

The Japanese Prisoners of War in Siberia 1945–1956

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1. Introduction

In over 2000 books published by Japanese prisoners of war (henceforth POW) veterans, mostly at their own expense, between the early 1950s and 2000, testimony is given of the sufferings they went through, but also of acts of humanity on the part of Soviet citizens, officials, medical doctors, etc. Only a few books were published in the 1950s, which can be explained by the economic situation in Japan and the effort required by the repatriated to settle down. This changed as the economic situation in Japan improved. As from the 1960s, and even more from in the 1970s, the number of publications rose. Those who completed their narrations with pictures attracted particular attention. Since any sort of records and drawings was strictly forbidden in the camps, all texts and pictures are based on memory.

The (partial) opening of the now Russian archives has given historians an opportunity of doing research, e.g. on the subject of how many Japanese had been taken prisoner, where the dead were buried, and the contribution of the POW to the reconstruction of the Soviet economy etc.

Whilst there is a constant flow of publications about what happened at high political and military levels, even in minute details, the vicissitudes of the POW seem to attract little interest, and even less, if anything, is known about Japanese POW in Soviet hands. How do people describe a very difficult period in their life? This question led to my thesis.¹

2. Historical background

Russia obtained from China the concession to build the East Chinese Railway, and during the Boxer Riots in China (1898–1900), she occupied the whole of Manchuria in 1900. The continuation of this occupation was one

¹ This article is based on my thesis "Die japanischen Kriegsgefangenen in Sibirien 1945–1956. Verarbeitung der Lagererlebnisse in Wort und Bild". University of Zurich, Japanology. 2001. 129 pp. All translations by the author.

reason for the Russian-Japanese War of 1904–1905. In the peace treaty between Russia and Japan in Portsmouth in 1905, Russia agreed, with the consent of China, to the lease of Port Arthur, Dalian, the surrounding area and the territorial waters to Japan. In actual fact, however, Manchuria was split up into a northern Russian and a southern Japanese section. After the abdication of the Ch'ing dynasty, 1912, and the collapse of the Chinese central government, Manchuria was practically independent as from 1919. In 1931 Japan began to occupy Manchuria and on 18 February 1932 proclaimed the puppet state of Manchukuo. This led to an escalation of the tensions between the Soviet Union and Japan and to skirmishes on the Manchurian-Soviet border.

In 1855 Russia and Japan had agreed that Sakhalin would be administered jointly and that the Southern Kuriles, up to and including Etorofu, belong to Japan. In 1875 Japan gave up its claim on Sakhalin in exchange for all the Kurile Islands. After Japan's victory in the Russian-Japanese War of 1904–1905, the southern part of Sakhalin was ceded to Japan in the peace treaty of Portsmouth (1905).

In the peace treaty of San Francisco (1951), which the Soviet Union refused to endorse, Japan renounced the Kuriles with the exception of the four southern Kurile Islands Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashiri and Etorofu, which Japan considered to be part of its "Northern Territories".

The neutrality pact between the Soviet Union and Japan of 13 April 1941 was due to expire in April 1946. One provision of the pact held that it would automatically be extended, if neither of the two parties gave one year's notice. The Soviet Union was under heavy pressure by the Allies to open up a new front, which Stalin promised to do after the defeat of Germany. At 17.00 hours on 8 August 1945 the Japanese ambassador in Moscow and the Japanese government in Tokyo were informed that the Soviet Union would consider itself in a state of war with Japan as from 9 August. At 17.10 hours, in the Far East already 9 August, the Soviet troops launched their attacks in Manchuria, Sakhalin and the Kuriles. The resistance of the Japanese army was terminated by the formal capitulation on 3 September 1945. About 2.7 million Japanese civilians and troops fell into captivity. The civilians were repatriated or returned to Japan by their own means.

Article 9 of the Potsdam declaration of 24 July 1945 by the Allied Powers stated that all Japanese POW were to be repatriated, except those responsible for war crimes. Although the Soviet government had endorsed this declaration on August 8, it did not intend to repatriate the soldiers. On 23 August 1945, the Soviet State Defence Committee passed the resolution No 9898, in accordance with which 500,000 Japanese soldiers, capable of working under Siberian and Far Eastern conditions, were to be transferred to

Soviet POW camps. In actual fact about 580,000 Japanese were brought to the Soviet Union. For many years Japan was given misleading figures about those held in captivity.

The Geneva Convention of 1929, aimed at improving the protection of POW, had been ratified neither by Japan nor the Soviet Union. At the Tōkyō War Crime Tribunal (1946–1948), the former Prime Minister Hideki Tōjō explained Japan's attitude to this convention. He said that there is a fundamental difference between the Western and the Japanese appraisal of captivity. By tradition it is shameful for Japanese to surrender. For this reason all soldiers are ordered not to surrender under whatsoever circumstances. The ratification of the Geneva Convention could have been understood as an encouragement to surrender.

The Soviet Union refused ratification because of what it called cultural and racist discriminations in the Convention, e.g. art. 9, which stipulated that wherever possible there should be separate camps according to nationality and race.

3. Life in captivity

The reports of the POW show distinctive patterns, which can be grouped as follows:

- August 1945 – end of first winter: Depressive tenor, bitterness, and incredulity about what happened to them, but also determination to survive, self-discipline. The POW are struggling to adapt to entirely new circumstances, e.g. quarters, food, forced labour, health, illness, accidents and numerous deaths.
- Summer 1946: The tenor is minimally less pessimistic. The deadly winter has ended and deaths are decreasing. The start of repatriations nourishes hopes.
- Winter 1946 – Summer 1948: Will one be able to survive another winter? Problems caused by the communist indoctrination campaign impose heavy strains on social life. Comments about comrades making camp life a hell are very frequent and stark. The general uncertainty persists. Rumours about being allowed home keep flourishing. Repatriations continue, though at a slow pace, nobody knows when his turn will be. By the end of August 1948 the number of POW has fallen to 211,758.
- Summer 1948 – Mid-1949: 95,000 POW remain in the Soviet Union, many of whom are arbitrarily convicted for war crimes or alleged delicts during their captivity. Circumstances having improved substantially, the

reports and pictures become brighter, feelings of sympathy and affection towards Soviet women and girls are cropping up. Climate and nature are no more a threat, the POW know how to deal with them, are able to appreciate the beauty of Siberian nature.

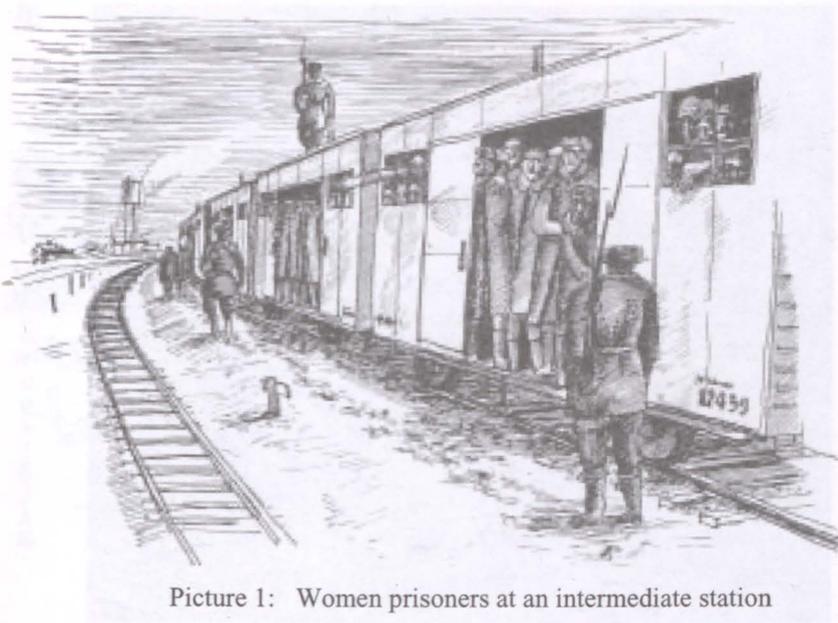
The shock of capitulation was followed by the shock of not being repatriated, but taken to the Soviet Union, with unknown destinations. When boarding the trains, the defeated soldiers, convinced that they were heading home, were encouraged by the cheers of the Soviet soldiers who wished them "home soon". The first doubts came when the trains did not head south, but north, and later even west. Some transports took weeks.

Satō (1979: 100; see picture 1) shows a train densely packed with human cargo at an intermediate station. Contrary to what one would have expected this train did not transport POW, but women prisoners. Satō comments "[...] Their escort is far more numerous than ours. It is a strange sight. These women are being taken here because they had fallen into German captivity, instead of fighting bravely. They are being considered anti-Soviet elements [...]". This was one of the first occasions when the POW understood how the Soviet State was merciless even to its own citizens.

The reports about these journeys and the first weeks in the camps are chronicles of how the POW had to get used to very distressing situations: Crunched in two-storey freight railcars, scarcity of food, humiliating hygienic conditions, dilapidated barracks, tent camps, low temperatures, and the extreme disappointment at having been cheated about their repatriation.

Satō (1979: 111; see picture 2) comments his picture *Sleep*: "In the first winter after our arrival in the Soviet Union 80 men, packed like sardines, were in one room. The outside temperature fell to as low as minus 30–40°, through the roof one could see the stars. [...] Upon returning from the toilet one's space had been taken; there was no option but to squeeze in between. [...]".

The camps were spread all over Siberia, between the Polar circle and even north of it (Vorkuta, Norilsk, Kolymskoe) and Vladivostok, Khabarovsk, the Central Asian Socialist Republics and Kazakhstan. For 1 September 1945, Kusnecov (1997: 51–53) arrives at the following figures of POW held in areas where in winter temperatures fall to - 50° C and snow reigns from between 140 to 240 days a year: Vladivostok 75,000, Khabarovsk 65,000, Čita 40,000, Ulan-Ude 16,000, Irkutsk 50,000, Krasnoyarsk 20,000, Altai 14,000, Kazakhstan 50,000, Uzbekistan 20,000. Total: 350,000.



Picture 1: Women prisoners at an intermediate station



Picture 2: Sleeping densely packed



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Picture 3: Cutting black bread



Picture 4: Potatoes or horse droppings?



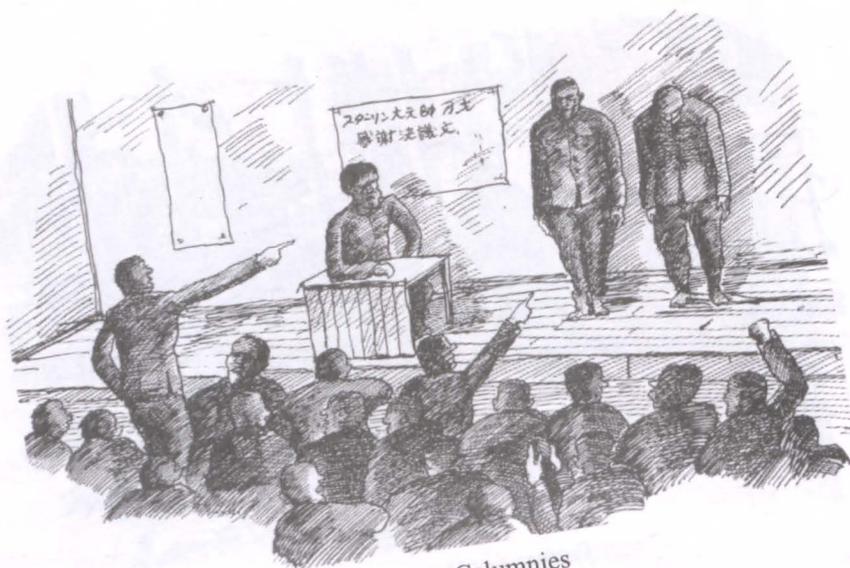
Picture 5: Felling of trees



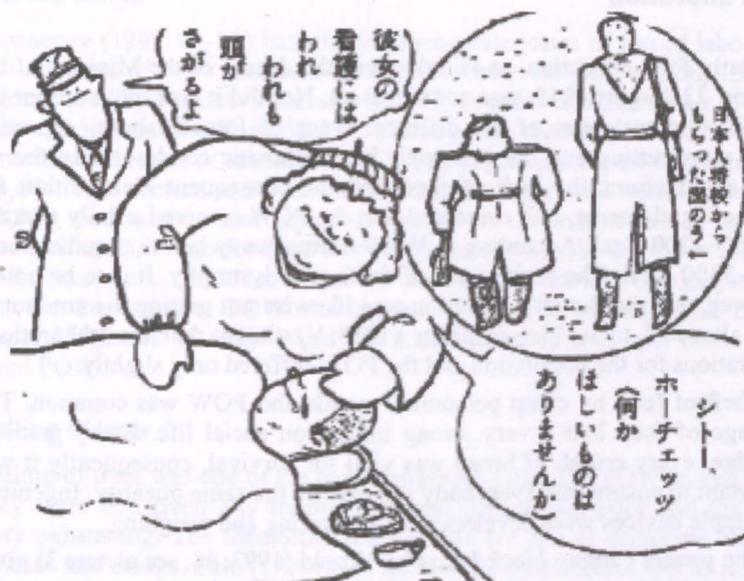
Picture 6: Horsepower



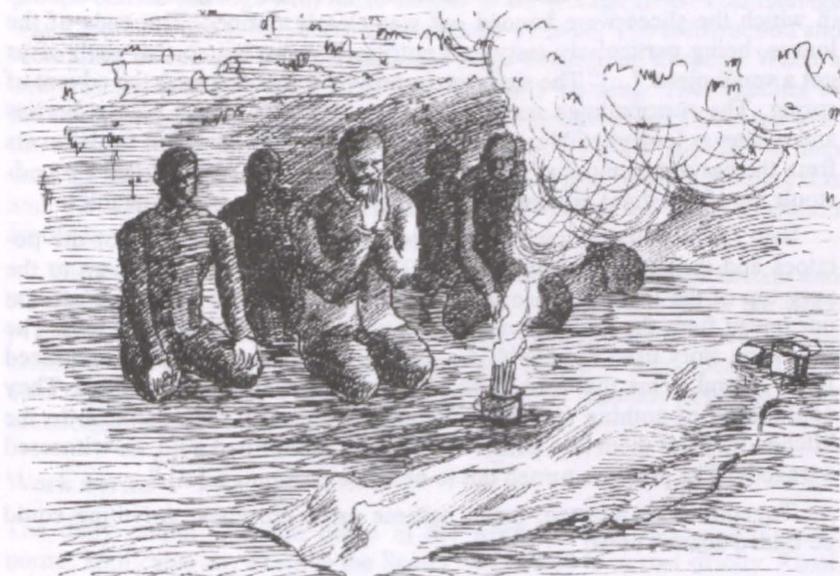
Picture 7: 1 May sports day



Picture 8: Calumnies



Picture 9: The tender doctor



Picture 10: Wake

Food allocation

The daily food allocation, as laid down in the decree of the Ministry of the Interior, 23 August 1945, was not met at all. Nor did it take into account the specific circumstances of the different types of forced labour, e.g. mine work, woodcutting and the extremely harsh climatic conditions. In the reports and pictures the lack of food and the consequent malnutrition are dominating elements. It is estimated that the POW received a daily average of 1100–1300 Kcal. According to WHO norms heavy labour requires about 3100–3300 Kcal. The main cause of death was dystrophy. It is to be noted, however, that the Soviet population was likewise not getting the amount of food allocated to it. Fleischhacker (1965: V) shows that the (theoretical) food rations for the population and the POW differed only slightly.

Theft of food by camp personnel, guards and POW was common. The shortage of food had a very strong impact on social life. Every gram of porridge, every crumb of bread was vital for survival, consequently it was important to ensure that everybody got exactly the same quantity. Ingenious but simple devices were developed for measuring and weighing.

The picture *Cutting black bread* by Yūzaki (1993: 48; see picture 3) gives a very vivid impression. He writes “[...] Cutting the bread was done under close supervision. We fixedly stared at the man measuring the bread by means of a metre rule, cutting it with a saw and then weighing it. The order in which the slices were handed out was clearly defined. The ends of the loaves, being particularly tasty and nutritious, were cut so that each of us got a small piece. [...]” The situation improved somewhat with the advent of spring. The surroundings were explored in search of fresh plants, berries and whatever looked edible, in autumn the fields were searched for leftovers from the harvest. A number of cases are reported of POW poisoned by toadstools, or of intestinal problems due to eating too many raw vegetables.

Satō (1979: 159; see picture 4) tells and illustrates the story of the potatoes and the horse droppings. “[...] The potatoes were heaped up to the very top of the loading space, at uneven bends potatoes would fall off. On our return from the job site we were always looking for such potatoes. The following story used to be told. A group returning from the job site noticed funny round items that looked like stones or frozen pieces of mud. They could think of nothing else but potatoes and filled all their pockets. In the kitchen they put them into pans. When one of them lifted a lid, he witnessed a tragedy: The potatoes turned out to be horse droppings. [...]”

Together with tobacco, bread became camp currency. Anything could be traded against bread.

Forced labour

Kusnecov (1997: 90–91) lists the following categories of forced labour and the numbers of POW assigned to them: Forestry 159,862, mining 134,608, agriculture 74,731, heavy industry 50,597, construction and repair of factories and human dwellings 50,871, military and civil airports 33,800, construction and repair of railways 20,157, power plants and power transmission 15,674, construction and repair of rail carriages and road transport vehicles 11,550, construction and repair of roads 9,953, construction of hospitals and welfare buildings for the POW 9,076, etc. The POW were also assigned to defence work, forbidden under the Geneva Convention. One major work site for the Japanese POW was the new Transsiberian rail trunk Baikal-Amur Magistrale (BAM). Word has it that under each sleeper there is one dead POW.

Felling of trees

Felling of trees was one of the most dangerous jobs. The POW lacked skills, they were not given any training, the equipment was poor and the work very exhausting. The memories and pictures are full of accidents, despair, disease and deaths. Satō (1979: 111; see picture 5) describes this as follows: “[...] Forestry work was the most demanding work in any camp, the norms were very high. Small work groups felled the trees in the hilly forests; other groups carried the logs with horse sleighs to the storage areas. This haulage was the most hated job. All sawing was done by hand. The construction and rebuilding of railway tracks required a large number of sleepers. When a tree was about to fall, the guards would shout a warning. The branches of the trees were used to maintain large fires; smoke clouds were hovered over the forests. [...] Norm swindling consisted of sawing off the date written onto the sawn surface and writing a new date. The guards did not notice this and the daily norm was reported as met, otherwise the food allocation would have been curtailed. [...]”

The POW were not paid for their work. Unlike USA, Great Britain and New Zealand, the Soviet Union did not issue confirmations about the work performed. The consequence of this was that due to the lack of such a document the Japanese government refused to pay the POW a compensation on their return to Japan. By a ruling of March 1993, the Japanese Supreme Court sanctioned the government's attitude.

Work norms

The daily output was laid down in the work norms. These complicated norms, applicable anywhere in the Soviet Union, had to be met strictly. Rossi

(1989: 254) cites the norms for clearing different types of snow: Fresh snow, light snow, slightly compact snow, compact snow requiring foot pressure on the shovel, very compact snow, frozen snow requiring a pick. A series of coefficients took into account the height of the snow shovelled and the throwing distance. The norms were assigned to the work groups irrespective of whether the group was complete or not. If somebody was ill or weak, the others had to make up for him. The work performed was measured by inspectors and administered by a large staff. There was a common saying "Not the work is bad, but the norm". Cruel and particularly strict inspectors could turn POW life into hell, destroying even the strongest men. Not meeting the norm meant shortening of the food ration, of which everybody was scared. Help was sought by bribing inspectors and norm administrators; the POW were also very adept at finding ways and means of cheating. In the first winter 1945/1946 the average fulfilment of the norms reached a meagre 13 %. This, together with the large number of deaths, became a serious source of concern of the Soviet government.

There were work norms also for the horses. Satō (1986: 134; 138) drew two pictures *Norm also for the horse* and *Transport of logs: The horse too has to fulfil the norm*. The horse's daily fodder ration was curtailed, if the norm was not reached. In their desperation for food the prisoners also ate horse fodder. Satō narrates the story *Friend* about the horse man in silent conversation with his horse. The horse tells its driver, who has become his friend, that it knows full well how it is being cheated of its fodder, warning that a horse too cannot live on hay and straw alone.

The picture *Horsepower* (see picture 6) is commented by Satō (1979: 144) as follows: "First winter in the Soviet Union. Transport of logs. Horses of the Kwantung Army [i.e. former Japanese occupation forces in Manchuria] were used extensively. Although the local horses were stronger, our horses could meet the norm, but as the months passed, they dropped in number. With freezing temperatures of minus 30–40°, no horse could make it for long. Because they were being treated cruelly and not given sufficient oats, they were too weak to work properly. Having become shaky and lost weight to the extent of being little more than a mere skeleton, this horse could not manage to trail a heavy load of logs any further in the middle of the woods. It was a terrible sight. As soon as we had taken off the harness and released it from the sledge, the horse fell to the ground and stared at us reproachfully. Patting it encouragingly and feeding it a B ration we tried to get it moving, but to no avail. We unfloaded the logs, intending to return with the empty sleigh. At that moment the horse galloped off at full speed to the stable some two kilometres away. Some horses were in such an appalling state that we shed tears."

Work continued seven days a week, holidays were few. A typical daily schedule was: Morning roll 05.00 hrs, breakfast 06.30, march to the job site and work 07.00–14.00, lunch break 14.00, work and march back to the quarters 14.30–19.30, dinner 19.30. Free time had to be used to repair clothing and shoes, vital for survival, particularly in winter. There was almost no repair material available. Needles, thread and other items had to be traded in, e.g. against bread. After a long day of hard work the POW were exhausted. In spite of the adverse circumstances, some diversion was possible, depending on the initiative and skill of the prisoners and the attitude of the camp commanders. Music and theatre groups were founded, sport, e.g. Sumo, was permitted, in some places tournaments with POW of other nations, sometimes even with the local population, were arranged.

Takeuchi (1993: 82; see picture 7) depicts a 1 May sports event with a humorous undertone typical of his sober style: “Long – high – triple jump and hurdles, the victory of the tall foreigners [i.e. POW of other nations] was overwhelming. They too had been kept in captivity for three to four years. Half-dressed, their protruding bones were clearly visible. Another round began. This small, rotund Japanese fellow seems to be slipping through between the legs of the tall, slim foreigners. They look bewildered, they do not move as fast as one would expect. It was impossible to ascertain who had won.” This is an indirect acknowledgment that the others did not want to overtake the small Japanese fellow POW.

Correspondence with the families

Correspondence with their families was first restricted to a post card with a maximum 25 words. In many cases it was well over one year until families got the first news. All correspondence, limited to about two to four letters a year, was subject to strict censure. In 1947 about 40,000 letters were withheld by the censors without telling the POW. One can imagine the distress of both the family waiting for news and the prisoner’s disappointment on not getting a reply to his letter.

Communist indoctrination

In March 1946 the Soviets launched an intensive communist indoctrination campaign. On their return to Japan the POW should act as propagandists for the Japanese Communist Party. To this purpose young POW were recruited and trained as activists. Those showing eagerness were rewarded with privileges like better and more food, suitable clothing, easier jobs and promises for an early return to Japan. Anti-fascist cells were formed with the task of propagating the communist ideology. This, together with the Soviet system of fostering mutual distrust and pressure to denounce their comrades, led to

serious rifts in the social structure of camp society. Those opposed to the indoctrination were fiercely attacked at mass meetings. Satō (1986: 171; see picture 8) sketched such a meeting, commenting it as follows: "What a disgusting spectacle. The accused, unable to defend themselves, were ridiculed, this was no face-to-face confrontation. The men were dragged onto a stage and harassed to confess themselves unreservedly guilty. The anti-fascist officer and the anti-fascist cells heated up the scene. Each of the accused was attacked and ruthlessly insulted. Everybody had to participate. In order to heighten the effect everything was grossly exaggerated. Those who were to be converted into true democrats were forced to sing the revolution hymn. Debating circles were set up; self-incrimination and mutual criticism were imposed. This struggling stirred up new hatred, it all amounted to finishing off and to destruction. In the democracy group in Nakhodka [port east of Vladivostok, where the POW boarded the ships back to Japan], however, there were people who abstained from criticism and created a good atmosphere, but if one was approached in an over-friendly way, referring to an old friendship, a feeling of danger immediately cropped up. [...]"

Another tool of indoctrination was a Japanese newspaper, edited by Japanese POW. Being short of books and in the absence of any news, the newspaper was greeted with joy, but subsequently rejected by many, prominent amongst them officers, who were the toughest opponents of the indoctrination campaign. The newspaper's contents were an enthusiastic praise of the Soviet Union and its great leader Joseph Stalin, acid criticism of the former and present Japanese governments and the USA, vindicating the abolition of the Tennō system and the institution of a socialist society in Japan on the basis of the Soviet system.

Health care

Health care was most critical in the first winter 1945/1946, when quarters for the POW were either not ready, requiring e.g. the use of tents even in severe winter, or were inadequate and offered little shelter, many were vermin-infested. Upon return from a day's heavy work no spare garments were available, the POW could not wash themselves; the toilets were in the open. Conditions improved gradually as from 1947, the POW themselves constructed steam baths.

Health was in danger for many reasons: Lack of, and unbalanced food, accidents at work, climate, unsuitable clothing, hygiene, poor medical care, mental distress etc. Accidents were largely the consequence of lack of experience of the POW allocated to jobs they had never done before. Felling trees and other forestry work, mining and agriculture were particularly dangerous. Training for these jobs was neglected by the Soviets; they were

equally careless about safety measures. Consequences of illness, poor physical condition and accidents were a high death rate and a poor fulfilment of the work norms.

After the tremendous losses and sufferings of the war, the Soviet Union was short, in some areas even totally, of doctors, medical staff, medicines, medical instruments, dressing material, disinfectants, antiseptics, antibiotics, vitamins and hospitals. The material the Japanese Army surgeons had brought with them into captivity was seized, they were left with the task of helping their fellow POW empty-handed. Only very serious accidents and illnesses were considered a reason for exemption from work. The Japanese Army surgeons and medical staff acted under strict supervision by the Soviets. Many remote camps had no medical staff at all; the next hospital was too far away to take the patients there. The situation improved slowly in major camp areas, but in remote areas it continued to be very poor. Medical checks are described as routine matters, the emphasis not being attention to the physical and mental shape of the prisoner, but to declare him fit for work; the doctors too had their norms. There are a number of testimonies that many Soviet doctors and medical staff, in spite of their limitations, did whatever they could to help.

Takeuchi (1993: 71; see picture 9) dedicates his drawing, entitled *The tender doctor*, to Zaru and portrays her loving care with the following words: "Compared with the tall doctor Smolenskova, doctor Zaru was conspicuous by her small stature and broad hips. On the other hand she had a youthful, fresh, innocent and honest face. Of all the Soviet army doctors she made by far the best impression. When the two doctors were walking side by side, nobody could help smiling. Doctor Zaru was in charge of the nursing service. When a patient got into a dangerous state, she took care of him personally. 'He is cold, we must warm him up', with such words she gently scolded the nurses. If all efforts were in vain, she said to the patient 'Whatever you would like to eat, I will get it for you' and she brought things which none of us had ever received: Food of the best quality, tasty chicken, veal, eggs and sweets. This kind of behaviour deeply moved her subordinates."

Mortality rate

The mortality rate was highest in the first winter 1945/1946: 10%. It fell to 7% in 1946/1947, 3.7% in 1947/1948 and to 2% in 1948/1949. According to Kusnecov (1997: 90) 30% of the total number of deaths of 61,538 occurred in the forestry, 23.2% in mining and 15.1% in agriculture. In many cases the cause of death was not ascertained, entries in death certificates were very often anything from inaccurate to totally wrong. The first winter in the Soviet Union took the highest death toll, which may be one reason

why pictures of that period are gloomy, depressing. One POW told the author that heavy smoking additionally weakened the body and, in his opinion, was a reason for many deaths. He attributes his own survival to total abstinence.

It was not until after Perestroika that (now) Russia finally provided Japan with a fairly reliable figure of POW who had died in captivity. Kusnecov (1997: 32; 169/170) gives examples of how unreliable the Soviet information to the Japanese government had been. The figures provided were dressed up for political reasons, even after Stalin's death. For years the number of dead was alleged to be 3957, then it was stated that by 1 January 1949, 34,000 graves in 340 cemeteries had been counted, while in February 1959 the figure was 15,147 graves in 270 cemeteries. One reason for the differing figures are the different sources: Ministry of War, Ministry of the Interior and KGB, all of which seem to have recorded different figures. Some historians estimate the death toll to be well over 100,000. On the basis of his own enquiries and those of other historians Kusnecov arrives at the figure of 62,068, which is consistent with the Japanese estimates of approx. 60,000.

Comradeship

Comments about the relationship between rank and file are rather rare. Is this due to the Japanese reluctance to speak out? Clear-cut comments are given in connection with tensions arising from communist indoctrination and the hot issue of fair and equal distribution of the daily food rations. Comradeship played an important role, it was vital for survival. The Japanese lived in separate quarters, under the command of their officers who enforced a strict discipline. Moving examples of comradeship are wakes and farewells at the graves. Death, far from home, meant that the family members were unable to perform the funeral rites at the grave, a source of major concern. The comrades held the wakes and performed the rites. During the first winter 1945/1946, however, they were hardly in a position to do so, their frame of mind and their exhaustion prevented them. Satō (1979: 211; see picture 10) describes his picture *Wake* as follows: "In order to console the soul of our departed comrade we called a soldier with a Buddhist education to read the Sutras. Small strips of white birch bark were used as joss sticks; thin pieces of black bread were the offerings. Black smoke rose from the joss sticks for the repose of the departed, rising up and falling down unto the shoulders of the comrades. The wake brought some peace of mind onto the camp, but in the first months in the Soviet Union our feelings were in no frame of mind for such like. The departed was kept in the camp for a while. When we had left for work, the guards fetched the body, carried it to the cemetery on a sleigh and buried it immediately; there were no funeral rites. Listening now

to the Sutra of the Great Enlightenment I think of my comrades killed in action against the Soviets and those who perished in the infernal Siberian winter, the smoke of the joss stick turns into the will-o'-the-wisp of the departed. His soul is angry because he has to rest in foreign soil, far from his home, the soul wanders about restlessly."

With the death of Stalin and the subsequent closing down of a large number of camps, also many cemeteries connected to them were no longer maintained. Nature, building and farming activities wiped them out. This is a source of concern to family members and POW veterans wishing to visit the graves of their beloved ones and comrades, to perform the memorial rites, indispensable for the repose of the departed.

Homesickness

Homesickness and the hope for an early return to Japan were inexhaustible themes of discussion. The mother was the symbol of homesickness. Nobody was given any hint as to when he might be repatriated, and even when word was given about the imminent return, activists could crush hope at the last minute for insignificant reasons or due to denunciations. Misleading information was spread by the Soviets about why repatriation was taking so long, e.g. it was stated that the Japanese government was not bothering about providing the repatriation ships.

4. Conclusion

The reports are impressive by the almost total absence of hatred, they even carry a certain dignity. This may be due to time having mitigated the once strong feelings, but understandably expressions of deep sorrow and disappointment are frequent. The capacity to endure sufferings, discipline, an eye for the plight of others, gratitude for the tokens of sympathy by Soviet citizens and an eye for nature are remarkable features of pictures and texts. The POW became aware of the credibility gap between Soviet propaganda and reality. Often enough they discovered that their camp commanders and guards were victims too and that their brutality was the result of their own sufferings. The reports also provide impressive examples of how people grow, mentally, under extreme circumstances. Many POW discovered and developed skills they had been unaware of, and each and everyone quickly understood how important even the most trifling things can be. An overall clear picture of the vicissitudes is conveyed, but there are aspects about which one would wish to learn more, e.g. the relationship between rank and file, problems of human relations in tight quarters, under the pressure of

norms, hunger, illness and mental stress. A statement one would certainly not expect is that captivity also had positive aspects.

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