PREFACE

In my experience, Americans have generally been astounded to learn that we had taken any Japanese prisoners at all during the Second World War. This is hardly surprising. Wartime reports only stressed kamikaze attacks from the air and banzai charges on the ground, reinforcing the image of a fanatic enemy who would never allow himself to be taken captive. By the war's end, only about 35,000 Japanese had fallen into Allied (including Nationalist and Communist Chinese) hands, a tiny fraction of the 945,100 German and 490,600 Italian POWs in camps in the United States and elsewhere when the war ended in Europe. Just over 5,000 Japanese POWs were in captivity in the continental United States, with the rest in Hawaii, Australia, New Zealand, India, Burma, the Philippines, Okinawa, and scattered additional locations. Relatively few Americans ever saw, let alone came into contact with, Japanese prisoners of war in the United States.

When I tried to explain the subject of my research to friends and acquaintances, most found the topic interesting. However, their follow-up questions indicated that half believed I was talking about Americans taken prisoner by the Japanese, while the other half thought I was referring to the incarceration of the West Coast Japanese Americans during the war. Japanese POWs in Allied hands were simply not a part of their frame of reference.

A recent flood of books in the United States on the biggest conflict of the twentieth century includes none on the Japanese prisoners of war it produced. From a Western perspective, wartime Japan's moral revulsion concerning POWs was an extreme position, one that tended to dehumanize the enemy. Japanese POWs faced a dilemma when, despite all their assumptions and expectations, they were forced to confront the reality of becoming prisoners. How they dealt with this dilemma merits examination.

A study of Japanese POWs of the Second World War at this time provides us with a far more nuanced picture than was possible during the war, or even in the decades that followed. We can now read books and articles written by the former POWs about their wartime experiences and, while there is still time, interview at least a representative sampling of them before they pass from the scene. It is clear that the experience of falling into Western captivity was for them a defining moment in their lives. By contrast, for the Japanese-speaking Caucasian-American officers who dealt with Japanese POWs, this was a passing phase that was largely forgotten once the war was over and they could look forward to resuming their "normal lives." For Japanese-American army intelligence personnel, who were forced to prove their loyalty and had family incarcerated in relocation centers, memories about wartime contacts with POWs tended to remain more acute. With the passage of a half century since the war, the former prisoners not only reflected more on what took place but also, to some extent, dwelt less on aspects of events they believed should never have happened. Through their eyes we also have a much better sense of how well they were able to reintegrate into the society of which they believed that they would never again be a part.

When the war ended on August 15, 1945, I was in the final days of an eight-week basic training course at Fort McClellan, Alabama, designed to transform bookish Japanese language students into reasonable facsimiles of soldiers. I had already had a year of intensive study of written and spoken Japanese at the University of Michigan and could look forward to another half year of intensive study at Fort Snelling, Minnesota, concentrating on the oral and written language used by the Japanese military. If the war had gone on for another six months, I could well have been one of those interrogating prisoners or translating documents in the planned second invasion of Japan near Tokyo in early 1946.

I had been accepted into the army's intensive Japanese language program by virtue of having lived for over seven years in prewar Tokyo. At the time my family was still German, but as Jews our situation was becoming precarious owing to the ever-closer relationship between Germany and Japan. We were most fortunate to be able to emigrate to the United States in late 1940 when tensions were

rising in East Asia. It was in 1943 that Capt. (later Lt. Col.) Paul Rush visited my family in New York. He was on the trail of former students of the American School in Japan (ASIJ) to recruit them for the army's Military Intelligence Service Language School (MISLS) at the University of Michigan. Informed that my former classmates at ASIJ would be getting into the army program, I jumped at the opportunity to head for Ann Arbor after graduation from high school in June 1944.

A few obstacles remained to be overcome. My status at the time of graduation in June 1944 was that of an enemy alien because I had yet to complete the five years needed to obtain American citizenship. Under the peculiar regulations of the time, enemy aliens were subject to the draft but could not volunteer. The draft, however, would not catch up with me for another nine months. Hoping for the best, I presented myself to the University of Michigan with a view to enrolling in the regular Japanese language course offered in the catalogue, as well as other courses appropriate for a freshman. I was told that the Japanese course had been canceled because the army required the service of all Japanese language instructors, but perhaps another way could be found for me to learn Japanese. In a matter of days it was arranged for me to join the ongoing MISLS class. My parents had known Col. Kai Rasmussen, the director of the MISLS program, when he was the assistant military attaché in Tokyo, and that no doubt helped my cause.

I cannot recall whether it occurred to me then how utterly absurd it was for a civilian "enemy alien" to be enrolled in an intelligence language program while almost all of our Japanese-American teachers had been denied their rights as American citizens. Most had spent time in the so-called "relocation camps" where their relatives were still detained. Later it bothered me that I had embodied an unwitting example of the racial discrimination so prevalent in the United States during that period.

The army's sixteen months of Japanese language training gave me the basis for my lifelong interest in Japan and American-Japanese relations. I served at General MacArthur's headquarters (GHQ) during the Occupation, including six months at the Tokyo war crimes trial of Japan's top war criminals. My knowledge of both Japanese

and German came in handy for supervising the translation of official German documents used at the trial. Later I served in the G-2 (intelligence) section at headquarters. Recalled to active duty during the Korean War, I was again assigned to G-2, GHQ in Tokyo. I was on a Fulbright grant in Tokyo to collect material for a doctoral thesis when I passed the Foreign Service examination and joined the State Department in 1957. In the ensuing thirty years, I spent another ten years in Japan, in both Tokyo and Okinawa, plus five more years at the State Department working on U.S.-Japan relations.

Upon retirement in 1987, my interest in the country and people of Japan remained undiminished. I turned to teaching about Japan and U.S.-Japanese relations at various universities in the Washington, D.C., area and exploited numerous opportunities to return to Japan to renew friendships and soak up new impressions. My original interest in Japan's political developments turned gradually toward seeking a better understanding of Japan's underlying values and its people's psychological makeup.

Through the years I kept running into colleagues and friends who had served as Japanese language officers and enlisted men during the war. For a time these encounters assuaged my abiding curiosity about the Japanese prisoners of war. Eventually, though, I determined that the time was ripe for me to take another look at our unexpected "guests" in the midst of what Professor John Dower aptly characterized, in the title of his book, the "war without mercy."

Since that war, two generations have grown up whose passions have receded with the passage of time. In Japan, the shame at having been taken prisoner has faded and, in most cases, disappeared. Reluctant to write or even talk about their wartime experiences at first, former Japanese POWs have become much more eager to leave behind a record of what they went through in the hell of war and the conflicting emotions resulting from their being taken prisoner. A surprising number of autobiographies by Japanese veterans have been published, especially in the past two decades. Several noted Japanese scholars have also begun to show an interest in Japanese POWs.

This study deals only with those Japanese who became prisoners of the Western Allies (the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand) during the war. Millions more were added

to their small numbers at war's end when the emperor broadcast his surrender message and the rest of Japan's military gave up peacefully. They were scattered from Burma in the west to pockets of Japanese forces in the Philippines and Guam in the east, including those in Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Indochina, and many islands that had been bypassed in the South Pacific. Some of them ended up in the camps that housed POWs taken during the war, usually creating little or no tensions.

In addition, more than 1.6 million more Japanese surrendered to Chinese and Russian forces at war's end. This study does not cover their surrender and subsequent treatment as POWs. Both deserve separate treatment because their experiences in captivity were entirely different from those accorded Japanese prisoners of the Western powers.

In China, Japanese forces were engaged in war against both Nationalist and Communist forces from 1937 to 1945. During that period, Japan's military presence was by far the most powerful one in China. Up to the end of the war, Japanese forces were generally on the offensive, suffered relatively few casualties, and gave up few prisoners of war. Once the United States became involved in the war, combat in China diminished in intensity as both the Nationalists and Communists husbanded their resources in anticipation of the civil war that was to follow. For the Japanese troops, the conflict in China was far less intense than combat in the Pacific and Southeast Asia, and their postwar treatment at the hands of the Chinese Nationalists was, as Japanese veterans recall, "magnanimous." Although the Japanese expected revenge, there was no mass retribution from the Chinese, who had suffered grievous military and civilian losses at the hands of the Japanese. Both the Nationalists and Communists held war crimes trials for those suspected of specific crimes. The Japanese surrendered largely to the Nationalists, partly because the United States arranged it that way, but also because it coincided with their own preference. The Nationalists' primary interests were (1) that they seize all weapons from the Japanese forces, which had not been defeated in China; (2) that the Japanese departure not result in a security vacuum exploitable by the Communists; and (3) that Japanese troops not be used against them by the Communists. With the tacit

concurrence of the American forces just coming on the scene in modest numbers, these interests ensured that the Nationalists treated their 1.2 million Japanese POWs with kid gloves, on occasion even with considerable deference.

Japanese forces in Manchuria opposite the Soviet Union endured yet another fate. For several years they had kept the Soviets from shifting the bulk of their Far Eastern forces to the defense of the homeland from a German threat and subsequent invasion. When the tide of war turned against Japan, substantial Japanese forces from Manchuria, including some of their elite and best-equipped units, were sent to the active fronts in the Pacific. The Soviet Union attacked the weakened Japanese forces in Manchuria on August 8, 1945, in compliance with its pledge at the Yalta Conference and in response to President Truman's request at the Potsdam Conference. It swiftly occupied all of Manchuria and northern Korea down to the thirty-eighth parallel, Sakhalin Island, and the Kuriles, and captured 600,000 Japanese soldiers in the following weeks. Like the German prisoners taken by the Soviets, these Japanese endured years of captivity, hard labor under primitive conditions, malnutrition and disease, and over 60,000 of them died. The others were eventually repatriated, some after having been brainwashed or recruited to furnish intelligence to the Soviets. Many of these survivors have written accounts of their ordeal under the Soviets, experiences totally different from what prisoners of the Western allies, or the Chinese, underwent.

This study of Japanese POWs captured by the Western Allies is based on a variety of sources. On the American side this includes the POW interrogation records at the National Archives, the sparse written material subsequently penned by American army and navy personnel who conducted the interrogations, and interviews of America's Japanese language officers and enlisted men. It also relies extensively on Japanese source material. This included publicly and privately published books and articles written by former Japanese POWs.

As a result of a letter sent to the editor of the *Asahi* newspaper, in which I asked former POWs to contact me, I developed an extensive correspondence with a large number of former POWs. In the spring of 2000, I followed up with thirty-five personal interviews in

Japan with ex-POWs, selected largely on the basis of our previous correspondence. These interviews were conducted in coffee shops, restaurants, hotels, and private homes. Lasting two or more hours, each covered a wide range of issues and helped to clarify for me the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of former POWs during those exceedingly stressful times. Our meetings were often quite emotional.

On one occasion, sitting in the crowded confines of a coffee shop filled with tobacco smoke, I noticed that a man sitting at the next table was greatly interested in our conversation. He strained to hear every spoken word and even tried to read some written material that passed at our table. Finally, he could contain himself no longer and in a thoroughly un-Japanese way, joined quite spontaneously in our discourse. He, too, had been a prisoner after the Second World War. I have a strong sense of gratitude toward all the former POWs for sharing their intimate, painful thoughts with me, a stranger from another country.

I am aware of the possibility that the former Japanese POWs who responded to my appeal through the *Asahi* might be a self-selected group with special reasons (perhaps of gratitude for the treatment received at the hands of Americans) for wishing to communicate with me. What I learned from them, however, generally agreed with the writings on wartime experiences by other Japanese veterans, who would have had no reason to believe that their accounts would ever be read by an American.

I was also aware of the evident fact that I was dealing with the recollections of events and attitudes of fifty-five and more years ago, and that some episodes of that stressful era may well have been repressed in the recesses of the mind. For example, a number of Japanese claimed to have been unconscious when captured; it seems more likely that they were exhausted, weak, ill, and perhaps confused by stress, and unconsciously wanted to bury realities that were too painful to bear.

My sources served in many different combat zones. They were captured at various times in the war, and their experiences of becoming prisoners of war varied greatly. Nevertheless, there were enough common, recurrent themes to give me confidence that they represent a reasonably broad spectrum of the limited number of Japanese

captured during the war. The relatively small number of diehards were a notable exception. They sought to make life as difficult as possible for their captors throughout the period of their incarceration. Although my sources and Japanese historians have written and spoken of this element in the POW camp population, apparently none has published his wartime memoirs, and none ever responded to my appeals for contact.

Nobody is more aware than the former POWs themselves that the generation that fought, bled, died, and became prisoners during and after the Second World War is now rapidly passing from the scene. The survivors of that war, on both sides of the Pacific, cannot and should not forget their comrades who died on its battlefields. Fortunately, such bloody wartime memories have not prevented Japanese and American veterans of such brutal conflicts as the battle of Iwo Jima from joining in organized unit reunions, as well as in one-on-one get-togethers. Such reunions have been taking place for decades, in fact, with little or no publicity, and have contributed to a new era of better understanding between the people of our two countries.

Since beginning this study, I have received several eager requests from American veterans of the Pacific War asking me to help find a Japanese whom they captured in a battlefield cave and with whom they now eagerly wanted to get back into contact. The difficulty of finding someone about whom they knew next to nothing made my task impossible, but the strongly expressed desire testifies to the meaningfulness of the brief encounters over a half century ago, probably for both men.

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, Japanese and Americans hardly knew one another. Only a tiny percentage of Japanese had ever met and talked with an American, and very few Americans had ever spent time with any Japanese. We knew each other largely through caricatures that were further embellished during the war. The prison camps became the place where large numbers of Japanese encountered Americans in any number for the first time. Elements on both sides apparently felt a desire to communicate across the linguistic and cultural barriers, despite the mutual hate and disdain brought on by the war. These tentative encounters established

a new pattern of discourse and understanding. A significant number of Japanese actually came out of the war genuinely appreciating aspects of the American way of life. Meetings under those exceptionally difficult circumstances were a prelude to the far broader and more meaningful encounters during the Occupation of Japan, and, eventually, to the mutually productive relationship of today.

If the ability of wartime Japanese POWs eventually to reintegrate fully into their postwar society was a test of the fundamental societal changes that have occurred in postwar Japan, we can be well satisfied that the Japanese have accomplished that task far better than anyone might have thought possible in 1945. Since that time our two countries have built a solid partnership based on mutual interest and mutual understanding, unprecedented for the United States in the sense that it was created with a non-Western nation. For the Japanese, too, the partnership with America represents their first really meaningful national collaboration with another country in history. I like to think that the first broadly based encounters of Americans, Australians, New Zealanders, and Britons with Japanese germinated in the unlikely locus of Allied prison camps. Wars can have unintended consequences.

A NOTE ON JAPANESE NAMES

Throughout the text, I have followed the traditional Japanese convention in which the family name precedes the given name, except in the case of Japanese Americans, for whom I followed the usual Western order of given name first, family name last.