
Homecoming

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A Tokyo Imperial University graduate in agriculture, trained afterward to be an army officer, he survived almost five years of war in China. A second conflict began for Captain Tominaga as that war formally ended.

Captured by the Soviets when they overran Manchuria in August 1945, he was held as a prisoner of war, and was transferred through a succession of harsh Siberian camps, encountering Germans, Rumanians, Hungarians, and Czechs, until he finally ended up in Camp 8, where he was put to mining work. "It was there I saw the full text of the Potsdam Declaration for the first time. I was shocked at Article Ten, the one which said all war criminals will be severely punished, including the ones who treated prisoners cruelly. Those lines reminded me of what I had done in China. Each day I simply did my eight hours of heavy labor and tried not to think of what those words would mean to me when I returned to camp."

The investigation of war criminals began about the time New China established itself in 1949. It was rumored that China had asked the Soviets to hand over war criminals. Some believed that we should say nothing and just tough it out. Others felt that telling what they knew was a condition for becoming a democratic man. Most of us thought then that murdering, raping, and setting fire to villages were unavoidable acts in war, nothing particularly wrong.

When I was called for investigation, Soviet officers and a Korean interpreter asked only if I was Captain Tominaga and questioned me about details of my military career. Someone else must have told about me. Some were bought by money. I remained in Siberia although trains for home departed regularly. Only one camp remained in 1950. We finally boarded a train and were told that we would be sent home via Khabarovsk.

Our train ran east along the same rail we'd taken west five years before. Farms now stood in what had been wasteland, and factories had

been built where there had been open country. The waters of Lake Baikal remained the same, frozen and somehow horrifying. We were gathered at Khabarovsk. Some more prisoners joined us from Vladivostok. We conducted a ceremony in the square of the camp where we were now held. The representatives of both groups exchanged greetings and sang a "Song of Unity," hand in hand. I was told that they were the "reactionary officers." Later, one of them came up to me and said that they didn't have any desire to work for the Soviets, but would like to work to build up their physical strength in preparation for the life in prison in China. One condition they wanted to set was that they not work with men who viewed them as the enemy. I negotiated with the Soviet side and arranged work for them at wood-milling.

In June 1950 we were given new clothes by our Russian captors and told to spend all the money we had. We were taken to the station. Normally, red banners and slogans hung from the trains, but what we found were freight trains covered with barbed wire. The sight reminded me of basket cages for criminals. It was blazing hot in the cars. After two nights the train was shunted onto a siding. I read the name of the station, "Guroteko," a place on the border between the Soviet Union and Manchuria. Inside the car there was complete turmoil. Everyone knew we were going to be handed over to the Chinese. We thought we would be killed when they got their hands on us.

When the train finally started moving again, we passed through a tunnel. Soldiers of the People's Liberation Army were lined up on the other side. They were so young they looked like boy soldiers, perhaps because we were used to seeing the robust Soviets. I thought soon it would be all over. There were about 960 of us, including former policemen, military police, and men from the criminal-investigation and legal sections of Manchukuo. There were about one hundred men like that who had treated the Chinese cruelly. The others were all soldiers. The highest-ranking officers present were divisional commanders. Several of them. More than half were noncommissioned officers. There were about two or three hundred officers, but no really senior ones.

We boarded new trains in China. This time, we found ourselves in passenger cars. They gave us some bread for lunch. White bread. We'd eaten only black bread in Siberia and we feared that white bread was too refined and wouldn't provide strength enough. It was eerie. The treatment we received was so polite that it almost seemed like they were scared of us. Maybe they were going to treat us gently, then kill us suddenly. The train arrived at Fushun. We formed up on the platform and walked through streets lined by soldiers with guns. The machine guns

on the roofs of the houses were Japanese-army issue. We were taken to Fushun Prison, which had been built by the Japanese government to hold Chinese. The former warden of the prison was now among its prisoners.

I was put into a cell with fifteen other men. The lock clanged shut behind me with a heavy noise. It was an awful feeling. A wooden board hung above the door, bearing the words "Japanese Military War Criminal Management." All of us resented that. We insisted that it didn't make any sense to call us war criminals. The war criminals were the Emperor, the cabinet ministers, and the military commanders. They were the ones who had led us into the war. They were the ones responsible. Small fish and hooligans like us weren't war criminals. Those were our complaints to our guard, who conveyed our feelings to his superior. The wooden board was replaced with one that simply said "Management."

Our first meal took us completely by surprise. We were served Chinese broccoli, with a soup of pork and radishes. It was delicious. When we ran out of fresh vegetables, they brought us more food. Our only wish in Siberia had been to get enough food. Now we did no labor. We were allowed to go out for exercise and to the lavatory for thirty minutes, morning and evening. We were confined to the cells the rest of the time. Our daily routine was to play *shōgi*, *go*, and mah-jongg, and tell pornographic stories. We had nothing to do but lie around on our backs. Sometimes the guards came by and cautioned us to sit up, but we ignored their warnings. We even spat at them. Sometimes we were given a few leaflets about the New China, but no one paid much attention to them. For the first two years, in our desperation, we were insubordinate and defiant toward our jailers. We felt we would be killed anyway. After all, every one of us was guilty of something.

They ignored our defiant attitude like willows before the wind. They never shouted at us or kicked us. When someone fell ill, they came to take care of him, even in the middle of the night. They sent the seriously ill to a special hospital outside. We began to realize that human beings should be treated this way and began to reflect on our treatment of Chinese during the war. "We acted wrongly, but we wouldn't have done it if we hadn't received the orders." That was still our thinking. In my case, I imagined I did it only because of the regiment commander's order. "Yes, the bad one was Commander Ōsawa," I'd say. "He's the one who made me kill that first one." I believed I was a victim.

We were transferred to another prison for a while in 1950 when the U.S. Army advanced to the Yalu River in the Korean War. It was confidently explained to us that the Volunteer Army from China was now participating in that war and would soon push back the Americans, that they were only moving us to protect us from American bombing. It never

crossed my mind that the Chinese could defeat the U.S. forces when the Japanese military had failed to beat them. We even hoped that the U.S. forces might rescue us from captivity, but the following spring the majority of us were sent back to Fushun, though those of us over the rank of first lieutenant were moved to Harbin. Only then did we realize that the People's Liberation Army were not an ordinary army. The Korean War turned out as they told us it would, and our belief that the Chinese people were inferior and the Chinese army weak was overturned completely.

Various books were now circulated in the prison. First, novels and the like were brought in and then books on politics and economics. Books by Mao Tse-tung appeared. I reread a collection of Marx and Engels that I'd read before the war, but being in prison made it a completely different experience. The *People's Daily* was circulated. It was 1952, three years after the revolution, and a movement to criticize superiors was sweeping through China. Those who were criticized were excused if they freely admitted their actions had been wrong. If not, they were pulled through the streets wearing conical hats on their heads. The best thing to do was to voluntarily confess what one had done.

Around this time, we were summoned before a panel and asked our feelings about our treatment there and our impressions of the books we had read. The guards and soldiers didn't wear any badges of rank. Those people who came to summon us seemed to be officers and the guards were probably noncoms. We called all those who summoned and talked to us "leaders."

One day, we were given ten pages of rough paper and told to write out an account of our past. We thought that the final act had come. If we were to write, what else had we to write about but cruel acts? It meant death. The four or five of us sat apart, scattered about in one room. No one said a word, just glared at the paper on the desk. Some wrote a little and then erased it. At lunch, everyone ate in silence. I told myself that I would be executed anyway and began writing. I wrote that I killed a prisoner under direct orders, I wrote that I had made new conscripts execute prisoners when I was a company commander. I wrote that I ordered my men to shoot the Chinese soldiers who surrendered because holding prisoners was troublesome. And I wrote that I had ordered the burning of a hundred houses under direct orders.

Everybody else looked at me amazed. I rewrote this neatly and tried to give it to a guard who passed by. He just ignored me and went away. Thirty minutes later, another guard passed by. I called out to him, and after asking me if I was really done, he reluctantly accepted it. Everybody else was having difficult time writing anything, while I was now reading a magazine. A guard came and called out my prisoner number. Number

373 was my name from the beginning to the end of my prison days. The guard stood there, with a fierce expression, holding out the papers I'd submitted. It was natural, he said, not to be able to write. Writing this quickly was the epitome of an insincere attitude! I was an obstacle to the sincere students. He took me out and threw me into an underground cell.

The cell was deep underground and dark, and it had been unused for long time. It was lit by a grim, dim bulb. I convinced myself that I'd finally fallen as far to the bottom as I could go. In time my eyes got used to the darkness and I made out writing on the wall. "Down with Japanese Imperialism!" "Devils of the Orient!" All of it was abusive language about us Japanese. Written in blood. When I saw these, a chill went up my spine. They'd been written in desperate, hopeless defiance by prisoners just before being killed. For the first time, I understood the mind of those prisoners. Up to that moment, I'd excused myself from responsibility on the grounds that I was myself ordered to commit such acts by regimental commanders. From the point of view of those murdered, though, it didn't matter whether the act of killing was a voluntary one or done under orders.

I now realized that first I had to take responsibility myself, as a person who had acted. Only then could I pursue the responsibilities of the superiors, my commanders, and the Emperor. There was a notebook in the cell. I was again told to write a self-examination. About the tenth day in the cell, the blue ink turned purple, then seemed to disappear altogether. I could no longer see the letters I was writing. When I told the guard I was taken to the medical room. There, I was given a shot and ordered to stop writing. I just sat in the cell and thought. One week later they told me I could write once again, suggesting that my consciousness must have been deepened. I wrote from the viewpoint of the persons whose houses we burnt down and whom we killed. In the middle of the winter, no shelter, no food, no fuel. I wrote my self-examination based on the results of my acts.

After one month, I was allowed to leave the dungeon. Later, I was taken to the hospital attached to Harbin Medical University, a former Japanese Kwantung Army hospital with excellent facilities. I received a thorough examination and learned that I was suffering from *lumbar caries*. Hospitalized, I lay with my upper body in a plaster jacket. I couldn't sleep because of the pain, not until I was given a morphine injection. When I woke up, still in pain, I felt that this was the revenge of the victims. I was experiencing real pain for the first time. They gave me streptomycin injections, a precious substance greatly prized at that time. The pain disappeared suddenly after two weeks.

While I was hospitalized, members of my battalion made oral confessions in front of each other. It was 1954. The leaders of the "management" and the public prosecutors were present. It went on every day for several months. Whenever they were found to be hiding something, they had to repeat their stories again and again. Their lack of sincerity was criticized. The anxiety caused a loss of appetite. One of them committed suicide. When I was finally allowed to go back to the prison and rejoin the Japanese after three years in bed, I noticed their expressions had changed. They had released what they'd held in their minds. At that time, we were able to visit other rooms because the locks were not set anymore. We studied in the morning and did exercises in the afternoon.

Now, the study committee brought a new theme up for discussion. Miwa, who'd killed dozens of people, announced in front of everyone that he would request the death sentence. The idea was that the war criminal who realized his guilt shouldn't wait for a trial but should request one. We reached a level of understanding through our studies that we ought to accept any sentence. However, we were still shaken when the time for a trial came. We were now taken out of our prison on field trips. The first day we went to a machine plant. I was especially surprised by a new kind of long light bulb that I had never seen before. I was told that these were called "fluorescent lights," and that they were extremely efficient. It made me realize how long a time had passed. The second day, we visited a farming cooperative, and the third day, a mine. After we saw the mine, we were introduced to one of the survivors of a massacre in a nearby village. She described, in detail, how all of her family members and other villagers had been killed and how she felt. She explained how the Communist Party had helped her understand that Japanese militarism caused this and not the Japanese people. For the first time we directly experienced the anger of the Chinese.

Soon the trials began. It was June 1956. There were one thousand sixty-two of us altogether, including one hundred twenty who had fought with the Nationalist army. Forty-five of us were indicted and the others were given a reprieve. They told us that there was enough evidence for indictment and conviction, but that they would allow us to return to Japan because we showed clear signs of repentance and had admitted our guilt. Furthermore, Japan was no longer a militaristic nation.

When I saw the green land of Japan after two nights aboard the ship, I wasn't moved at all. I didn't even feel that I had returned to my motherland. Maybe it had just been too long. Perhaps I was overwhelmed by worries about how I would support my family and how I would adjust

to the society I had yearned for so when I was in Siberia. In those days, tears came to my eyes whenever I saw the trains moving east. But I gave up on the idea of going home after I was moved to China as a war criminal.

It was more than sixteen years since I had left for China. I was a frail forty-three-year-old man wrapped up in Chinese worker's clothes, sick and weary. I couldn't help feeling empty. The pier was full of people. I got off the ship and walked past the welcoming crowd until I encountered my wife's face. "I'm back," was all I said. "Welcome home," she replied with a smile. She looked a lot older. Then she introduced a tall girl standing behind her, "This is Yumi." I touched the shoulder of the high-school student and said, "Hi." She grew tense and didn't smile. When I had last seen her, she could barely walk. The girl standing there like a stranger was my daughter.