

Keeping Order in the Indies

NOGI HARUMICHI [2]

The Dutch East Indies were central to Japan's vision of a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. From the islands of Indonesia would come petroleum and other resources vital to Japan's military economy. Stunning military successes throughout the Dutch and British holdings in the Indies brought the oil-rich areas of Borneo under Japanese control—Balikpapan fell January 24 and Bandjarmasin was taken February 16. Sumatra and Java were conquered in April 1942.

Indonesia—unlike the Philippines, Burma, Thailand, Manchukuo, the so-called Nationalist government of Japanese-occupied China, and the "Free India Interim Government"—was not "invited" to the Greater East Asia Conference, which opened in Japan on October 5, 1943, to proclaim the realization of the dream. For the Indies, direct military administration, quickly established, with the army and navy each having its own distinct geographic sphere, seems to have been the solution preferred. It

was only in September 1944, as defeat loomed, that Prime Minister Koiso Kuniaki promised Indonesia independence "in the near future."

Nogi Harumichi was in the navy's administration, which included southern Borneo, the Celebes, the Moluccas, and Lesser Sunda. "I was sentenced to thirty years' hard labor by the Americans for what I did in Indonesia during the war. When I walked out the gate of Sugamo Prison in 1955, my sentence commuted, I felt that freedom was the only thing I wanted. I was then thirty-seven years old."

In 1942 I thought occupying a country was a wonderful thing. When our ship arrived at the Celebes, in Indonesia, I saw wide stretches of uncultivated soil. "We can develop this land and introduce Japanese technology here," I thought. We were billeted in the houses built by the Dutch colonizers. We didn't take anything from the Indonesians, only from the Dutch. On any given day we might receive the order "Bring your buckets for distribution of wine" or "Officers, prepare to receive whiskey." Johnny Walker whiskey was everywhere. Until confiscated by us, these things had been the property of the exploiters, so most of the time I felt it was fine for us to liberate them.

We had no idea what the four of us new-minted naval candidate officers would be used for. All they said was, "We'll train you on site. Be ready." We made up lists of Dutch prisoners of war who were gathered on the grounds of a former school. Mr. Itō and I met with the Dutch commander, a lieutenant colonel. We issued him orders: "Make a list of prisoners. We will examine it." We were told to gather books from evacuated houses in the city of Macassar, where military confiscation and requisition announcements were posted. We found refrigerators fully stocked, cupboards loaded with whiskey. Western clothes were hanging in the closets. Automobiles sat in front of the houses. We gathered all the books using trucks. Itō was very good with books. He separated and classified them. While we did such miscellaneous tasks by day, we began basic officer training at night, learning such fundamental things as naval regulations, boat handling, and how to command men.

My mental image of the South was really based on a comic strip called *The Adventures of Dankichi*. No matter what I had learned in school, no matter how many pictures I saw of modern cities with wide boulevards like those in Holland, I just couldn't get those images of Dankichi's South Sea islands out of my head. Even when I listened to lectures about life in Surabaya, in my imagination I saw small desert islands with naked black natives under palm trees. When I saw how things really were I was actually shocked.

The building we used as our headquarters had housed the offices

of the Netherlands governor general. It was in Greco-Roman style, enormous fans turning overhead in each room. It even had running hot water. Japan didn't have such things. In this occupied area I learned for the first time how developed Europe was. Grand refrigerators were manufactured in Europe, while in Japan we still used iceboxes. Here the Japanese military was full of people who'd come directly from farming villages, never even been to Tokyo. Many didn't even know how to urinate in a Western toilet. A lot of them stood on top and blasted away. A distant anxiety grew in me: "Can Japan win?"

A Civil Administration Department was established in August 1942. I was assigned to its legal section. I was thrown in there, even though I was still just a cadet ensign. Well-educated Indonesians were assigned to each section. They'd been working for the government since the Dutch period and could bring out a great book of documents and records whenever I asked them a question. Japan recreated exactly the same structure the Dutch had used. If we'd removed that, we couldn't have administered the country. This was true even at the lowest levels. Each local district had its own head, with its own system of self-government. It was almost completely feudalistic and practically universal. In the Celebes, the Dutch had controlled only the population of the city of Macassar, and the village headmen were in charge elsewhere. The Japanese military authorities followed the same pattern. We used the feudalistic system as it was.

One of my first jobs was to go with the chief of the the telephone-communications section to inspect facilities needed for public order and security, including prisons, police, and telephones. We traveled through the southern part of the Celebes by car. All seemed to be functioning well, and we Japanese were being treated as liberators who had expelled the Dutch for the Indonesians. The haughty Dutch who had lorded it over the Indies found themselves prisoners overnight. When I got to areas where Japanese forces had never been, village chiefs welcomed me. I wore a white military uniform, but concealed my pistol. They waved the Sun flag and the Indonesian flag too. I felt we were doing something wonderful there. To me, at least, they looked as if they favored us. This lasted through the end of 1942. Then the military demanded an allotment of the rice harvest from the depths of the Celebes. There was a stirring of tension among the locals and troops had to be mobilized to control it.

Allied bombing started in 1943. Macassar was hit practically daily. Casualties began to mount up. Mr. Sumida—today chairman of the Bank of Japan, then a lieutenant, j.g., representing the Civil Administration Department—a naval lieutenant commander, and I were in charge of civil defense. Just before each air raid, it seemed a flare would be sent up, showing our location. Spies were suspected, but the efforts I led to

catch them in the act failed. I can't say that there was an organized independence movement acting against us. I sensed resistance in town, but I couldn't pin it down. At first, the pedicabs had stopped the instant I called out to them. Now they kept going as if they didn't hear.

Large-scale arrests of foreigners, persons of mixed blood, and intellectuals were carried out by the Police Affairs Section of the Civil Administration Department, together with a unit of the Navy Special Police, the Tokkeitai, set up at the end of 1943. I worked with them as an interpreter, but refused to continue participation when I realized the charges were invariably trumped up. I disliked the police mentality shown by the unit's inspectors, but the men at the top were deadly serious, so I didn't dare criticize them. I simply told them I didn't have such skills as an interpreter. All Japanese who were involved received death sentences after the war.

I also became aware that right-wing financial groups and the military were in league in our area. Of course, that's not the way I would have described things then. The head of my old private academy had come to Indonesia with his wife. He now headed up the Southern Awakening Construction Company. It even had a Southern Awakening Friendship Association attached to it. When the military built a road to an airfield, an enormous amount of money was appropriated for the job. This construction company would then take the whole job. It didn't really matter what they charged. All the budgets were special military expenditures. With that money, the commanders and the rightists went out drinking. Restaurants with Japanese names were built all over. The ones in Macassar were constructed from beautiful and expensive wood. Tatami mats were brought in on warships. They were really gorgeous, but people like me couldn't really go there. They were for senior staff officers and cost too much. There were serving women there, though no real geishas. On rare occasions, our commander might declare, "I'll take you all. My treat." I'm sure he had special expense money for that. Kaneko-Sensei—my teacher, the academy head—was hanging out with the captains and colonels. I wasn't much use to him, only a lieutenant, j.g., so I had little to do with him in Macassar, but I heard that when he invited high officials to his home, he'd say, "Nogi's one of my boys. Been at my academy. Take care of him."

When you've been in the navy for two years and are promoted, they'll ask you where you want to go. If you remain in the same post after your promotion, you lose dignity. Mr. Itō and some of the others requested transfers back to the Homeland. I requested a transfer to the front lines. I'd started to wonder what I was doing there, military man that I was. I don't think I was motivated any longer by a desire to win the

liberation of Indonesia, but I wanted to be sent somewhere where there was intense combat. I was fed up with being a bureaucrat.

I was put in charge of the Tokkeitai special naval police on Ambon Island, closer to New Guinea, and, by then, virtually on the front lines. New Guinea was under attack and American forces were sweeping toward us. I'd never studied the laws that applied to police work. My commander was a naval captain who issued me orders. We were in charge of enforcing military discipline and regulations over our area, including controlling things within the military itself.

I posted two slogans in my Tokkeitai office: "We Are The Emperor's Subordinates" and "The People's Mind Is Our Fortress." I never thought of the Emperor as divine, but I have to admit I used His authority. I really did believe, and told my men, that we dared not lose the local people's mind in the course of accomplishing our duties.

Soon after I'd reported to Amboina, I received a telephone call from headquarters ordering me to go to an ordinary house. When I arrived, I found my *sensei*, Kaneko, this time with Vice Admiral Yamagata and his chief of staff. They had a large bottle of saké. The former head of my academy spoke to me as if I were one of his gang: "I got the go-ahead from the local commander, here. We're gonna build a training base for our boatmen. You're picked to run it. I'll give you the best petty officers as teachers. All right?" Boatmen were necessary for Southern Awakening Construction's ferry service, running back and forth between the islands. They were now going to get the military to train the crews for them. I was startled that such a decision was being made in this kind of place. The commander himself asked me directly, "Well, how about it?" My reply was, "I'll do it if it's an order."

From then on, I was in charge both of the special naval police and the boatmen being trained. They gathered the sons of Indonesian village heads and young local officials too. They were all smart. They were to be taught simple sailing techniques, Morse code, and hand signals. I had to teach them ideology, trying to explain why we were fighting this war, why they had to cooperate with us. My argument was that if Japan lost, their nation would remain a colony, and I asked them to cooperate until victory was achieved.

I didn't truly believe those arguments any longer, but I used them anyway. I felt we were only turning them into our own colony. I had once imagined we would be leading Indonesians in singing their independence anthem, "Indonesia Raia," but now we banned it. I even received an order that all nationalist movements were to be prohibited. We put local people into various key positions and then ordered them to report even the tiniest rumors to us. We dispatched unit members to the houses of

suspected local nationalists, but until the end of the war we hardly ever found any.

Among the Japanese forces the atmosphere became more and more brutal. Violent incidents occurred regularly. Superiors were beaten up by drunken soldiers. A naval captain beat up a civilian administrator, accusing him of being presumptuous. There was even a murder that was hushed up. The victim, it was said, "died of illness," and when I tried to investigate anyway, I was told the case was closed. The captain in charge cursed me out: "Stupid fledgling! Don't poke your beak where it doesn't belong. A battle of annihilation is imminent. If we punish this man, we'll be reducing the fighting strength of Japan!" He then suggested that I leave the police unit. "How'd you like to be in charge of an air-defense unit?" This was a threat. If you commanded antiaircraft guns you were the target of an avalanche of bombs. This incident convinced me the military was a capricious organization not worthy of my trust. From then on, I no longer encouraged the men under my command to track down crimes.

The Indonesian people knew, thanks to their illegal short-wave radios, that Japan was losing in New Guinea. When we caught locals whispering about it, we seized them for spreading groundless rumors and undercutting morale. Just listening to short wave—well that was enough reason to execute them. It was in military law and was accepted. We had such cases.

I was cautious, though. I never did anything before the eyes of the locals. Even when we had to do something, I never, never let them see. This wasn't a humanistic matter for me. It was tactical. It would have been bad strategy to stir them up. I judged that I would get stronger negative reactions if we tried to make examples of violators than if we didn't. In other areas they did make examples. But in my area, when they knew we'd captured someone for acting against us, I always had a notice sent to their village informing them that the party had escaped. Even when he'd actually been executed. Often we had trials first. I knew that our military occupation would be powerless if the locals began guerrilla activities against us.

During this period, in 1944, American pilots fell in our area. Army and navy staff officers came to interrogate them, bringing maps on which they could pinpoint locations. After they had extracted the intelligence they wanted from them, the order came down, "Process them." I knew it was illegal. Because I'd studied some law, I knew international regulations. But every day, those two-engine Lockheeds would come and run wild, doing what they wanted. All our planes had been destroyed. We could offer no resistance. We were enraged and frustrated. When you

lose your own fighting capability and can only suffer under their attacks, you become vengeful yourself. We'll get them! They'll pay for this!

"It's illegal," I thought, "but the only choice for Japan is total annihilation or victory. If we go on losing like this, we'll never return home alive. Will I be questioned on my responsibility? Not likely. We'll all be dead. If we win, there's nothing to worry about because it was ordered from above." Welling up within myself I felt sentiments like "How dare they bomb us! We can't give them special treatment just because they're prisoners. I can never forgive them."

When I appeared at my trial as a war criminal I didn't say that, of course. I said I had no choice but to obey orders. But the truth was, I wanted to kill them. Still, when I saw their faces, I pitied them. They were as young as ours. The soldiers who'd prepared the ground for the execution, and who'd dug the graves, all watched me. Saying this today I feel ashamed. I had a strange vanity. I didn't want to embarrass myself in front of the men. If I didn't make a good show of it, I'd be a laughing-stock. If I analyze my psychology today, I would say I killed them because of that. They were very pale. Their eyes were blindfolded properly. You had to have an actual document, a written sentence and an order of execution, to do it. But there was no trial or hearing. I knew this was illegal, but I announced: "You have been sentenced to death." They asked, "Why?" If I'd listened to them, my own spirit would have been dulled, so holding my sword I made them kneel down.

There were three of them. We used our swords, because it was risky to use pistols. The sound of shooting could have stirred up the local residents. That's why we didn't use a firing squad. We took them deep into the mountains where not even the locals could observe us. Americans. Whites. Pilots. I don't remember their names. The ones who interrogated them surely must remember, though.

Why did we do this? Those who fell from the sky at the front all got killed. Their presence was undeniable evidence that Japanese forces were collapsing, and the Japanese commanders didn't want this known even among their own troops. I think that's why such killing took place. I suspect that such a policy was applied broadly, but I have no hard proof. But consider the fact that this happened all across the front. It can't have been due simply to spontaneous orders from the local commanders. Something had to have come from higher up. Yet, even today, field-grade officers and such never say anything disadvantageous to themselves. I sometimes have occasion to meet them, and I ask them while we're sharing saké, but they still won't speak of it.

The reason I didn't have my subordinates do it in my place was that all of them were former police officers. They had wives and children.

They weren't young. I felt sorry for them. I felt it best for me to be the executioner. By the end, I feared the whole unit would be executed, but only two of my subordinates were tried. One was sentenced to death, but all the others made it home and got their old police jobs back. The one who was executed had killed by torture.

After the war, the Dutch did not charge those who had followed official military legal procedures carried out by the Japanese army and navy. They did not question them even if there were horrible things in the trials. And so, although the Dutch came to investigate these martial-law sentences, they never filed complaints against me. Half of all the Navy Special Police units in the southern theater, commanders and simple unit members, were sentenced to death. This also showed that many cases did not go through proper trial procedures. Nevertheless, the Americans made me dig up the bones of the men I'd killed. When I did, they were still fresh, like corned beef, although it was nearly a year later. Horrible. I washed the bones, together with Chief Petty Officer Yoshizaki, who had assisted me.

Near the end, when we even had to grow our own food, we found ourselves fighting over local laborers, pulling them this way and that. The army tried to pinch ours, threatening to use the Kempeitai. Our food ration was reduced by forty percent. Half the unit worked to build military positions, the other half were farmers. We were really hungry, but we couldn't say so. We just had to endure. We paid local residents for their labor, but it was in military scrip, virtually worthless.

The navy had grudges against the army for not providing sufficient provisions. Right there at the front lines, the Japanese army and the navy fought just like enemies. Had the war gone on six months more, I'm sure they would have started shooting at each other, trying to grab the other's provisions. I myself felt the local Kempei unit had been acting outrageously. Cooking up false cases, just to get points for doing something. They were dragging in village heads one after the other. Calling them spies and then executing them.

Many of my fellow members in the Amboina War Comrades Association view me as someone who took all the responsibility and became a casualty or victim. Officers and men both think that of me. I don't ask them what they did on the islands, because each knows what he did. They don't speak about it, but they remember. It is not possible to forget. I ask them, "If foreign forces did what we did there, right here in Japan, wouldn't you be angry?" They often say they agree with me, but I don't know how they behave after leaving the meeting. I suspect many still fear that what they did at risk of their lives would become a disgrace if they admitted to themselves they were fighting a dirty, aggressive war.

They deny what we actually did. I myself admit that the trials for our war crimes were good. What I went through was good. If I'd gone straight back home, forgiven for what I did, it would be even more frightening for me. Had I gone right back, I would have probably run for the local assembly, become a local official and eventually a conservative party official whose reputation is marred by corruption. If what we did in the name of national egoism were to be accepted, that would be horrible. The leaders of Japan today are all of my generation.

Today, Japan's government justifies what the military did during those war years. I'm saying this because I'm receiving a pension today. The time I spent in Sugamo prison as a war criminal is included in my service. This is the Japanese state saying, "Thank you very much for your efforts. You acted for the sake of Japan." Although I was given thirty years by America for a crime I committed, it's treated as just a foreign sentence, unimportant. After I left Sugamo, nobody looked at me strangely.

"I've been back to Indonesia seven times. Indonesians try not to show us the war museums. If I specifically ask, they will take me, so I finally got to the Djakarta War Memorial, but I wasn't allowed to bring in a camera. They display many photographs of Japanese suppression of Indonesians during the war. Indonesian politicians today must go to the Japanese for economic aid, and they seem to feel it is just better to take the economic assistance and avoid disturbing the Japanese."