outskirts of Hiroshima City. My mother had survived the atomic bomb because she had been in a bomb shelter, but my older brother Victor had been injured by the bombing. He was to die a few months later from radiation poisoning. Many of my relatives had died or disappeared in the atomic blast.

I was overjoyed to see my two younger brothers, Pierce and Frank. They had been drafted into the Japanese Army, and had returned home just a few days before I arrived in Hiroshima. Frank had been assigned to a suicide unit in Miyazaki Prefecture. He had been training to blow up a U.S. military vehicle by running up to it and detonating an explosive strapped to his back. I shuddered when I heard that he was supposed to guard the beaches of Miyazaki Prefecture on the island of Kyushu. That was where my division had been planning to land on November 1, 1945. I was glad that the atomic bomb had ended the war.

During the first month after our arrival in Japan, hordes of Japanese children wandered the streets without food and shelter. Enlisting the help of our mess-hall cooks, I got left-over food to distribute to the children. Most of them had never seen or tasted sweets. The candy and cakes were a rare treat. Word spread quickly, and soon, many of the Army mess halls were providing the Japanese community with left-overs. This kind gesture by the American soldiers did more to help grass-roots level cooperation and coordination than words can express.

I returned to Japan for a second tour in September 1947. I stayed until September 1954. These seven years covered most of the Military Occupation period, including the Korean War and the important post-WW II recovery period. My official Army duties were interesting as well as challenging, and I had the opportunity to personally participate in many rewarding and self-satisfying activities.



I had been discharged from the Army in March 1946, but I re-enlisted because I thought it would put me in a better position to help my family in Japan. They were suffering unusual hardships. My older brother Victor had died from atomic radiation and other members of the family were ill and undergoing difficulties.

After attending the Army Counter Intelligence School in Baltimore, Maryland, I was assigned to the 441st Counter Intelligence Group for seven years, five years in Toyama and two years in the Kansai. CIC units stationed throughout Japan were known as MacArthur's "eyes and ears" because we investigated and reported everything, good or bad. Our guidance came from GHQ in Tokyo and likewise our reports were for their consumption. CIC offices were located throughout Japan and through their reporting, GHQ was able to keep tabs on the "pulse" on whatever was happening, or about to happen, in Japan. Since security and maintaining the peace were our main objectives, the police and other security agencies were our main counterparts, but, as necessary, we also contacted directly all departments and levels of the Japanese government, as well as other agencies and organizations such as labor unions and private companies. In all of these activities, knowledge of the Japanese language, culture and customs were all important assets that the Nisei linguist soldiers were able to utilize to effectively perform their duties.

For five years, from September 1947 to June 1952, I was assigned to Toyama Prefecture, an isolated area facing the Japan Sea. The U.S. military presence there was limited to a small U.S. Military Government Team and a U.S. Army Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC) unit. Our CIC mission required direct contact with local Japanese government offices and exposure to the Japanese public on a daily basis. In 1951, the Military Government office disbanded, leaving the Toyama CIC office as the sole U.S. military unit in the prefecture. This was of particular significance because with the out break of the Korean War in June 1950, the coastal area along the Japan Sea became a target for smuggling and spy activities. Investigating and reporting all suspected criminal and counterintelligence activities became the main part of our official mission. I commanded the Toyama CIC office for most of this period and as a subordinate office of the 441st CIC Detachment with Headquarters in Tokyo, I will discuss a few of the main activities that I personally was involved in, although many of the details are no longer remembered due to passage of time.

For the Christmas of 1948, our small CIC office decided to have a party for orphans in Toyama City. The city was one of many that had been bombed in the B-29 strategic



bombing raids of March 1945. Ninety-eight percent of the city destroyed. We began planning for the party in June. All eight personnel in our office, including the six Nisei, started saving our rations. Toyama was in an isolated area with no PX or commissary facilities, so we had to purchase necessary items from the PX train that came through once a month. We pooled our money and bought soap and candy whenever we could, and we also asked our families to send gifts from the United States. On the big day, we asked the help of the Welfare Section of the Toyama Prefectural government to invite about 50 orphans to the Toyama CIC office. After a simple Christmas party with refreshments and Christmas songs, we presented gifts containing a bar of soap, candy and an item of clothing to each orphan. Most of the kids had never tasted Coca Cola; some commented that it tasted like medicine. In the many thank-you letters we received, some commented that they had experienced a steam-heated room for the first time. Toyama City had several feet of snow in the wintertime, and the orphanage had very little heat. For the next 4 years, the Christmas party for the Toyama City orphans became an annual event, and with monetary and logistical support from municipal government and local stores, we were able to invite more children.

In 1948, our official and social contacts were expanding, but I felt more could be done to enhance our relationship with the Japanese counterparts. The destroyed city of Toyama was gradually getting back on its feet, but I noticed that recreational activities, especially sports, were very limited. I knew that the Japanese had enjoyed baseball before the war and that it was banned during the war years because it was an American sport. I arranged to have our headquarters send us baseball equipment, which we provided to several police stations. Soon the CIC office was playing baseball several days a week, whether we wanted to or not. Within a year, baseball became our main means of establishing rapport with various government offices.

In 1951, a U.S. professional baseball team played at the newly-built Toyama Baseball Stadium. The visiting team consisted mainly of New York Yankees, including Joe Dimaggio, his brother Dominic and manager Lefty O'Doul. I was asked to throw the first pitch in the opening ceremony, and the Governor of Toyama Prefecture was the honorary batter. Baseball was more than "just a game." It created a rapport that transcended language and spawned a sense of goodwill that was remembered by the Japanese for many years. For our CIC office, it was another means to a successful end.

In my official capacity, I vetted, recruited and developed many informants who provided timely and important information that we oftentimes found difficult to obtain. On several



occasions, I was able to help when our confidential sources were confronted with personal problems. Taking advantage of my position, I was able to provide services that were not readily available to them, such as medicine not available on the Japanese market. In one instance, I was able to provide a confidential source with penicillin that saved his wife's life. We later became close personal friends. In this case, I was able to do a good deed, while ensuring that our office would continue to receive good intelligence from a credible source.

When I was first assigned to the Toyama CIC office, in September 1947, I met a young Nisei girl who became my wife two years later. Terry Yamamoto had come to Japan as a teenager before the war. She was working as an interpreter at the Toyama Military Government Team. We were married at the Yokohama Consulate office on May 9, 1949. The governor of Toyama Prefecture, Gov. Takatsuji, had known Terry since 1945. He insisted we have a Japanese wedding and that he and his wife be the official go-betweens. Ten days after a military church wedding by an Army chaplain, we were married once more in a formal ceremony at a Shinto shrine, with the governor and his wife as official go-betweens. We were married three times in one month, at the consulate, in church and at a Shinto shrine, but we had only one honeymoon. Our close relationship with the governor made our stay in Toyama very enjoyable. We were like adopted Toyama citizens. We left the area in June 1952 when the unit was disbanded after the signing of the Peace Treaty between the U.S. and Japan. Our close relationship with the Takasuji family continued for over 30 years.

Many Japanese people I met officially later became personal acquaintances and family friends. In some cases, our children continued the association and some relationships are now continuing into the third generation. My wife Terry has done much to maintain close relationships with our Japanese friends over the past 50-odd years. I still visit Japan at least once a year, and many of my Japanese friends visit us. It has been a fulfilling life for me and a sentimental journey in every respect.

On September 13, 1990, prior to my retirement from government service; I received the award of the Order of the Rising Sun, 3rd Class, with Gold Ray and Neck Ribbon, from the Japanese government in recognition of my service in Japan, including the Occupation period. I was the third MIS member to receive this prestigious award from the Japanese government.

