Japanese Reflections on World War II and the American Occupation
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The Occupation Takes Hold

Censorship and a New Order

As the Americans moved into Oita Prefecture, censorship of the media continued apace. The only change, according to journalists Shunsaku Nanri and Yasuo Tanaka, was merely a transfer of censorship from one military power to another. During the war the Japanese Army censors reviewed the newspapers each day to approve copy. The Americans did the same. Postwar censorship covered not only newspapers, but also magazines and books, some of which never saw the light of day. After the war, journalists found certain stories off limits, especially those covering questionable activities of American military personnel.

The Japanese “never knew if the Americans committed any crimes or had any misconduct, because they were the occupiers, and negative stuff about them was not reported.” Journalist Tanaka recalls that he played it safe and “never wrote anything about the lives of the Occupation forces.” Reporter Nanri, on the other hand, found a way around this restriction. “We couldn’t write about the American soldiers directly, so if I found out one of them did something illegal, or bad in any way, I wrote about a ‘tall man.’ Everyone could guess who this was. If they did something good, however, we could write about that. Other than that I wasn’t censored much.”

The local press, under American control, instructed citizens on Occupation policies and occasionally inserted articles highlighting the ceremonial activities citizens were expected to attend. Two articles from the Oita Godo Press, both from June 1946, reflect such stories. The first, from June 16, dealt with Japanese ownership of American goods.

The residents of Oita Prefecture are requested to comply with the following orders issued by Oita District Occupation Headquarters, on October 15: All Japanese shall be prohibited from owning any goods formerly possessed by the U.S. Occupation Army. Those who own such goods shall bring them to the nearest police station by the end of this month. Those who adhere to the orders shall not be punished. Failure to comply shall result in serious consequences. Additionally, Japanese must not sell food

1 Interview with Sadayoshi Yutani.
and drinks to the Occupation Army personnel. All residents of Oita Prefecture should respect these orders.²

The cause for this admonition was not just a concern that citizens were stealing American goods. It was aimed at Japanese who dealt in a newly flourishing black market encouraged by some American troops. Toyoji Koya, a former police officer in Beppu assigned to enforce this order, explains the problem.

For example, the soldiers of the Occupation forces sold blankets, food, and clothing on the black market. Due to a severe shortage of adequate clothing, buyers used the U.S. military blankets to make pants to wear. However, even if the blankets were dipped into different colors of dye, you couldn't hide what they were. Cigarettes and soap were also at a premium and found eager buyers. The soldiers also sold medical supplies on the black market, items such as bandages, penicillin, and gauze. During the Korean War, the American soldiers brought guns back from the war and sold them to local criminal gangs, and crime increased enormously after the war. We had to deal with these problems and were on constant alert. When we caught American G.I.s engaging in these illegal activities, we'd question them, hand them over to the Occupation forces, and the American officers took care of it. The soldiers did anything for money.³

An article from June 30 under the headline “Violence against Occupation Army Shall Result in Severe Punishment” reads, “On June 29, Oita and Miyazaki District U.S. Occupation Headquarters issued a warning to all Japanese, stating that those who act with any form of violence against U.S. Army soldiers will be severely punished. At the same time, U.S. authorities will properly punish U.S. Army personnel who act violently.”⁴

There were the occasional thefts of watches, cameras, and money from the soldiers, as well as fights between Americans and locals. In some cases when the soldier was the instigator, he might be arrested by the military police, but never had to face justice in a Japanese court. In one case documented in a letter from camp headquarters, a sentry on duty at the military camp shot at a local citizen whom he thought was acting suspiciously in front of the camp. The investigation into this matter determined that the sentry had broken

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camp regulations and would be reprimanded. The following contains part of a letter written to Beppu authorities from the camp commander to a local official and shows not only the commitment to address the incident, but also the need to maintain good relations with the community:

I desire to express my regret to Mr. Okamoto and to the people of Beppu for this unfortunate incident. Appropriate action is being taken with the sentry involved. I am taking steps to prevent future unpleasant incidents such as this by insuring that my sentries will not discharge or fire their weapons from locations outside the boundaries of the camp, and also they will walk their post within the boundaries of the camp. In addition, flood lights will be installed at the place of the incident so as to allow the Japanese people to utilize this road without fear.5

This need to foster trusting relations with the community went beyond polite letters and correct protocol in communication. It also invited the populace to participate in American holidays and festivities. One of the first such occasions was during the 1946 celebration of American independence. The news story bears the headline, “Celebration March in Beppu: For the Brilliant War Record of Oita and Miyazaki District Occupation Army,” a lead that surely had no trouble passing the censor. It reads:

The Oita and Miyazaki District U.S. Occupation Army will organize a Military Celebration March on America’s Independence Day. The Headquarters’ declaration states that on July 4, the 19th Regiment of the U.S. infantry will march into Beppu City to celebrate the 170th U.S. Independence Day. It is quite significant for us to recognize this regiment with a lengthy history and brilliant war records as one of the Occupation forces. The celebration march will start from Higashi-Beppu station at 11:00 a.m. and go through the autoway on Kaigan Street, then turn left at Ekimae Street, proceeding to Beppu station. There they will hear speeches from their commanders. Colonel Charles P. Lynch, commander of the regiment, encourages Beppu and Oita citizens to observe the celebration.6

This parade marked a turning point in the Occupation of Oita, as the 19th Infantry Regiment had arrived in Oita City in May, relieving the 6th Marine Regiment of responsibility for that area. The 19th would eventually

5 Beppu City Library Archives, title and date not shown.
move from temporary quarters in Oita into what its regimental historian described in 1949 as “a beautiful new and modern post located in Beppu. This post was appropriately named ‘Camp Chickamauga’ and is now the home of the 19th Infantry Regiment.”

The official move occurred in December 1946. This regiment would stay in Beppu for much of the Occupation, which ended on April 28, 1952. They would be followed over the next several years by other units to close out the Occupation, and then as a training base for the Korean conflict. For the citizens of Oita Prefecture, especially those in Beppu, the names and insignias of the Occupation units blended together, as their presence served as one continuous, seamless period while they tried to get their country back on its feet.

**Baseball and Chocolate**

Memories of the children during that period reflect a fascination with the American soldiers. Yoshio Ninomiya, a young teenager in Usa at the time, remembers them as “very handsome. I remember they had long legs and would give us snacks. They were very kind.” Takafumi Yoshimura, also from Usa, watched but never talked to the Americans. He thought they were nice, but on one occasion he and his friends had to reconsider this, if only briefly. Their concern was for one of the young women in Usa. “There was a bride on the street when an American jeep drove up and the soldier went to talk to her. He then put her in the jeep and drove away. Of course we worried what would happen to her. But later we found out that this American was just fascinated by how the bride was dressed in her formal kimono and how she looked, because he had never seen a Japanese bride before. Then, after 20 minutes, he brought her back with lots of wedding gifts.”

Hidekatsu Nakano remembers the first time he saw the Americans. “These guys were very big, very different from us, and I was really curious about them. Some of them stayed on the second floor of a traditional Japanese inn, and when they came to the windows they’d tossed chocolates to us. I never harbored any anger toward them, even though we lost the war.”

Stories like this dominate the memories of those who were children during the Occupation. Toyoki Goto, who was fourteen at the time, remembers

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7 The 19th Infantry Regiment, 1861-1949, published on September 20, 1949, at Camp Chickamauga, Beppu, Kyushu, Japan. The name of the camp comes from the Battle of Chickamauga, which took place during the American Civil War and in which the 19th Infantry Division participated and distinguished itself.
that “when the Americans came in their jeeps and started giving us gum, that’s when it really sunk in that we had lost the war. Seeing them for the first time on our land was when it hit me.” Eiji Ono, only six years old at the time, still has vivid memories of the American ships docking in Beppu Bay and of watching the soldiers march up Nagarekawa street to the newly constructed Camp Chickamauga.

I was a kid, so I wasn’t particularly scared. They were different colors, with lots of black soldiers, and this really surprised me. My parents never told me to stay away from them, as they were friendly, always giving us chocolate and playing with us. But we were scared of the MPs. They walked around with guns and controlled the soldiers. Sometimes they even shot their own men, I was told. When the soldiers got drunk and went crazy, the MPs would take care of the situation.

When it was clear that the streets would be safe and that the American soldiers could be trusted, some playful interaction began. There was also a fixation on learning a few words of English. Tetsuo Tsukuda recalls the day he tried to use his newfound English on the soldiers. “One day, some soldiers stopped their jeep to speak to me. I was very nervous and had no idea what they said. I could think of only one sentence, so I said, ‘OK, please go straight on, cross the bridge and you will see another bridge. That’s it.’ They said OK and went off, but that was a sentence I memorized from my textbook, and I didn’t really know what it meant. So I ran away as fast as I could. That was my first English conversation.”

Picking up English took place in several locations, as did different ways of taking advantage of American wastefulness. Tadashi Ono, for example, was happy when baseball returned to the sports ground for multiple reasons. “Once I was playing baseball near the American base in Beppu and the soldiers were also there but didn’t have enough players for their game, so they invited me to play with them. I had already memorized, ‘Please give me some chocolate and chewing gum.’ Now I learned ‘Come on,’ which they said all the time during the game. It was after the games that we had an extra treat. The American soldiers would leave the butts of their cigarettes on the field after playing, so we picked them up and smoked them. That’s how I started smoking, and I haven’t stopped since.”

Baseball played a key role in establishing communication between the Americans and Japanese youth. In the town of Saiki, Kou Takeda had such an experience.
Less than a month after the war was over, a group of American soldiers came to our school on a friendship visit. It was the first time I saw Americans. They started to play baseball on our sports field at the school, and it was the first time I saw a new type of baseball glove. They used their equipment to flatten the ground, so we could play better. A month later, we had a friendship game between the students and the soldiers, and I remember thinking, “Why did we have a war with these people?” The American troops were nice. Compared with Japanese soldiers, who were arrogant and looked down on people, the Americans were friendly and relaxed.

Aside from the gum and chocolates, the most memorable image of Americans for the children was the jeep. They were everywhere, and most of the children were taken with them. Kou Takeda recalled a friend of his “was so enamored of the jeep that he begged for a chance to ride in it. After that, he said he would one day buy his own, which he did decades after the war was over.

Sadayoshi Yutani, the young boy shot at by a Grumman while fishing, returned from the countryside to Oita City after the war ended. He remembers seeing American soldiers early on:

My mother used to take me to the hot springs in Beppu. I kept looking at the Americans because they looked very different from the Japanese. My mother warned me not to stare at them, because if I did, they’d eat me. But of course, people soon relaxed around the Americans. After I started going to school, there was a camp between my home and school. I’d passed the camp every day. The American soldiers treated us nicely and offered us chewing gum. My friends and I were curious about the American families, so we’d climb the fence to look into the officers’ homes. We were really envious of their children. They dressed very well, and we were blown away by how many toys they had to play with. Sometimes the Americans used the old air fields to practice parachute jumping, and after they landed we’d run out to help them gather up the parachute. Then they’d give us more chewing gum.

The Americans Were So Wasteful

Some of the children who lived close to live fire combat training centers have strong impressions of those days, and describe the differences they
observed between the Japanese and American soldiers. Takeyoshi Kajiwara, a primary school student at the end of the war, says:

The American soldiers stationed in Beppu would practice at the firing range next to my house. I always went there to watch and talk to the soldiers. Well, not really talk, just make gestures. When they practiced rifle shooting, they’d get the bullets out of an ammo box. I wanted one of those cases because it was big, made of metal and very sturdy. In my family, we raised ducks and chickens, and we could use it as water feed. Also, the ammo box and bullet cartridges were quite precious for us because we could make money by selling the metal shells to rubbish shops. The Americans were so wasteful. After each practice, they just left the empty boxes and cartridges behind without cleaning them up. Once I grabbed one of the ammo boxes and ran away with it to use for my ducks. Sometimes I'd take eggs to the soldiers. That made them happy and they'd give me chocolate and chewing gum. My father was happy, too, because he enjoyed chewing gum as much as I did.

Hideo Sonoda grew up adjacent to the firing range of the Oita 47th Regiment, which converted to an American base after the war. The difference between the Japanese and American soldier left a strong impression on him:

The American soldiers were very different from Japanese soldiers. The Japanese soldiers were serious and disciplined. The Americans were more casual and laid back. The Japanese would take very careful aim at the target and fire one shot. The Americans would see the target and open fire in rapid bursts with their machine guns. When the Japanese practiced shooting, they’d count the empty shells to the number of targets hit. The ratio had to be one to one. That was how serious Japanese were in taking care of their possessions. But the Americans would shoot randomly and not care about the number of shells. Also, while the shooting was going on, the Japanese soldiers would stand at attention, perfectly straight guarding the roads. The Americans, on the other hand, just slouched around chewing gum.

While the acceptance of the American soldiers as friendly occupiers was shared by many, not everyone was so enamored. Even in the same family, attitudes varied. Takeyoshi Kajiwara comments, “My mother’s younger brother was killed by the Americans when he was aboard an oil tanker headed for Okinawa. We don’t hold grudge against the Americans for that.
But my father-in-law was different. He’d been a professional soldier and never forgave the Americans for defeating Japan. After the war he said that the U.S. was a dangerous enemy and could not be trusted. He would never use American English and even to this day, at 94 years old, he won’t use terms such as Occupation, chewing gum, ice cream, and so on. Japanese militarism had grown deep roots in his head.”

Even some children resented the Americans. Yonosuke Yanase and Umon Takamatsu were two of these. Mr. Yanase remembers:

My family lived in Beppu, and I could speak some English. Occasionally I’d be called on to serve as an interpreter for the Occupation soldiers. But I didn’t care much for them, so I tried to avoid them as much as I could. I never asked for or received anything from them. I didn’t want their handouts, and this was my way of practicing the way of Bushido. I broke this principle once, however, when I took a cigarette from one of the soldiers. “Kool” it was, really good and I got addicted to it. But I used to hate the Americans because we lost.

Umon Takamatsu, following the spirit of discipline taught to him by her mother, recalls:

Some Americans liked to play with kids and offer them gum and chocolates. And kids would chase after them, begging for these things. I never did and would never do that because I felt strongly “Why are we supposed to receive this?” I didn’t want anything from an enemy. Thinking from the Bushido perspective, there is a phrase that says the samurai should never take anything from someone else, even if he is suffering and starving. That’s how I was raised by my mother. I didn’t think it was a good thing that these other kids learned the idea that they could get things so easily. After all, it wasn’t like an organized volunteer effort to distribute food; they just enjoyed throwing the candies on the ground and watching the kids scramble to pick them up.