

*From Bandung to Starvation Island*

IITOYO SHŌGO

*He was an official in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry before the war. "I was feeling pretty important, having been appointed an Imperial official. But I feared I'd be called up as a common soldier, even though I*

*was married and had been classified C in my army physical. So I volunteered to go to the very front line as an administrator. Because I made that choice, I'm alive today."*

*After the war, he worked at the renamed Ministry of International Trade and Industry. Seventy-one, he is now retired. Ballroom dancing is his hobby.*

When I was first in Djakarta, as a general administrator sent from the industrial division of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, I really didn't need to know Malay. But in October 1944, I was transferred to the Bandung Industrial Laboratory. Malay was essential for that job, and the language studies I'd taken up after my arrival really paid off. There were about one hundred and twenty workers from seven or eight different countries—Germans, White Russians, Chinese, Dutch, and native people from all over. It required special abilities to achieve communication through Malay and win cooperation for the Japanese administration of the occupied areas. Everyone else was hesitant to take this position, but I thought it would be very challenging.

Prior to our arrival, the lab had specialized in testing thread, wire, and other industrial materials for their tensile strength and capacities to withstand stress. All the material and equipment necessary for advanced research were available, but the documentation was entirely in Dutch, and we weren't allowed to use Dutch. Besides, the Japanese army told us, "Basic research isn't needed now. That's for peacetime. Make something useful. This is war." So we went to work making electrodes for use as detonators for dynamite. We also developed high-sensitivity photographic paper for aerial photography.

A Japanese, Hayashi Shūichirō, was in charge of the detonators, and a White Russian named Tiessen was put in charge of photographic paper. We were told Tiessen was very bright, but we were warned to be cautious. It was not clear to what extent he was utilizing his full abilities. The workers had all been there in the Indies from before the war. They often claimed they didn't have a certain essential piece of equipment, or required special supplies, always unavailable. I sensed that they were spending more time making demands than they were working. It was a kind of sabotage.

At home I had a chauffeur, a gardener, a cook, a male servant, and a female servant. I had a grand residence in the best part of Bandung. It was just like when the American forces moved into the finest neighborhoods of Akasaka, Tokyo, in the Occupation. I had a garage, a car. Bananas and papayas grew in my garden. I had a guest room, dining

room, three bedrooms, and detached quarters for my servants. There I lived with Sakai, the head of the laboratory—just the two of us.

We needed to have documents available to us, so we were able to secure an exception from the army to use Dutch workers. We negotiated with the Kempeitai to use Dutch from the POW camps. The Dutch working at our research site had all been in the camps. Their families were allowed to lead normal lives outside. I went to the camp by car at ten o'clock and picked up those we needed. They worked until four, and then I took them back. It was only human to develop a relationship with such people, even though they were prisoners. We let them meet their families behind the backs of the military police. They were very appreciative. Many of their families were making their living by selling what they owned to us. Some were even high-class call girls with Japanese partners.

One day the Kempei came to pick up Tiessen. He was then chief of one of our most important technological areas. He was actually a spy. I was told he had hidden a shortwave radio in the ceiling at his home. That was June 1945.

On August 14, we were told there would be an important announcement the next day. Reception was so poor that we couldn't really make out what was coming in on the radio. We couldn't understand what the Emperor was saying, so we called the headquarters of Field Marshal Terauchi, commander of the Southern Area Army, to ask what we should do. The Southern Area Army was going to fight to the last, they told us. We should continue our work as before. The next phone call we got informed us of Japan's defeat. Give up everything. Surrender to the British-Indian Army. Orders changed completely. Things were in total confusion. That day was truly painful. Everyone was staring at us. I sensed sharp, beastlike glares. After a while, I couldn't take it anymore. I closed my door. Sakai and I just threw ourselves down on the floor and cried out loud, uncontrollably, without regard for status, position, or the consequences. Thus, overseas, I experienced the collapse of our nation.

On the sixteenth of August, Tiessen appeared before us. His form still floats before my eyes to this day. He was covered with grime and sweat. He had a strange smell. His beard was overgrown. He loomed in front of me like Niō-sama [one of the frightening guardian gods at a temple gate]. He slammed his fist down on my desk as if trying to break it. He shouted, "*Nippon kara!*"—meaning Japan's completely defeated. "Do you know what that means? Do you repent what you have done?" He told me he'd been tortured by the Kempeitai, but said, "Look at me. I'm back now!"

We fell from heaven to hell overnight. Until that moment, I had

reigned with impunity as an administrator in the midst of other races. Now, I was under the British-Indian Army Command. The officers were all British. The sergeants were all Indians, mostly Gurkhas. We were taken to the camps where the Allied captives had been held. The next day, we were stripped naked, except for our shorts. Even our undershirts were taken. We were paraded down the main avenue of the town over which we had ruled, where the British were now ensconced in the high-class residences where we used to live. We were told to clean the filth from stopped-up toilets. That was the beginning of our humiliating work. Naked, we cleaned the roads, in plain sight of onlookers of all sorts. If we relaxed even a little, they kicked and beat us, called us shirkers or accused us of sabotage. It was really worse than dying. Everybody I knew in Indonesia was watching me. [*His eyes fill with tears.*]

The Indian soldiers were fairly good to us. Out of sight of their officers, they'd let us slack off at our labor, and they discreetly gave us food. They told us they, too, had suffered under the British as a colony. We understand your situation, they'd say. They were relatively generous to us Japanese from the yellow race. They were like gods of mercy. Between seven hundred and a thousand people were in our camp. I'm ashamed of myself to admit that we sank to the depths. We fought among ourselves for scraps of foods. The overseas Chinese I'd used at my home, and Indonesians, too, brought me bread and fruit. For the first time, I myself had been degraded. In that forlorn state, I came to understand the warmth of the human spirit.

It was a terrible time. We were forced by the Allies to scrub the runways of airfields with wire brushes under the scorching sun. You got so thirsty you felt you would faint, but there was no water. It was two kilometers away. To get water you had to run there, drink, and run back. Many collapsed of sunstroke every day. Our skin blistered. We told them we weren't soldiers and asked to be excused from heavy labor. We were told, "Japanese are all the same. Civilian or not. If you don't do as we say, we'll kill you." British army policy seemed to be to imbue in us the consciousness of our defeat, physically, mentally, even spiritually. We were there from August to February 1946.

Finally, we were taken to Tanjon Priak, a harbor. There a British officer questioned us, one by one. He spoke clear Tokyo dialect. He asked us the date of our arrival, our job, our rank. He already had a complete list in front of him. There was no point in lying. We were given white, blue, or red cards. I learned later that red was for war criminals, blue for those under suspicion, and white for those not guilty. I was given a white card. I got really excited, since those with white cards were going to board a ship. It was April and we would be going home!

But the ship turned out to be only a five-hundred-tonner—much too small to get to Japan. After the ship started moving, we learned we were heading for Galan Island. There were two islands, Galan and Renpan, about three hours from Singapore. Several tens of thousands of men from the armies in Malaya, Burma, and Java were being shipped to those islands. On our arrival, I was appalled by the people who met us. They were hanging onto walking sticks. Their limbs were swathed in bandages. With their rotting flesh and oozing pus, I thought they were lepers, but it turned out they were suffering from the tropical ulcers that come from extreme malnutrition and the breakdown of your circulatory system. Even if you got only a mosquito bite, the next thing you knew, you'd developed a running sore. Within five or six days I looked just like them. You don't ever really recover.

There was no natural source of water. The islands were less than ten kilometers in circumference, and located at the equator. April through June was the dry season. The weather was sweltering. No grasses or trees grew there. There was only a reef, not even a proper harbor. The British Army in Singapore delivered water in tanks once a week. People were dying. When I tried to wake my neighbor one morning, he didn't move. Dead. They had us make a road on that island. My guess is that there was no real purpose for it.

It was more hellish than hell. We were issued only seven *shaku* of rice per day, less than half a cup. We ate snakes, frogs, anything living on the island. Even the rats there were just skin and bones. From where I was, there seemed to be a beach two or three kilometers away. We heard the rumor that men from the Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries Ministry were there, living high by fishing. I paid them a visit, as a fellow bureaucrat. When I got there, I couldn't believe the wildness of the ocean. How could such an untamable sea exist? The edges of the reef were like razor blades. The Fisheries men had made shoes from a vine that clung to the island's few coconut palms, and wearing these they could walk out into the water. They'd catch fish with spears they'd somehow fashioned. I asked them if they could spare one for me. They just said, "Get one yourself. You can't live here by begging."

Even at night, if you had something next to you while you were asleep, it would be gone by morning. It was a matter of life and death. Scholarship, school records, career—none of that meant anything there. The strong won. Near the end, an observer team from Geneva came, after learning that such a horrible place existed. Then the food got better. We were issued combat rations. We were given only breakfast, but I thought I'd never eaten such delicious food in my life. That tiny box contained tinned corned beef, butter, cheese, four or five cigarettes, and

some sugar. It was really compact. We ate with tears streaming down our faces. When I saw those rations I realized Japan's defeat had been inevitable. I was on that island for forty days until the former Japanese aircraft carrier *Hōshō* came to pick us up on May 25, 1946.

Recently I went back to Indonesia with my wife after forty-two years. I visited the site of Bandung Industrial University and the laboratory where I worked, and the place where my official residence had been. Forty years had changed everything. I'd spent four years down there. We worked hard for everybody. I'm sure there were merits and demerits to what we did, probably divided fifty-fifty. The sad thing is they don't remember us at all. When I'd ask someone if they remembered our laboratory, they'd only respond, "I don't know." Whatever I asked, they only said, "I don't know." Young and old alike. The same response. Maybe for them it was just a dirty period. But I regret that. That thought leaves me feeling desolate.