

After the War:
An American in the Ruins of Japan

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This is the story of a special time and place and some unusual men and one woman : The time was the end of World War II and the place was Sugamo Prison in Tokyo, Japan. Sugamo Prison housed several hundred former members of the Imperial Army, some on trial for war crimes, some awaiting trial and others were serving sentences. Some had been accused of battlefield atrocities but the accusations against a larger number had been for crimes in Prisoner of War camps where they had served either as guards, commandants or doctors. In addition, there was a special group, twenty-one "Class A" prisoners, the former leaders of Japan. They were the defendants in a long and excruciatingly detailed trial, new in the history of jurisprudence, charged with conspiracy to wage aggressive war and commit crimes against humanity. This trial, and its counterpart in the Nuremburg trial of the former leaders of Germany, were viewed by many as the most important trial in history that, it was hoped, would extend international law to ban war itself. For others it was simply the old story of a trial of the conquered by their conquerers. For all it as a topic of intense interest.

At the time I was twenty-five years old and a doctor, a Medical Officer in the Army of Occupation. One day there was a call for a Medical Officer at Sugamo. I volunteered and was soon walking in the large 1930s - modern box of a prison which, incredibly, had escaped the total destruction of the neighborhood in which it stood.

The book is a twice told tale -- first by a young man, immersed in the events as they were taking place, an account of the men, and one women, and how they lived in the devastation of their country. I realized at the time that these were extraordinary circumstances and I tried to describe this special time and place located at a hinge of history. It was at the end of a long-

standing national dedication to conquest and war and at the beginning of an unprecedented attempt to judge a nation and to create a new structure of justice. It seemed that the least I could do would be to attempt to memorialize all that was happening. But my ambitions went beyond merely being a witness to history. For the trial provided an account of a leadership and its decisions for war that, as in the Nuremberg trial in Germany, had never before been available. Service at Sugamo would make it possible for me to know these leaders on a personal basis and to talk with them about their actions that were being displayed on the broad screen of the trial.

The idea grew in my mind that these unusual resources might make it possible to understand how these men decided on war. And, grandly, how we might learn to prevent war.

The idea was not totally Quixotic: at the time there was a popular view that war was the result of the psychopathology of individual leaders. Hitler provided a dramatic example. And if individual psychopathology could cause wars, individual psychotherapy might be able to prevent them. So I set about to interview these men, seeking in their public lives, revealed in the trial and in their private lives revealed in our discussions, how they made the decision for war. And always I hoped that this search might help us to prevent war.

The search was not successful. There was little in the lives of the men at Sugamo to suggest that they had controlled the events of their time in a way that, for example, Hitler may have done. The conservative, consensus-oriented culture of Japan made this possibility, uncertain in Germany, even more remote. And what psychopathology I unearthed bore only tangentially upon issues of war and peace. I ended my search with the humbling conclusion that, given the choices that these men had faced, I would not have chosen differently. And I put the manuscript away.

I put the manuscript away but I have lived with this story for fifty years. This first account was a young man's story, naive, uncritical, reflecting the hubris of someone who thought that he might learn how to prevent war. Over the years I came to see the story from another perspective, that of an older man, a psychiatrist who has reflected on what the younger man told him. The older attempt at an objective account is now mixed with reflection about the experience of an American in the ruins of Japan. This twice-told tale is the story of these objective accounts and of this experience.

The book begins with an account of Takeshi Tohei, an epitome of the young officers who had led the Japanese Army during the war, with dedication, courage and cruelty. Shortly after his arrival at Sugamo he attempted ritual suicide, to "assume the responsibility" for the deaths of men under his command. I describe my attempts to enlist the aid of another prisoner, a senior statesman, in dissuading Tohei from his course and, failing that, of my first, desultory attempt at psychotherapy. Despite my best efforts, Tohei's drive towards ritual suicide turned into the suicidal behavior of a psychotic depression.

The second chapter describes the man who tried to help me carry out this psychotherapy with Tohei. Before serving as interpreter in this effort he had served as interpreter for General Homma who had commanded the Japanese Army in the Philippines.

The third chapter describes the senior statesman who had tried to help Tohei – Kiichiro Hiranuma. This venerable 84 year old man had spent his life in the criminal justice system. As a young man he introduced fingerprinting into Japanese police work, as an older man he served as Prime Minister. He also founded and led one of the early, very conservative anti-communist organizations that paved the way for later extremist groups. Hiranuma was the first person I met

who had studied Zen Buddhism, and he tried to teach me about it across enormous social and linguistic gaps.

The fourth chapter is concerned with a German prisoner, Graf Duerckheim, who had been a Professor of Psychology at the University of Kiel when was appointed by Hitler as Special Envoy to Great Britain. He spent three years trying unsuccessfully to persuade influential British circles of the benign intent of the Third Reich. He failed and was recalled to Germany, where one his special attractions as Envoy, his Jewish wife, faced mortal danger. His friend the Foreign Minister, von Ribbentrop, saved her by sending the couple "as far away as possible" -- to Japan. There Duerckheim studied Zen Buddhism and eventually became a prominent Christian mystic. He, too, taught me about Buddhism and our discussion of his choice of a career in psychology helped me to decide on a career in psychiatry.

The fifth, short chapter is an adventure story of another German, von Have. He told me wonderful tales of escapes from a British internment camp in India, together with Heimrich Harrer. After their escape, Harrer went to Tibet which he described in a book about this seven years there. Von Have went to Burma and then to Japan..

Chapter six, describes a hanging at Sugamo. It sets the stage for a chapter which deals with Hideki Tojo, the Japanese wartime Prime Minister who ended on the gallows.

Chapter seven describes the stern, humorless Tojo, who led Japan to war and something about how he did it. He described, perhaps for the first time, the circumstances surrounding his failed suicide attempt and, in a curious encounter, pleaded with me to recognize the purity of his motives.

Chapter eight, "Discipline", describes a dinner party in which the host, a grandson of the

founder of Japan's first private, prestigious university, Keio, told us how he had been able to stay true to his family tradition during 15 years of military rule .

Chapter nine deals with Daisetz Suzuki the man who, more than any other, was instrumental in the spread of Buddhism to the West. Over a period of nearly 20 years after Sugamo, I saw his benign influence extend over a vast expanse of intellectual life and watched the evolution, even in old age, of his understanding of Zen Buddhism.

The book ends with a chapter about the person who most deeply affected me in Japan, a woman. She taught me about the beautiful, long-suffering people who comprise half of the people of Japan.