

Army Doctor

YUASA KEN

*He was imprisoned in China for crimes to which he confessed after the war, and returned to Japan after his release in 1956.**

He now works in a clinic and lives near Ogikubo in Tokyo.

* The three men in this chapter, and Tominaga Shōzō in chapters 1 and 24, are all members of the *Chūgoku Kikansha Renrakukai* [The Association of Returnees from China], a voluntary group of those arrested as war criminals and held in the People's Republic of China after the war. Some were first confined in the Soviet Union, before being handed over to China. In 1956, Chinese military courts formally indicted forty-five for crimes, and the remainder, about eleven hundred, were set free after their confessions. By 1964, all had returned to Japan. None were executed by the Chinese Communists.

The members of this group publicly admit that they took part in an "aggressive war" and were retained in China because they were "war criminals." The group takes the collective position that its members, "due to the generous policies of the People of China," having reflected upon the crimes they committed against humanity, wish to contribute to peace and friendship between China and Japan. To that end, unlike most Japanese who served in that war, they write of their acts as "victimizers" and speak out about their crimes. They also openly raise what they consider to be the war responsibility of the Shōwa Emperor. They have been denounced by their detractors as "brainwashed."

My father had his own practice in Shitamachi, the old district of Tokyo. I became a doctor myself in March 1941. I took the exam to become a short-term army doctor in the fall. Everyone passed. You can't fight a war without doctors. In December 1941, I entered the Twenty-Sixth Regiment in Asahikawa, Hokkaido, and within two months was promoted to first lieutenant. We were a privileged elite, treated as if we were different from the rest of the people.

I was soon dispatched to a city hospital in the southern part of Shansi province in China. I arrived there January 1, 1942. It was still bitterly cold that day in the middle of March when, just after lunch, the director of the hospital, Lieutenant Colonel Nishimura, summoned everyone together. Seven or eight MDs, an accounting officer, a pharmacist, and a dentist. All officers. He excused the housekeeper and other women. After they'd left, he said, "We'll be carrying out an operation exercise. Assemble again at one o'clock." I was chilled to the bone, but it wasn't the weather. I'd heard in Japan before I went that they did vivisections there.

The hospital building adjoined a courtyard and a requisitioned middle-school building. Our patients were in there. There were nearly a hundred employees. Ten nurses, fifty to sixty technicians, some noncoms, too. I'm the kind of man who usually agrees to whatever I'm told to do. A "yes man," you could say. I remember that first time clearly. I arrived a little late; my excuse was that I had some other duties. Usually the compound was full of Chinese coolies lounging in the sun, but that day nobody was around. Everyone knew what was going on, though they all pretended they didn't.

A solitary sentry stood guard. He saluted me the moment I opened the door. I then saw Medical Service Colonel Kotake and Hospital Director Nishimura, so I snapped to attention and saluted. They returned my salute calmly. I approached Hirano, my direct superior. That's when I noticed two Chinese close to the director. One was a sturdy, broad-cheeked man, about thirty, calm and apparently fearless, standing immobile. I thought immediately, that man's a Communist. Next to him was a farmer about forty years old. He was dressed as if he had just been dragged in from his field. His eyes raced desperately about the room. Three medics were there, holding rifles. Nurses were adjusting the surgical instruments by the autopsy tables. There were some fifteen or sixteen doctors present.

You might imagine this as a ghastly or gruesome scene, but that's not how it was. It was just the same as any other routine operation. I was still new to it. I thought there must be a reason for killing those people. I

asked Hirano, but he just answered, "We're going to kill the whole Eighth Route Army."^o I pretended to know what he meant. The nurses were all smiling. They were from the Japanese Red Cross.

The director said, "Let's begin." A medic pushed the steadfast man forward. He lay down calmly. I thought he'd resigned himself to it. That was completely wrong. As a rule, Chinese don't glare at you. He had come prepared to die, confident in China's ultimate victory and revenge over a cruel, unjust Japan. He didn't say that aloud, but going to his death as he did spoke for itself. I didn't see that back then.

I was in the group assigned to the other fellow. A medic ordered him forward. He shouted, "No! No!" and tried to flee. The medic, who was holding a rifle, couldn't move as fast as the farmer, and I was a new officer, just arrived in the command. I was very conscious of my dignity as a military man. The hospital director was watching. I never really thought, if this man dies, what will happen to his family? All I thought was, it will be terribly embarrassing if I end up in a brawl, this man in farmer's rags and me dressed so correctly. I wanted to show off. I pushed that farmer and said, "Go forward!" He seemed to lose heart, maybe because I'd spoken up. I was very proud of myself. Yet when he sat on the table, he refused to lie down. He shouted "*Ai-ya-a! Ai-ya-a!*" as if he knew that if he lay down he was going to be murdered. But a nurse then said, in Chinese, "Sleep, sleep." She went on, "Sleep, sleep. Drug give" —Japanese-style Chinese. The Chinese of the oppressor always bears that tone, as if to say, "There's no possibility you will fail to understand what I'm saying." He lay down. She was even prouder than me. She giggled. The demon's face is not a fearful face. It's a face wreathed in smiles.

I asked the doctor who was about to administer lumbar anesthesia if he wasn't going to disinfect the point of injection. "What are you talking about? We're going to kill him," he replied. After a while, a nurse struck the man's legs and asked him if it hurt. He said it didn't, but when they tried to get him to inhale chloroform, he began to struggle. We all had to hold him down.

First, there was practice in removing an appendix. That was carried out by two doctors. When a man has appendicitis, his appendix swells and grows very hard. But there was nothing wrong with this man, so it was hard to locate. They made an incision, but had to cut in another place and search until they finally found it. I remember that.

Next a doctor removed one of his arms. You must know how to do

^o The Communist army active in North China.

this when a man has shrapnel imbedded in his arm. You have to apply a tourniquet, to stanch the flow of blood. Then two doctors practiced sewing the intestines. If the intestine or stomach is pierced by bullets, that kind of surgery is a necessity. Next was the opening of the pharynx. When soldiers are wounded in the throat, blood gathers there and blocks the trachea, so you need to open it up. There is a special hook-shaped instrument for field use for cutting into the trachea. You drive it in, hook it open, then remove it, leaving only a tube behind. The blood drains out. It all took almost two hours. You remember the first time.

Eventually, all the doctors from the divisions left. Then the nurses departed. Only the director, the medics, and those of us from the hospital remained. The one I did, small-framed and old, was already dead. But from the sturdy man's mouth came, "Heh. Heh. Heh." One's last gasps are still strong. It gave us pause to think of throwing him, still breathing, into the hole out back, so the director injected air into his heart with a syringe. Another doctor—he's alive today—and I then had to try to strangle him with string. Still he wouldn't die. Finally, an old noncom said, "Honorable Doctor, he'll die if you give him a shot of anesthesia." Afterwards we threw him into the hole. This was the first time.

Japan's occupation of China was no more than a collection of dots and lines in a vast theater of operations. When a man suffered from appendicitis, you couldn't bring him to a hospital. His appendix had to be removed right there at the front line. But there weren't enough surgeons available. Even ophthalmologists or pediatricians had to be able to do it, and they didn't know how, so they practiced. Doctors weren't in China primarily to cure illness. No, we were there so that when units clashed, the leaders could give orders to the soldiers and say, "We have doctors to take care of you. Charge on!" We were part of the military's fighting capability. It was easier to get men to fight if they thought there was a doctor to treat them when they were hit.

The next time we did it, we were practicing sewing up intestines for bullet wounds that had passed through the stomach. I remember the dentist was there, too, saying, "Oh, I've got his teeth!" The urologist removed the testicles. The hospital director said, "I will instruct you myself in this technique." He cut into the intestine and then sewed it back up. At that moment a phone call came for him, and he left the room to take it. One doctor observed the director's work and noticed something wrong: "It's sewed up backwards!" We all laughed. When the director returned, we were still snickering, but when he asked "What is it? What's the matter?" we just couldn't tell him. I remember fragments like this.

Orders for such exercises went from First Army headquarters,

through the army hospital, and out to the divisions and brigades. In the beginning, exercises were conducted only twice, in the spring and the autumn. But by the end, we were getting doctors who couldn't do a thing, couldn't even handle instruments. Old men. I felt, we have to do this much more often. We should do it six times a year. I took the initiative and sought permission from the hospital. It was necessary to improve the technique of the army doctors. I did that as a loyal servant of the Japanese military. I felt I was willing to do anything to win. Doctor Ishii Shirō, the director of Unit 731, came to our hospital many times for education.^o "If the only way to win a war against America is bacterial warfare, I am ready. I will do anything," I thought. "This is war."

Besides training, I also treated patients. Sometimes they were wounded soldiers, but half suffered from tuberculosis. Infectious diseases, malaria, typhoid, dysentery, and liver diseases were common. I really enjoyed my work. When I went out to town, I could swagger, you know, swing my shoulders as a Japanese officer, feeling I was serving the nation, and watch people treat me well because they were afraid of me. Everybody saluted an officer. All the girls addressed me as "Honorable Military Doctor." If anybody showed even a trace of resistance, we could send him directly to the front. It was easy at the hospital. We had no worries about being killed. We had plenty of saké. Anything we wanted. I felt I ruled the whole country. At morning roll call, they saluted me. I had only to say, straighten up that line, and they'd do it. They'd move back and forth until I told them to stop. I did it only for the sake of my own ego.

In late 1942, at the time of the battle for Guadalcanal, we realized things weren't going to be too easy. About forty doctors were gathered in the city of Taiyüan for a meeting. We were told to assemble at Taiyüan Prison, where I ended up myself a few years later. There, two men from the judicial corps brought out a couple of blindfolded Chinese. They then asked the doctor in charge of the meeting if everything was set. At his nod, they suddenly shot the Chinese, right in their stomachs, four or five times each. We then had to remove the bullets. That was our challenge. Could we remove them while they were still alive? That was how they measured the success or failure of the operation. When asked, "Want to do it?" I said, "No. I do this all the time." But eventually everyone got in on it, helping to control the bleeding or whatever. They both died.

We also carried out medic training. It was in 1944, at a time when

^o Unit 731 was the army unit near Harbin in Manchuria that specialized in bacteriological-warfare experimentation using humans as guinea pigs. Tamura Yoshio talks about this later in this chapter.

we already knew we were going to lose. Those soldiers! Skinny and hardly able to write at all. I was in charge of education by then. I decided there was no way to teach them except by practical experience. I went to the Kempeitai and asked them to give us one of their prisoners. We practiced leg amputation. The one I got bore no traces of torture. I remember how surprised I was. "This one's real clean," I thought. I remember one soldier fainted.

Another time they sent us two for educational purposes. We didn't have many doctors at the time, so we were able to do all we had to do on just one of them. But we really couldn't send the other one back. So the director chopped his head off. He wanted to test the strength of his sword.

We received requests from a Japanese pharmaceutical company for brain-cortex tissue. They were making adrenocortical hormones. We cut tissue from the brains and sent it along. We sent one bottle. Then a second request came from the company for ten bottles, which we filled. This was a "private route." Everybody was involved.

We forgot these things. We actually forgot what we did! After our defeat, I thought about whether or not I should go back to Japan. There in Shanshi, there were some six thousand Japanese. Half were enlisted men. It was an area controlled by the Nationalist Army. We were impressed into that army. I was a doctor, so I established a hospital for those who were staying. I even thought it might be all right for me to stay there, as if it were Brazil or someplace. I didn't know anything about the situation in the Nationalist-Communist war. I'd probably just as easily have gone with the Reds, had I been in an area under the control of the Eighth Route Army.

Then the civil war began. It went on for three years. Some returned to Japan, but I couldn't leave my patients there. Besides, as a doctor, you feel you can survive anywhere. I ended up a POW with three or four thousand others. Then I was released for a while and went to work in a city hospital.

Finally, they came for me. Those who had committed serious crimes, about one hundred and sixty of us, were taken to the prison at Taiyüan, Shansi. It took four years for me to remember what I had done and to confess. I was imprisoned until 1956. That's when I returned to Japan.

All the doctors and the nurses who had been with me at that hospital in Shansi came to Shinagawa station to welcome me when I returned to Tokyo. The nurses said to me, "Doctor, you had such a hard time. We're so sorry for you." One man said, "Doctor Yuasa, I hope you did your best to assert your Emperor's policy was just and Communism was wrong." That's what they said! I told them, "Don't you remember? I did those

things with you. You did them, too." The man I said that to seemed to shudder. Suddenly, for the first time, he recalled that he was a murderer!

It is scary. It's outrageous to murder a person. Yet it's far worse to forget that you've done it. That's the most horrible thing imaginable!

I did about ten men in three and a half years. Six times, all together, I took part in exercises to improve the technique of medical doctors. Removed brains, testicles. Most doctors did that, in the divisions, or in hospitals, all over China. Yet all keep quiet! Why do they forget? Everybody did it. At that time we were doing something good. That's what we let ourselves believe. But they still keep their mouths shut. If they were to recall it, it would be unbearable. That's why they are silent. It was "because of the war." That's enough for them.