



THE BURMA CAMPAIGN SOCIETY

To Mark the 70th Anniversary of the World War Two/Imphal Campaign

This essay is dedicated to the soldiers

Those fallen in Manipur, India

-Reconciliation and the Future-

Gratitude and Apology

The 70th Burma Campaign/Imphal Campaign Anniversary reminds us of the destruction of villages, towns and countries that became involved in the war whether they wished to do so or not.

I feel personally sorry for the people of Manipur and their state, which became a battlefield where so many fallen soldiers were left. I feel that the Japanese government were very late in acknowledging what had happened in Manipur (Imphal/Kohima campaign) and just how much your people have endeavoured not just to re-establish your community over the years but also the building of War memorials to Japanese soldiers. I would like to pay special tribute to all the volunteers who gave their time and effort in building and maintaining the war memorials to Japanese war dead. It is shameful that the Japanese government did not contribute to the building of the Japanese soldier's memorials.

I feel very frustrated that Japan has not done more to help your people and your communities invest in some useful ways and at least to thank the people who established friendship between your country and Japan.

The remains of young Japanese soldiers and the souls of over 50,000 still remain in North Eastern India.

The forgotten war and the forgotten soldiers from the UK, Japan, India and Manipur and all the other nationalities and races are being commemorated this year.

Brief History of Post War Japan

<Far East International Military Tribunal>

Friendly Anglo-Japanese relations were restored after the signing of the Peace Treaty of San Francisco in 1951 (coming into force in April 1952). India and Japan, however, separately signed a peace treaty in 1952. India had a different perspective regarding World War Two. They stirred up to their spirits and urged and dared to criticise the

International Military Allies enforcing the infringement of Japan's sovereignty and India refused to attend the Allied peace conference and waived completely war compensation from Japan.

After the Far East International Military Tribunal was over, for many years Japan never forgot India's support and feels grateful to the Indian Judge who was delegated from your nation. His name is **Radhabinod Pal**, an honourable Justice in Japanese post war history. His view of the tribunal was sceptical and questionable in regards to its legitimacy. Without his judgement, which came out in the open many years later, Japan could not redeem her nation's honour and dignity. The American-led Allies conducted the tribunal to condemn and demonise the defeated enemy.

The Japanese Imperial army's war crimes were presented at the tribunal with evidence based on facts, photos and figures that had not been properly investigated and exhaustively examined with an objective eye, thus, Japan was not given a chance to defend her position fairly. Most of the pleadings by Japanese defendants were dismissed by the rest of the allied judges.

Judgement was passed without legality, fairness and impartiality according to International law.

Justice Pal was convinced that there should be a correct way to examine and judge World War 2 as a whole under the existing international law.

Judge Pal explained how Japan engaged in the Great War in the Pacific and Far East and argued that the evidence should be re-examined as to whether Japan was guilty or not. His argument was strictly based on International law and not sympathy for Japan.

If humanity and indiscriminate mass murder of civilians are in question, America should also be put on trial for using weapons of mass destruction over Tokyo and dropping the nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, which resulted in the great loss of life among the civilian population.

Years later, another representative of the Allies, Justice Professor Bert Röling from the Netherlands followed the view of Justice Pal.

I believe great people in our history have one thing in common. They are not afraid to speak out about what they think is right and never cease in their quest for truth.

Mahatma Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is also another prime example.

After the Second World War, Japanese people became despondent and had mixed feelings: they felt they had been unjustly treated at the war tribunal, guilt and remorse for starting the war. Some of these feelings still persist even today.

<War History Education>

The history of WW2 has never been coherently taught in schools in Japan. The Japanese post war education system was greatly influenced by the American military occupation and young Japanese learned American values. American culture poured into Japan's old and ridged traditional society which was turned upside down after the war ended. Japan's society was in complete chaos, people lived in poverty, and everyone was struggling to survive.

Talking about the war became a taboo subject amongst the war time generation. Returned soldiers were despised as losers whereas during the war servicemen were feted as heroes fighting for their country. Many veterans felt guilt and shame about coming back home alive, so they just put their heads down and tried to get on with restoring the country.

<Rebuilding Devastated Japanese Society after the War>

During rebuilding of the nation a new education system was established and women were given rights. Under the American occupation policy (United States Education Mission) in 1946, the existing education system was restructured and improved so as to democratise and abolish the Japanese elitist higher education system.

Today, education plays a crucial role in Japan. In 2010 more than 2.8 million students were enrolled in Japan's 778 universities compared to 72,000 who graduated in 160 universities pre-war (292,000 other students went to teacher training colleges which were subject to strong military and nationalistic influences.).

Some old traditions and values were abolished such as worshipping the Emperor, which could have lead to nationalism, for example. The country embraced peace more than anything, in fact, if the truth be known, people were tired of war.

Before sending their young sons and students to unknown battlefields and they had to endure harsh military training. The military government greatly increased the number of such recruits. All of the nation's healthy young males were conscripted and sent to the battlefields of Asia. Japan turned war into "All Out War".

Japanese people in general were tightly controlled by the military and were terrified and did not have the courage to oppose the dictators. The people hid away their feelings of dismay, disillusionment and sadness that the nation was engaged in war.

Intimidation of society by the military became the norm.

On the day, the war finally ended in August 1945, the Japanese people finally got rid of totalitarianism and militarism.

After Japan had lost the war, the people repressed their remorseful feelings and memories, and many tried to forget all about the war. Many veterans became heavy

Sake (Japanese Rice wine) drinkers, while others became taciturn and focused on working diligently every single day to rebuild the nation.

During the 1960s, 70s and 80s the nation concentrated on building up its infrastructure, industry, high technology and exporting all manner of goods. Due to the tremendous effort made by the war and post-war generation, Japan gained world -wide respect and established itself as a modern civilised country.

Only after Japan had become relatively wealthier and a democracy that took care of its own people did everyone look back at the wartime period and all the sacrifices.

We realised that Japan has caused so much pain to other countries during and after the war.

Between Imphal and Kohima Battle Sites – ‘White Bone Road’

So many books and essays were published in the UK and in Japan in regards to “Imphal Campaign/U-go Operation”. The 33rd, 15th and 31st Infantry Divisions of the Japanese 15th Army were led by infamous commanding officer, Lieutenant General Renya Mutaguchi who was regarded as block-headed monster. Mutaguchi was incredibly ambitious and egotistical and had never been popular and respected, rather he was despised by many for his cunning, cowardliness and self interest. General Mutaguchi never went to the front lines of battle sites in Manipur, but instead stayed in Mandalay, and gave orders that the 3 divisions must penetrate Manipur to take Imphal, Kohima and on to Dimapur. There was a feud between Gen. Mutaguchi and three generals due to the recklessness of his orders.

The road from Imphal to Kohima is well known to those who fought and is called “The Road of Bleached Bones” or “Yasukuni Avenue” by Japanese veterans. I have never been to India or Burma and I have only seen some old photos or documentaries about the events of 70 years ago, so it is difficult for me to imagine the battle sites

It is said over 20,000 British and allied troops and over 60,000 Japanese soldiers died in Manipur state. The nationalities included British, Indians, Ghurkhas and Japanese who perished between March and July 1944. The 3 divisions of the Japanese Army were involved in gruelling battles along the Burma-India border, with major battles in Imphal and Kohima. Many of the 60,000 Japanese soldiers who fell died from malnutrition, tropical diseases, exhaustion and starvation.

<My Father>

My father, Taiji Urayama survived the Imphal Campaign. He was 22 years old then. He went to Kohima in 1944 taking part in the U-Go offensive mission as a vet and a lieutenant of the mountain artillery. He led 150 soldiers who carried armour and parts for portable artillery on the back of horses. Often the soldiers as well as animals lost their lives on the way to get to the battle sites.

The Japanese army's recklessness plan to march through the unexplored jungle to India from North West Burma ended total disaster. Japanese troops walked through mud in deep jungles, climbed 3,000m mountains and crossed rivers from Burma to North East India, often drenched and covered with leaches, encountering snakes, mosquitoes and tigers, all without sufficient food, medicines and ammunition, which made nature a major enemy.

I was told that my father rescued so many drowning soldiers and horses when he and his men were crossing rivers. He nearly died several times; he caught Malaria, Cholera and dodged the bullets of fighter planes, and tank and artillery shells. Boxes of food and miscellaneous goods meant for British and allied troops dropped by parachute were sometimes obtained by Japanese troops. The soldiers realised in the end that medieval Bushi-do style fighting without proper logistics was ridiculously inadequate, and in their heart they knew they would never win.

Reconciliation between Great Britain and Japan

<Masao Hirakubo and British Veterans>

The late Masao Hirakubo, the founder of the Burma Campaign Society, the initiator of Anglo-Japan reconciliation activities in the UK fought at the same battle sites as my father under Lieutenant General Kotoku Sato, the 31st division of the 15th Imperial Japanese Army.

I met Masao for the first time in 1998 in London. Masao moved from Japan to the UK with his family after he retired from Marubeni Corporation, in order to carry out his noble reconciliation activities in the UK.

He inspired many people and endeavoured to work together with former enemies, i.e. British Burma Veterans to achieve his goals by visiting them at their homes and gathering places. One can imagine how difficult it was and he must have had tremendous guts to do this. He created many opportunities to discuss about each other's war experiences and their historical background.

Anomaly of Japanese Militarism consisted of Rule, Obedience, Discipline and Violence.

When British ex-prisoners of war showed anti-Japanese feeling in 1998, I was forced to remind myself about the Japanese imperial army invasion of Singapore in 1942.

About 80,000 British and Australian soldiers surrendered to 32,000 Japanese. They were detained as POWs and transported to the Thai-Burma Railway (infamous as the death railway) as forced labour to build a railway.

With the unexpected large numbers of surrendered allied soldiers, the Japanese army had to handle and control them. Japanese also suffered with the scorching heat and harsh tropical conditions.

Back home, civilians were also suffering from shortages of food and natural resources which had been badly affected since America, Great Britain and Holland had enforced economic sanctions against Japan. Ironically this was the cause of the war in the beginning. The Japanese government were unable to provide enough food and medicines for Japanese themselves let alone for POWs.

The Kenpei-tai (Military Police) were most infamous for torturing prisoners, and even Japanese who did not obey the rules and maintain military- standard discipline faced similar punishment.

<Prejudice and Misunderstanding>

Since Japan did not have enough food to feed themselves in their own country, they had to rely on local food in Burma and elsewhere.

I have heard that some British POWs complained because the Japanese army gave them root to eat. In fact, it was burdock. In Japan, it was commonly known as a healthy vegetable. The western diet is based on meat, potatoes and bread which differ to the Japanese diet of fish, rice and all sorts of vegetables. Also Japanese food portions are again different; they eat smaller portion as compared to the big-sized westerners.

Feeding large numbers of POWs (80,000+ is a massive challenge). They were not guests. Japanese forced the POWs to obey no matter what; otherwise they received severe physical punishment. During the war, humanity and basic individual human rights can sometimes disappear, including Japanese to Japanese.

Japanese military discipline and obedience was another large cultural difference which created a huge misunderstanding between East and West.

“Surrendering to the enemy” was just unthinkable to them. Laying down their sword and gun is absolutely “dishonourable” and they were taught to take their own life rather than let themselves be captured. If they were captured their name would be disgraced in their own family and country.

<Hatred> (POWs suffered traumatic experiences during their captivity)

British POWs, who came back to the UK, naturally held a grudge for a long time about the Japanese soldiers and their army’s brutality. Their hatred towards Japanese was so great that British former POWs boycotted Japanese products in the UK after the war. Post-war Japanese industries developed which helped Japan economically and Japanese export goods flourished in the world market. Most British veterans saw with bitterness that despite defeat, Japan managed to prosper.

In 1998, some British Burma POW veterans organised anti-Japanese demonstrations when the Japanese Emperor and Empress visited in the UK. They burned the Japanese flag to show they were still angry, demanded compensation and even condemned Emperor Akihito, the son of Emperor Hirohito the wartime Emperor.

As I married an Englishman and moved to the UK from Japan 25 years ago, and in that time I have never encountered anti-Japanese feeling by British people. I was astounded that British veterans still bear a grudge towards Japanese fifty years after the war ended.

In 1983, Masao Hirakubo met two Welsh Burma veterans, Gwilym Davies and Hirwen James in Wales. One of them was a former prisoner of war. They talked and talked and British veterans were initially furious in expressing their anger. But they gradually softened up and realised that the Japanese also suffered so much during the war. Masao invited them to visit to see the real and present Japan. From that point, they became fond of Japan and started to understand about Japanese people and the country's history. Eventually they became good friends till their death.

Since their dramatic meeting, the message spread by word of mouth amongst British Burma veterans and at the peak more than 150 British Burma veterans and nearly 2,000 Japanese Burma veterans reconciled in Tokyo. British veterans visited the Yasukuni shrine, some went to Hiroshima as well and Japanese veterans visited Imphal barracks in York where the 2nd Infantry Division was based. Masao organised also a trip to Kohima/Imphal in India for both parties and held a massive joint Anglo-India-Japan reconciliation ceremony and prayed for peace at a Cathedral in Kohima in 1991. Masao was awarded an OBE from Queen Elizabeth for his relentless work and dedication to achieve reconciliation between the UK and Japan.

My personal involvement of reconciliation and building a peace bridge between countries and sustaining hope for the future of all humankind

Reconciliation activities are very important and necessary to promote peace and make sure there are no more world wars. It is very important that we acknowledge the different cultural values and traditions of each country and take account of the geopolitical aspects.

I became involved in this activity, since my father fought against Britain and I married an Englishman and have two grown-up children. We have lived in the UK over 25 years now. Our children are grown up now and will have children of their own. When those children think of their identity, either English or Japanese, it will be most difficult to determine who they are.

I became very close to Masao as soon as we both realised that my father and Masao had fought at Kohima. Masao naturally and immediately persuaded me to help his activities.

I was very keen to listen to veterans' war stories and also to learn from their history from both sides. My mother told me about wartime Japan. She and my two sisters were nearly killed by American aircraft swooping down and machine-gunning citizens on Tokyo's streets. She joined anti-war secret gatherings and was terrified that she might get caught by the Kenpei-tai. My father was a troubled man after Japan's surrender. I

wanted to know how the war had affected my father's character and so many of those men who had traumatic experiences during the war.

Since I joined the Burma Campaign Society, I have had excellent opportunities to meet British Burma veterans.

In the case of the Britain, I am very fortunate that I have been given the opportunity to express my thoughts even if they are different from the British view of the Second World War. I am also very grateful that I have met so many generous people in the UK and particularly British Burma veterans since I joined the Burma Campaign Society. They are wise, good listeners, kind, and tolerant with me and very warm hearted human beings.

<Humanity and Inhumanity>

In terms of Japanese treatment of POWs in the First World War and Japan-Russo War back in 1914 and 1904, the Japanese Navy and Army captured surrendered officers and soldiers and brought them to Japan. Japanese Imperial Military personnel treated them as guests, and those prisoners reported this to their countries when they were freed. There is also another example of an honourable act during the WWII from a Japanese naval commander, captain Kudo, a naval officer, who gave the order to save British navy personnel from the ocean where they had been adrift for many days after their ship had been hit. Captain Kudo, without hesitation gave his order to his crews to rescue over 400 people and to treat them with honour.

Regarding Taiwan, I was told by some Taiwanese that the Japanese were kind, polite, courteous, educated and more over they planned for Taiwan during the Japanese occupation to build a good and lasting infrastructure such as railway system, industries, administration system and public government houses and so on. They feel that Japan is their brother. We were overwhelmed and thankful for the money that they raised for the Tohoku Tsunami and Earthquake disaster in 2011.

War produces heroes as well as evil on both sides. The evil side human beings can sometimes become arrogant, cunning and sly; people who have evil ambition, desire to gain power.

Extreme nationalism and racially oriented fascism as well as religious fanatics often create conflicts that ignite war. War produces so many orphans and widows. Military dictatorship can easily enter into war that destroys family, society and country. Everything will be gone.

We must all work to maintain peace and coexist with everyone.

<The way to build a peace bridge>

I believe that all the nationalities involved in WWII should share their war stories and their experiences with each other.

All these nationalities should empower themselves to create many communication platforms to internationally engage people in forums, symposiums and debates and all of their voices must be heard equally.

In this way if we keep talking and communicating to create peace and stability for future generations rather than provoking each other and creating violent conflicts, it is possible that reconciliation and peace can be achieved, although this will take a long time.

I believe that patience and tolerance backed by a balanced and open education for all are the keys to reaching peace in the world. Japan can make a bigger contribution to peace if they enhance their diplomatic and rhetorical skills and have a powerful and sincere moral sense.

Akiko Macdonald

Chairman of the Burma Campaign Society

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<Postscript>

I gave my draft to the Japanese Embassy in the UK last week as they were very interested to read it. The following paragraphs that they noted and suggested to add or rephrase:

Page 4 - We realised that Japan has caused so much pain to other countries during and after the war.

- **(As for Japanese government, they have been expressing apology many times after the war.)**

Page 3: military government.... dictator...

- **(Japan didn't have a dictator. The government wasn't run by army and navy and the Japanese parliament was operated.)**

My comment: I think the whole of Japan was upset by the treatment of a modernised Japan emerging with their industrial strength.

They wanted to be recognised by the West as the leader of Asians. Japan is an independent country and has its own sovereignty. Certainly they did not wish to be colonised, rather they wanted to be treated equally and to have the right to do things that the Western Countries did, i.e. have some colonies.

America, Britain and Holland wanted Japan to withdraw from China and Manchuria where it was so important to prevent Russia's military intervention that could threaten Japan, while many western countries occupied parts of Asia, Middle East, and Africa etc. America also took Hawaii and the Philippines archipelago. The West had many territories with natural resources, creating prosperity in the West for hundreds of years. Japan developed and modernised to catch up to the west to follow their examples.

The mood of the Japanese nation was influenced by the rightist media. Since Japan was the victor in WWI and the Russo-Japan war, it made Japan over confident.

My view is: Japanese people in general before the 2nd World War did not have much international knowledge and were not educated enough to understand the international political landscape. The reality was Japan did not have influence or strength regarding political and international negotiations backed by economic power.

Western countries became contemptuous towards Japan and other Asian countries which were not given much consideration or equal rights at the time. So, as a consequence, the nation became more vexed, exasperated and lost patience, making the people become more defiant towards those mighty Western Powers.

Writing about any war is always difficult due to the political, military, economic, and cultural differences. It is also necessary to keep alive the memories of all the participants, whichever country they came from.

The stories of soldiers can vividly project the reality of war, which people and politicians sometimes become oblivious to.

What I would like to convey is that Japan did wrong things during the war due to the brutal methods of its military, but before the war Japan hoped to influence other Asian nations to kick out the Western Powers.

However, my utmost wish and hope is that all problems are resolved through discussions and negotiations and certainly not by violence and military intimidation.

My view is entirely my own and I believe I need to study more about the histories of other nations, as well.

I would like to welcome other people's views and opinions.

Thank you for reading my lengthy essay.