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***Senso*: The Japanese Remember the Pacific War**
Introduction by Frank Gibney

On 10 July 1986, *Asahi Shimbun*, Japan's great newspaper of record, ran the first in a series of letters from its readers about their reminiscences of World War II. Since January of that year, readers' letters on various themes had been featured on the op-ed page of *Asahi's* morning edition, under the heading "Let's Talk About Topics" ("*Tema Danwa-Shitsu*"). Predictably, the first topics chosen, "Teachers" and "Men and Women," evoked a good response. As more readers added their thoughts and comments, some interesting exchanges of opinion developed. The letters on both of these subjects were later printed by *Asahi's* publishing division as separate books.

The *Senso* series was originally planned to last for three months. Because of the very nature of the subject, however, the response was extraordinary. *Asahi* had succeeded in capturing the attention of its readers far beyond the original hopes of the op-ed editors. The series was extended several times, ultimately running through 29 August 1987. Some 1,100 letters were printed out of 4,000 received. That year the letters appeared, with suitable introductions, in a two-volume book, *The War [Senso]: A Testimony Composed in Blood and Tears*. It became a best-seller.

All of the letters related to wartime experiences or opinions about the War. Some of the letters were written by soldiers about their experiences in battle, in military camps, or as war prisoners. Others dealt with civilian life. These included the evacuation of school children from Japan's bombed cities, and descriptions of life under military control by war workers and families. Women as well as men told their stories. The reflections of the wives, mothers, and children of Japan's soldiery proved to be poignant indeed. Most of the correspondents were in their sixties, people who had been in their teens or twenties at the time of the War, but the letters included some childhood reminiscences. All were looking back over the years, an element of retrospection which gave the series a character all its own.

A Road We Cannot Sidestep

In our country, where wartime leaders remained in power in the postwar period, people associated with them have suddenly become active. Ominous signs have reappeared. At this time we have a great duty to face up anew to the actual circumstances of the War and impart this knowledge to future generations. Those with experience of the War are advancing in age. So unless we do it now it will be too late.

In this series, there have been dark recollections of the atrocities committed by the Japanese forces in the war zones. We read about the tyranny over the weak at home, which had been concealed until now. Those making their confessions must feel that what had felt stuck in their hearts has been cleared away. They have had the opportunity to release with a single stroke what they had locked up in their hearts for so many years. The confessions about the atrocities committed in the occupied areas were without question made because of the natural sense of guilt felt by human beings. It is a narrow-minded nationalism--consisting merely of self-righteousness and arrogance--to view these confessions as disgracing us Japanese. Attempts to conceal, feign innocence, and idealize only deepen others' mistrust and hatred of all Japanese.

These confessions are evidence of self-reflection and atonement. They allow those in the former occupied areas to realize anew that the majority of Japanese are loving, sincere, and upright people with a conscience. They will serve to aid in forging lasting international understanding and exchange: and they will lead to a sure road to promoting our national interest. Though it may be painful, we cannot sidestep this road.

Okada Chuken, sixty-nine (m), professor emeritus, Ibaraki University, Mito [p. 316]

Don't Be Ashamed, You Are Heroes

The warship I served on was sunk in the Battle of Leyte Gulf and I became a prisoner of war of the American forces. I was interned in the Leyte POW camp for one year. There were about twelve hundred Japanese POWs in this camp. All of us were ashamed that we were clinging greedily to life and forced to be idle in the midst of the enemy. Occasionally we felt that we wanted to die.

As the days wore on, we realized that the attitude of the American troops toward us was different from what we were accustomed to. The MPs who guarded us, the military doctors, and the medics were all kind without exception. And we were supplied with clothing, food, and even PX items like candy and cigarettes on the same basis as the American soldiers. On the bulletin board was a sign saying POWs were allowed to write letters to their families and have necessary items sent to them. This was the way we first found out about the existence of the Geneva Convention article on the treatment of prisoners of war.

One day, the camp commander, a first lieutenant, gathered us dejected POWs and told us, "You men fought bravely until the end without fleeing, so you have no reason to think you are lacking in courage. You men are heroes." Having been indoctrinated for years that we must die with honor rather than surrender, these words were shocking to us. We had thought ourselves to be dishonored prisoners of war. But the Americans not only dealt with us humanely, they also treated us as warriors who had fought courageously until the end and fallen into enemy hands.

Sekiyama Eiji, sixty-four (m), company employee, Abiko [p. 232]

Don't You People Have Any Compassion?

Sato Toshio, who worked in Sapporo's social welfare office, was critical of the government's war policies. The day after the War between Japan and the United States started, he was arrested, ostensibly for preventive detention under the Peace Preservation Law. He was confined in Naebo Prison. This sort of thing was happening all over the country. It was the dark underside of the Japanese people's jubilant festivities at the news of the successful attack on Pearl Harbor. Under relentless torture, amid deteriorating living conditions, Toshio died in prison on 14 May 1944, at the age of thirty-four. He did not live to see the day of defeat that he had predicted would come. The blood-curdling events leading to his death are faithfully recorded in *Inside the Infirmary*. This was written after the War by Sasaki Sentaro, who was confined in the isolation cell across the corridor. Toshio's naked body was released without a stitch of clothing on it to his wife and four-year-old daughter. His courageous wife pressed the officials, saying "Don't you people have even the compassion to put a sheet over someone you've killed with your own hands?" They could only mumble in reply.

As a "traitorous" family, she and her daughter lived under observation by the Special Higher Police and suffered the cold stares of society. Working day and night during and after the War, Toshio's widow died exhausted.

After the War's end, the story was that the War was waged against the Emperor's will. The military men and politicians who thus went against the will of the Emperor and started the War were granted pensions, while those who died who had been in agreement with the Emperor received no compensation. Wanting to find out what crime her father was judged to have committed, Toshio's daughter, who had grown up during the difficult times after the War, requested the court to issue a copy of his trial records. The single response she received was that "the documents requested were burned up." This daughter later became my wife.

It is not necessarily the enemy's bullets that are to be feared during a war. What is frightening beyond words is the process by which a government run amok can kill its own citizens who have committed no crimes.

Yamashita Saburo, sixty-one (m), company president, Tokyo [p. 179]

The Red Circle is the Heart: Don't Ever Stab It

In March 1942 a post was fixed in the ground in a corner outside the town in Shan County of Shandong Province. In a hollow next to the post cowered five captured Chinese soldiers, their hands tied behind their backs. They were painfully emaciated and absolutely filthy. Their faces twitched and their bodies trembled.

These prisoners were to be used as targets for bayonet practice by twenty-some raw recruits. During my training period with the Kofu Regiment we used straw dummies as

targets. Here on the battlefield they used live human beings. About to stab a human being for the first time in their lives, the new recruits were terrified--their faces were sheet white. The tips of their bayonets quivered as they stood ready.

The prisoners were blindfolded and tied to the post. A circle was drawn in red chalk around the area of the heart on their grimy clothes. As the bayonet training began, the instructor bellowed out, "Ready? The red circle is where the heart is. That's the one place you're prohibited to stab. Understood?"

I had thought that the instructor had marked the area to make it easier for the new recruits to stab at the heart. But that was my misunderstanding. It was to make the prisoners last as long as possible.

Several minutes later, shrill war cries echoed continuously outside the town. The prisoners, their bodies honeycombed with bayonet stabs, crumpled in a pool of blood. War had transformed the instructors and the soldiers into frenzied murderers. This abnormal state of mind must be unfathomable to today's young people who haven't experienced war.

Kawano Masato, sixty-seven (m), restaurant owner, Yokosuka [p. 69]
