

A Study of POW Camps in Niigata Prefecture

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Abstract

この論文には、戦時中における捕虜の取り扱いについての制度と、その実態について書かれている。初めに基本的な概要として、その定義や歴史、条約など、国際的意味における捕虜を取り扱う。また幾つかの収容所の例を挙げながら、世界的に捕虜が、どのような境遇や生活をしていたのかを明らかにする。次に日本での捕虜の地位と収容所での実態、特に日本における収容所がどんな性格や特徴を持っていたのかを明らかにする。そして本稿のメインとなる新潟の収容所については全体の半分以上を使い、その特徴と実態を詳しく解明する。さらにここでは実際の歴史の当事者である、元捕虜や収容所職員のインタビューを、参考文献と研究活動の中から要約して書き、歴史の断片を読み解く。

その後私見を交えながら、このような事態のあった地域として、人々がどのような考えを持ち、どのように考えるべきかを考察する。それによってこの論文を通じ、戦争捕虜についての広い意味での見解と世界的な注目度の高さ、歴史研究の重要性が改めて認識されるであろう。

Introduction

During times of war, there are often discussions about the treatment of Prisoners of War (POWs). This is one of the most important issues in modern warfare. For example, in the recent war with America and Iraq, American soldiers received international condemnation for the psychological torture and physical mistreatment of Iraqis held in military prisons. What is disturbing is that the third Geneva Convention, which was reconvened and concluded in 1949, and which the United States signed, provides detailed prescriptions for the treatment of POWs. A summary of the Geneva Convention is that “POWs in a war have the right to receive generous and humanitarian treatment” (Fujita 2003, p.23).

Because of the recent violations of America and other countries of the Geneva Convention, it seems appropriate to reconsider the issues of war and captivity. Especially since Japan is presently a willing ally in America’s so-called “War against Terror”, I feel that this thesis might raise the awareness of other younger Japanese about what took place in our own backyard (Niigata) during our last great war. By understanding the crimes and failures of the past, it is hoped that our generation will avoid making similar mistakes in the future.

This thesis will focus first on some of the general terms and concepts surrounding POWs both from Western and Japanese points-of-view. Japan’s situation and decision for using POWs in forced labor camps during World War Two will be discussed, with special attention on the treatment and conditions of prisoners. The memories of POWs who were imprisoned in Niigata, as well as the memories of camp guards, will be considered. After focusing on the conditions of one POW camp in Niigata City, an overview of other POW camps in Niigata will be given. The

consequences of those deemed War Criminals by the victorious Allied Forces will be studied. How the weight of this history should affect the actions and decisions of future Japanese in Niigata and across the country will be discussed in the conclusion of this paper.

Historic Treatment of POWs in the West and in Japan

This section will outline a historic understanding of the concept of “POW”, and compare these meanings with the actual condition that took place in camps across Niigata. The development of the beliefs about how captured soldiers should be treated will be revealed.

First, however, it is important to define the term “POW”. POW, or Prisoner of War, is defined in this paper as people who captured by wartime enemies. No distinction is made in this definition between soldiers or civilians. Either soldiers or civilians can be taken prisoner by opposing forces, for reasons that both are often viewed as either active or potential agents of the enemy government. POWs can also refer to the capture of civilian, political or military leaders who have been deemed “war criminals” by the victors following the cessation of hostilities.

POWs as Slave Laborers

In earliest times throughout the world, prisoners of war were killed, tortured for entertainment or made into lifelong slaves. Starting from the Middle Ages in Europe, POWs were increasingly used as either hostages or slave laborers. Taking some prisoners alive was seen as an important tactic of war. Officers and nobility captured during a war were held for ransom. Lower-ranking soldiers, however, were often seen

as worthless, and while some were used as forced laborers, many didn't fare as well.

Changing Attitudes towards POWs in the West

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, warfare became increasingly advanced, and as larger armies were being mustered in European Wars, some countries began to draft laws that would define rules for conduct during wartime. The United States followed this trend by creating the Lieber Law in 1863 during its Civil War. What is significant about this law is that it has a number of articles concerning the treatment of POWs (Fujita 2003, p.19).

In terms of the creation of international laws to protect POWs, Henry Dunant contributed to this issue as the founder of The Red Cross. The first Geneva Convention concluded with an agreement among 12 mostly European countries in 1864. Other conventions in The Hague further defined laws designed to regulate the treatment of POWs in 1899 and again 1907. Although the main thrust of the treaty that was formed from these august meetings aimed at improving the conditions for injured combatants on the battlefield, the treaty also stipulated that wounded POWs, upon their capture, would be afforded the same treatment as any other in the enemy's hospital, or if they were found wounded upon the battlefield. While the treaty allowed for the possibility of POWs being imprisoned and required to work for enemy's government, it also stated that POWs would never become the personal property of the Enemy State. POWs were to be treated in a humane manner based upon common European standards of mercy and decency, which would perhaps be connected to the Judeo-Christian concept of loving one's enemy, and showing kindness to those who once intended to do harm.

Western Contradictions in the Treatment of POWs

Although these concepts were admirable in their intent, they were made far from the bloody and brutal battlefields of Europe. Governments agreed in principle to an ever-increasing list of rules for the treatment of POWs, but it was impossible to enforce these standards during a war. World War One was the first test case to see if these laws would hold, and it was quickly seen that the rules of common decency towards POWs were violated repeatedly by European Powers on both sides of the war.

In Germany, more than one million of POWs became slave laborers. Conditions were terrible. Often three people slept in one bunk for lack of space. POWs were pitted against each other, and competition between colored and Caucasian prisoners for limited POW Camp Resources was common. This was exacerbated by the fact that the German Government purposely kept decreasing the amount of food sent to POWs. After some time, some POWs survived only from receiving food that was sent by their families.

In retaliation for this behavior, the French government decreased the food for German POWs by half. Disease, especially typhoid fever, reached epidemic proportions, and patients increased by over one thousand in ten days. Many POWs died.

One problem that was even more serious was the abuse that POWs suffered as a result of victories or defeats on distant battlefields. POWs were often mistreated by guards if their army lost a major battle. Both the German and British military made POWs dig trenches on the battlefield and work as interns in medical stations (these stations were often attacked by their enemy). In effect, POWs were forced to be human shields. If they refused to cooperate, they were severely beaten or killed.

The Geneva Convention

Following the abuses of World War One, the second Geneva Convention in 1929 concluded with the call to prohibit the retaliatory abuse of POWs. Another decision was to make the treaty binding upon a country even if they chose to withdraw from it during a war. The treaty also called for the creation of neutral delegates who would be allowed free access to the POW camp, and who could speak to the POWs without any enemy observers. The result was that the treaty had far more influence in Europe during World War Two. The situation, however, was very different in Japan.

Historic Japanese Attitudes and Treatment of POWs

It is not a surprise to most people in the West to learn that Japan did not sign the Second Geneva Convention Treaty of 1929. The decision not to do so was connected not only to a fear of losing national sovereignty over internal military matters, but also because of the Japanese notion that POWs were cowards that were beneath contempt. And yet, these attitudes were relatively new when compared to how Japan treated its POWs during the late 19th and early 20th century.

In the late Meiji Era, Japan and Russia went to war over territorial disputes in what is now known as the Russo-Japanese War. Japan won this war, and took many hundreds of Russian soldiers as prisoners. However, the treatment of Russian POWs was very compassionate, surpassing the treatment of POWs in Europe at the time. This brought international praise for Japan, and fostered the image of Japanese as being honorable warriors. Later, during the short reign of Emperor Taisho, Japan sided with the United States and Britain during World War One. German POWs in small numbers were taken, as boats and submarines were either sunk or captured. Again,

the treatment of German POWs was similar to the treatment of the Russian POWs nearly twenty years earlier.

After World War One, the political climate in Japan changed. Emperor Taisho died, and less than three years after the ascension of Emperor Showa, the Japanese government visibly moved from a moderate, pro-Western stance to a right-wing nationalist position. The new regime placed pride in its military after its succession of victories against Russia, China and its suppression of Korea. To create greater solidarity among the Japanese people and the military elite, myths about the spiritual connection of the pure Japanese race to the Emperor, the mystic devotion of the Japanese warrior, as well as a fascist interpretation of ancient samurai codes of honor and unquestioned obedience were promulgated. To strengthen the resolve of the foot soldiers to fight their hardest, all soldiers were indoctrinated into believing that they were (in varying degrees of status) heirs to the samurai tradition. Honor and obedience to one's superiors were considered all-important, and to become a POW was a dishonor far worse than even a coward's death. It was better to die with honor in a suicide attack than to be taken prisoner.

By World War Two, this belief was fundamental to the success of the Japanese military. Military laws contained articles on the treatment of POWs, which were far harsher than for Japanese soldiers accused of a crime. The Geneva Convention was seen by the new elite as a threat to Japanese legal autonomy, and since the Japanese military culture focused upon death before dishonor, any humanitarian ethics espoused by the Geneva Convention were seen as weak or missing the point of why wars were waged. Moreover, during World War Two, lower-ranking guards in POW camps, many of whom were uneducated farmers from isolated rural areas, were kept in the

dark by their commanding officers about the existence of the Geneva Convention. They followed the example demonstrated by their commanders on how to treat prisoners, and were told that any order from their commander was the same as a command from the Emperor himself. All of these issues contributed to the reasons why the Japanese government in the beginning years of Emperor Showa did not agree to the Geneva Convention, and why incredible abuses took place against POWs in Japanese camps later during World War Two.

POW Camps in the Japanese Prefecture of Niigata

It is not possible in this paper to cover every aspect of the POW experience in Japan during World War Two. From my research, I believe that there were so many differences between how various nationalities were treated, and an enormous variety of experiences remembered by former POWs from different regions of Japan. To document all of this, even if it were possible, would fill several books. Although this paper will focus on POWs camps in Niigata Prefecture, even this topic is beyond the scope of this short paper. What I will attempt to do is to describe the Allied POW experience in general terms, focusing mainly on one camp in particular that was in Niigata City. This is not to diminish in any way the experience of Chinese POWs or Northern Chinese Slave Laborers from the former Japanese colony of Manchuria, or of Korean Slave Laborers. These people were also imprisoned and brutally abused in Niigata during the war.

The Reason for POW Camps in Niigata Prefecture

Niigata was the most important Japanese port city facing the Eurasian Continent. It

was more developed industrially and technologically than other cities in the region. However, as World War Two began, companies in Niigata suffered a severe labor shortage from their male workers being sent to fight abroad. Corporations in Niigata contacted the central government in Tokyo to investigate the possibility of using POWs as forced laborers. These companies already had strong connections with the government, so the plan was quickly approved, and Niigata was placed under the jurisdiction of the headquarters of the Tokyo Horyo Shuyojo (Tokyo POW Camps).

This organization sent POWs to different places throughout Japan to work in labor camps. In 1943, the first camp created in Niigata was called 4B (“B” stands for the Japanese word bunsho, meaning sub-camp)¹. Niigata Camp 4B was established in Naoetsu City. Other camps were soon established that year in Niigata, Nagaoka, Omi, and Kanose, anywhere where heavy industries were in operation (see Table 1).

This paper will focus mainly on Niigata Camp 5B, a place which has been well-documented by both Western and Japanese researchers.

¹ There were many distinctions in the types of POW camps that existed in Japan. In actuality, there were very few full-scale camps in Japan. Many, especially in the more rural areas, were called “sub-camps”. Below these sub-camps were also “hakken-sho”, literally as “dispatch camps”. The quality of life, difficulty of work and maltreatment of POWs often depended upon whether they were in one of these smaller, less-managed camps. For the purposes of simplicity, all of these facilities will be simply called “camps” in this paper.

Camp	Established	Location	Company	Type of Labor
3B	May 16, 1945	Nagaoka	Hokuetsu Denka	Carbide Production
3KB	May 16, 1945	Nagaoka	Nippon Tsu-un	Loading and Unloading Train Cargo
4B	Dec 7, 1942	Naoetsu	Nippon Stainless, Shinetsu Kagaku	Carbide Production, Ironworks, Loading Salt and other Chemicals for Train Transport
5B	Aug 20, 1943	Niigata	Niigata Kairiku Unso, Nippon Tsu-un, Niigata Tekko	Stevedore Work on Docks, Loading and Unloading Coal and other Cargo
13B	May 12, 1943	Omi	Omi Denka	Moving and Cracking Aggregates for Production
15B	Apr 1, 1944	Niigata	Niigata Tekko	Carbide Production, Engine Part Production and Ironworks
16B	Apr 15, 1944	Kanose	Showa Denko	Carbide Production and Coal Mining

Table 1 (Peace Bridge Committee, 1999, pg. 7).

Niigata 5B

Niigata Camp 5B was established in September 1943 by three companies, Nippon Tsu-un (NpT), Niigata Kairiku Unso (NKU) and Niigata Tekko (NgT). The first 300 POWs were a mixture of Americans captured in the Philippines, British and Canadians captured in Hong Kong, and Dutch sailors captured off the coast of Java (Cambon 1995).

This camp was moved to several locations during the war. The first location was actually a dormitory for NKU employees. The accommodations were not at all sufficient for 300 POWs. There was only one faucet and a few outhouses provided for them. They slept in one large, crowded room without any heat. Each person was limited to a small space on a straw mat for sleeping (about 85cm × 175cm). Food at this time, however, seems to have been sufficient, as none of the POW records

mention extreme hunger.

POWs lived at the first location until early December 1943. An additional 350 POWs were added to the camp from the Philippines, and the accommodations became even more overcrowded. Lice were rampant, and disease spread among the POWs. POWs were told that a new facility had been finished close to the port, near the present-day location of NKU. Around Christmastime, all of the POWs were marched to this location. However, when they arrived, they discovered that the buildings had not been completely finished. Windows did not have glass panes, and had to be closed with boards. Wartime rationing meant that nails were in short supply, and it appeared that too few had been used in the construction of the buildings. In places, the ceiling was also unfinished.

Life and Death in Niigata Camp 5B

Factors such as the climate, type of work, organizational culture of the camp, and a lack of surveillance from the Tokyo Headquarters due to distance (or a lack of concern), contributed to high numbers of casualties among the POWs. This section will look at these factors in greater detail, and get an idea of what life and death was like in a typical Japanese POW Camp.

Life in 5B

All of the reports from POWs found the life Niigata Camp 5B to be hard, monotonous and brutal. POWs were used as slave laborers in dirty and dangerous tasks. POWs were housed in the camp, where they were guarded by the military, but early in the morning after roll call, they were marched to various companies where they were then

guarded by company employees. POWs worked on docks unloading huge cars of coal, scrap iron, foodstuffs and machinery. Some who worked at the harbor of NpT engaged unloading cargo from ships. This could be anything from bombs, which weighed from 500 to 1000 kg, to bags of soybeans weighting at over 55 kg. Because food often passed through the harbor, these POWs could sometimes steal vegetables or rice, so apparently this was a popular work detail. In the warehouse near the harbor of NKU, POWs loaded coal into trams and pushed them to the warehouse. This was the worst work detail, and it was often the most dangerous. Many fell off the rail platforms, which were six meters above ground. Some POWs were injured, and others nearly died. Weather was also their enemy, and working outside in the winter was especially difficult. It was far more uncomfortable than the experience of POWs at Camp 15B, who could work inside the warm ironworks.

A workday was typically nine hours. Adding lunchtime and the time spent marching to and from the camp, and a workday was actually closer to eleven hours. Under the first commandant, Lt. Masato Yoshida, POWs were allowed two days a month for rest. Most spent their time washing their only change of clothing, which was often bloody from cuts and injuries from the work, or from beatings from the guards at the companies.

POWs who were judged by the camp medic to be too sick or injured to work were allowed to stay in a sick room. Among POWs, this was called a Death Room, because there was no medicine, and the food rations for the POWs in this room were cut in half. In those days, camp efficiency was judged upon the total percentage of POWs who were working. To increase their efficiency rating, the Japanese staff forced POWs to work even if they were suffering from disease or injury. As Lt.

Yoshida once told Maj. Bill Stewart, the POW's medical officer, POWs had been "sent here to work, and work they would, or die" (Cambon 1995, pg. 68).

Food

Food, or the lack of it, is the main thing that POWs remember about their experience in Niigata 5B. In the beginning, POWs were able to get enough food, and even at times they could even get some fish or make a soup from pig guts that were thrown out by the guards. But soon the amount of food was cut drastically due to shortages within Japan as it began to lose the war. POWs obsessed on the meager amount of food they received, which consisted mainly of some small amount of rice or soybeans, the tops of daikon (a Japanese radish), or some thin soup made from soybean paste. Sometimes they would get a change, such as snails taken from the mountains, or a blue gruel known as koryan. According to regulations, workers on the dock were to get about 700 g (1000 kcal) of food a day, and workers who were inside factories were to receive about 600 g (900 kcal) a day. In actuality, POWs received far less than this. Many resorted to trading food between each other within the camp as a form of currency, or to stealing food outside the camp.

POWs who were caught stealing were severely punished. Two POWs during the command of Lt. Yoshida were caught taking Red Cross Packages. These packages were meant for the POWs, but Yoshida had kept all of them for himself. When the POWs were discovered, Yoshida had the guards beat them for days, and then ordered that they be chained to the outside of the guardhouse in their underwear. As it was winter, both eventually died eventually from exposure.

Death in 5B

In Camp 5B, at least 86 POWs (about 10% of all POWs in this camp) died, though the number of casualties is much lower in Japanese history books (see Table 2). Most died in the first year, because they had come from tropical climates and did not receive sufficient winter clothing. Those who had to work outside on the docks were especially susceptible to pneumonia. Winter storms near the Niigata coast are famous for their fierce high winds. On January 1, 1944, a terrible storm caused one of the poorly-constructed buildings that housed sleeping POWs to collapse². At least eight POWs died that night, and many more were seriously injured. Soon afterwards, a large number of POWs were separated and sent to live in the in employees' dormitories of NgT. This group was designated as Niigata Camp 15B, and the POWs there worked mainly indoors making engine parts for patrol boats.

While severe and brutal beatings from both commandants and guards were common, executions were less frequent in POW Camps within Japan³. In Niigata 5B, there is one famous case of the execution of Private Frank Spears. This POW was thought to be insane by both Japanese guards and his fellow prisoners, because he exhibited bizarre behavior, and constantly tried to escape from the camp. He was always captured and brought back. Eventually, he was seen as a nuisance to the commandant at the time, Tetsutaro Kato, and he personally executed Spears. Although Kato tried to keep the execution a secret, word eventually got out, and he was later tried and

² Japanese historians insist that the weather was not a direct cause of the building's collapse. According to the records of the Niigata Metrological Observatory, a terrific blizzard with high winds did not occur on January 1 (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 26). They state that camp staff have admitted privately that the main cause for the accident was that lumber used for the POWs quarters had been misappropriated to finish the accounting offices of the camp.

³ The further a camp was from a central authority, the more likely it was for more murder and mayhem to take place. POWs in Japanese camps outside of Japan, especially those in Southeast Asia, were far more likely to be executed than POWs within Japan.

imprisoned for this act. Kato defended his actions by saying he was following orders. His viewpoint is represented in his famous book *Watashi wa Kai ni Naritai* (I Want to be a Clam, 1994).

Camp	Nationality	POWs	Casualties
3B	Indonesians and Dutch	198	2
3KB	American (19) and Dutch (80)	99	0
4B	Americans (338), British (90), Dutch (39), Australians (231)	698	60
5B	Americans (527), British (34), Dutch (18), Australians (1), Canadian (109), Norwegians (3)	692	40
13B	Americans (432), British (109), New Zealanders (1)	542	0
15B	Americans (160), British (41), Dutch (11), Australians (26), Canadians (82)	320	32
16B	Americans (50), British (152), Dutch (86)	288	3

Table 2 (From 「新潟県史 通史編 9 現代」 *Niigata Prefecture History Volume 9*, 1988, pg. 13).

It can be seen that the Japanese history books place the number of casualties much lower than other estimates. Also, the actual number of POWs in the camps is different depending upon the source.

Camp Organizational Culture

The life of POWs in Camp 5B was directly affected by the leadership style of the commandant. Guards followed his example to a great extent. The first commandant, Lt. Masato Yoshida, was remembered by Japanese guards as a hard man who was very militaristic. He spoke some English, and maintained a very strict regimen for POWs, though he himself often spent much of his time in his quarters in a Japanese house robe (*yukata*), and let the guards deal with POWs on a day-to-day basis. He is faulted for

incompetence and corruption, since he did not provide POWs with adequate clothing, housing or food in the first year, and because he stole the POWs Red Cross Packages in order to sell them on the black market. Because of this, the casualty rate of Niigata 5B became the highest in Japan. During the war, he was transferred to a military post in Fukushima. He was captured after the war, but he went insane and committed suicide in a mental hospital before he could go to trial.

The next commandant, Lt. Nemoto, was far more humane in his treatment of POWs and worked hard to improve conditions after Yoshida. The buildings, which had collapsed from the winter storms, were rebuilt in the spring. Heaters, bathing facilities, a kitchen and larger sickrooms were provided. Medical services improved slightly, and the requests of the POWs' Ranking Officer, Francis Fellows, were sometimes accommodated. POWs were allowed one day a week of rest, and food rations were increased. However, Nemoto was reputed to be something of a heavy drinker, and did not keep a tight rein on the guards. As a result, many beatings took place in the camp without his knowledge.

The next commandant, Tetsutaro Kato, was feared and hated by both guards and POWs alike. He was prone to beat both the guards and the POWs, and often threatened the POWs with his samurai sword. Guards began to mimic this behavior, and those who had swords also began to threaten POWs in the same way. Later on, Kato tried to convince the Japanese public that he had improved conditions in the camp, pointing to the fact that no POW died as a result of sickness during his tenure. In his book, he felt as if he had been misunderstood by the POWs, who he sought to care for in difficult circumstances. POWs remember a very different Kato than the one portrayed in his book.

Memories of 5B

This section will provide a general summary of the memories that some had about Niigata 5B. Oral histories are only one form of data, and these often conflict with other historical material. It is difficult to judge whether the memories are accurate, but by comparing various eyewitness accounts, it is possible perhaps to perceive historical reality from that which has been clouded by subjective emotions. The memories of both guards and POWs will be presented.

俵山 龍民 Ryumin Tawarayama (5B Guard)

Tawarayama worked as a guard at Niigata 5B from September 1943 to October 1944. His monthly income was about 62 yen. He remembers that the enlisted POWs were paid 10 sen a day (1/10yen), while officers received 3 yen. In addition to guarding POWs, he was also involved with procuring food, fuel and other supplies for the POWs. Four kilos of pork was sent to the camp every other day. The Japanese staff ate 1.5 kilos and the remainder of the pork was put in the food for the hundreds of POWs in the camp.

Tawarayama remembers once how in September 1944, they were able to buy a large load of green Asian pears that had been blown off trees from a typhoon. Because the pears were still very hard, they boiled them until they were soft enough for the POWs to eat. Another memory he has was of an experience when he and thirty POWs went to the nearby pine forest to gather firewood. The doctor of a nearby hospital saw them working, and he gave all of them some watermelon to eat.

When POWs died, he often read a Buddhist sutra for their souls. The bodies of POWs were cremated at the Sumida crematory. During his time at Niigata 5B,

Tawarayama recalls hearing that at least 27 POWs died when their bunk house collapsed in January 1944, and he personally remembered that at least 10 POWs died from malnutrition or other factors (including the execution of Frank Spears) (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 23).

庄司 永保 Nagayasu Shoji (5B Guard)

Shoji was a guard at the front gate from May 1945. He remembers the camp as about 2000 tsubo in size (1 tsubo is about 3.3 sq meters). Shoji said it would be easy to escape from the camp, because the surrounding fence was weak and wasn't high enough to keep the POWs inside. Only two men guarded the camp at nighttime. One would be at the gate; the other would watch the camp perimeter. Neither carried firearms. When he was later given the job of guarding the Commandant's Office, he became an acquaintance of both Lt. Kato and POW author Kenneth Cambon (Asahi Evening Edition, Aug 12, 1988). He often exchanged his cigarettes to barter for things from the POWs.

Shoji remembers his first Sunday at the camp. Earlier, the POWs had been allowed to make a jazz band in the camp square. Kato had only recently taken leadership of the camp. That Sunday, Kato returned to the camp when the jazz band was playing. As they were in a middle of a song, they either didn't notice Kato, or didn't acknowledge his return. According to protocol, POWs were required to bow to Kato when he returned to camp. Feeling slighted, he flew into a rage and began to beat the POWs. Kato's reputation among both POWs and guards began to suffer as a result of this incident, and the band never played again (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 28).

渡辺 外四男 Toshio Watanabe (5B Guard)

Watanabe became a guard at 5B's front gate when he was 20 years old. He was terrified by the sharp glint in Tetsutaro Kato's eyes, and will never forget his first curt words to him: "Don't fraternize with POWs." Watanabe remembers watching Kato punish one POW. A POW was ordered to stand at attention under the flaming sun during the summertime. After a long time, the POW passed out and fell to the ground from sunstroke. Kato calmly took a bucket of water, poured it on the POW, and ordered him to get back on his feet again.

Watanabe complained about the injustices that took place after the war. Japan was a society that required absolute obedience or death, and many of those who abused POWs were under orders from their commanding officers. Enlisted men ended up getting far more severe punishments than the officers after the war (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 39; Watanabe, 2003).

渋井 元次 Motoji Shibui (5B Staff)

Shibui worked for five months as an accountant for the camp. He had to make up for the shortage of food that was caused by the mismanagement of an earlier accountant. The former accountant had given more food to the POWs than was required by the regulations, and kept false records that showed food consumption was in accordance with the regulations. He participated in the effort to get the Asian pears for the POWs, and remembers they came from an orchard in the village of Kizaki north of Niigata. Cooks used the pears as an ingredient in miso soup (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 27).

阿部 常衛 Tsune-ei Abe (5B Staff)

Abe also worked to gather food for the POWs. He would barter for food from civilians, and would be accompanied by POWs at times. Abe remembers the commandant Tetsutaro Kato had a quick temper, but that he did try to improve the life of the POWs in the camp. For example, he remembers that Kato required the camp staff to start giving baths to patients in the sick ward (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 36).

飛鳥井 房江 Fusae Asukai (NKU Employee)

Asukai sometimes helped work on the harbor after POWs went back to the camp. Her husband worked in 5B as a guard. He took the train from headquarters to the camp to watch the POWs. She remembers guards having clubs, but she never saw guards beating POWs. She heard that some of the strict guards disappeared in order to escape revenge from GHQ (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 41).

松原 長太郎 Chotaro Matsubara (NKU employee)

Matsubara worked as a driver for executives before the war. He has some experience of transporting the bodies of POWs to the Aoyama crematory. Bodies were transported on a board covered with straw mat, not in coffins (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 45).

皆川 勇 Isamu Minagawa (NpT Employee)

Minagawa remembers that between 50 to 100 POWs were sent to work at the Central Dock. POWs were beaten if they moved too slowly. He once heard that a POW working in a nearby factory was shot for hitting the machine that he was operating.

The machine was not broken, but the POW was frustrated with trying to work the controls (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 44).

“N.S.” (NgT Employee)

This person was subcontracted by the military to be a guard from September 1944. The eyewitness remembers the guards carrying clubs like a *shinai*, which is bamboo or wood that is shaped to look like a samurai sword. This employee was responsible for a group of ten to twenty POWs. POWs worked nine hours a day from 8 AM to 5 PM (no overtime was allowed). The person felt that POWs suffered from culture shock about food and medical treatment. They thought that the Japanese food called gobo (burdock root) was some sort of a tree root, bran given to them for beriberi was really pig feed, and mistakenly thought that moxibustion, which was commonly used in Japan at the time to treat illnesses, was a form of torture or a punishment (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 43).

Anonymous A (Student Laborer)

In the spring of 1944, high school students were mobilized into work teams. This student remembers seeing the abuse of a POW once. S/he remembers the POW's grievous wails of pain and he was being beaten by a guard (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 46).

Anonymous B (Student Laborer)

This student worked on the docks for about a month. S/he remembers seeing a POW, who didn't come back from toilet for about an hour, was being beaten by a guard. The guards thought that he had tried to run away or was slacking somewhere

(Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 47).

Anonymous C (Student Laborer)

This student unloaded soybeans and coal on the docks twice a week, from 8 AM to 4 PM, for about a year. During this time, the student's teacher had the chance to talk with POWs while working. This teacher spoke about one conversation with a POW, asking him about his opinion of the war. The POW replied that he believed the Allies would ultimately win, even though they had suffered setbacks for the moment (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 47).

George D. Idlett (Former 5B POW)

Idlett was a POW in 5B from 1943 until he was repatriated in 1945. He worked on the docks for NKU. He remembers that he and other POWs were made work like slaves. POWs didn't get their salary for their work. He says that regulations required that they receive one yen a day. He wore surplus Japanese military uniforms for two years, and lost half his total weight from the work and lack of food, which he estimated as being about 600 calories a day. He also heard the comments of Lt. Masato Yoshida, that, POWs had been "sent here to work, and work they would, or die," but Idlett said that instead of "work *or* die", Yoshida should have said "work *and* die". Idlett remembers a few Japanese workers who were very kind to him on the docks, and who gave him extra food to eat. After the war, Idlett maintained his friendship with these men, and gave them food from America when they didn't have enough to eat. He also returned to Niigata a few times to meet friends and to show forgiveness for how he was treated in Niigata during the war (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 48;

Idlett, 2004).

Other POW Camps in Niigata

While the bulk of this paper had focused on Camp 5B, it is worth mentioning in brief something about the other camps across Niigata Prefecture. In my research, I found that there was a lot of data about some camps, but hardly anything could be found about others. The reason was in some cases that the conditions varied widely between camps; camps that were, given the general circumstances in Japan, relatively humane in their treatment of POWs have been nearly forgotten from a lack of documentation. We can infer this from the fact that commandants and camp personnel from these camps were not arrested or prosecuted by the Allied GHQ after the war. The camps where crimes against humanity took place, however, have been well documented.

The designations for other camps in the Prefecture are as follows: 3B in Nagaoka City, 3KB (a dispatch camp) near Jo-Oka station not far from Nagaoka City, 4B in Naoetsu City, 13B in Omi Village, 15B in Niigata City (a kilometer from 5B), and 16B in Kanose Village.

3B

This camp provided labor for an electric power company known as Hokuetsu Denka. The report that Hokuetsu Denka submitted to GHQ after the war (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 10) states that POWs were engaged in carbide production for an average of eight hours a day, staggered by three different shifts. The unspoken rule in this camp was to not overwork the POWs. The company supplied vegetables, meat

and vitamin tablets for the POWs. Nevertheless, the POWs did report feeling hungry every day. As was common in the Japanese POW Camp experience, there were some guards at the camp who would beat the POWs as they called roll in the morning.

In this case, however, the POWs noticed that the Japanese workers at Hokuetsu Denka were also beaten by overseers. Although it was prohibited, Japanese workers at the power company often tried to communicate with the POWs (Monument of Friendship and Peace Committee 1996, pg. 119).

However, Japanese military discipline was maintained at Camp 3B. According to a newspaper article (Niigata Nippo 1994, pg. 22), two POWs were discovered stealing potatoes from a field. The commandant had both of them locked in a root cellar at the camp. This occurred during the Japanese rainy season, and that evening, there was especially heavy rainfall. When guards went to open the root cellar in the morning, they found the two POWs had died in the cellar. The cause of death was unknown, though local POW Historian Akio Kimura states that the history of the company reported the cause of death as starvation (Kimura, 2004). News of this atrocity was not included in the report submitted by Hokuetsu Denka, but word of it reached GHQ after the war. However, all evidence and documents had been destroyed when Nagaoka was bombed, so a full investigation was never carried out (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 9).

3KB

This “dispatch camp” was little more than a warehouse near Jo-Oka Train Station outside of Nagaoka City. POWs remember vividly the lice in their blankets. They would unload cargo off of trains for about 7 hours a day, from 8 AM to about 4 PM.

Some guards would sneak food into the camp and give it to the POWs, and sometimes guards would let the POWs go to a nearby river to bathe. There were others Japanese guards and staff at the camp, however, who regularly stole the Red Cross packages intended for the POWs, and who sold the food on the black market (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 11).

4B

Camp 4B was by far the worst camp in Niigata Prefecture. Former Camp 5B guard Toshio Watanabe remembers how, soon after the Japanese surrender, he had met a guard who had just returned home from Camp 4B. They discussed how terrible the conditions were, and how the treatment of the POWs violated even the conscience of the other guards at the camp. After the war, eight guards from this camp were arrested and later executed by GHQ (Watanabe 2003).

As with most of the camps, it was the commandant who set the tone for how the camp was run. The first commandant, Asao Sakata, was generous and was respected for his leadership skills. However, the next commandant, Narumi Ota, was lazy and often not at his post. Guards got away with brutally beating the POWs while he was away. Many POWs were beaten to death by the guards as a result of Ota's ineptitude.

During the time Ota was in command, POWs were forced to work 12 to 18 hours a day in various factories and mines. Work details included carbide production, working in iron foundries, and loading salt or chemicals off of freight trains. POWs worked seven days a week, and were not allowed to rest even if they were sick or had a high fever. If a POW at this camp committed a minor error of protocol or was caught breaking any rule, all the POWs in the camp would be punished. If any POW tried to

bring up the Geneva Convention, he was beaten (Uesaka 1986). POWs were made sleep under four blankets during the summer. If a guard found a POW taking them off at night, all POWs were forced to stand for hours at attention in the camp yard. In winter, POWs weren't allowed to wear coats in their unheated bunkhouse. Although there were new boots received from the Red Cross, POWs weren't allowed to receive them, and were forced to work barefoot (Monument of Friendship and Peace Committee 1996, pg. 131).

After Ota was transferred, Tsuneo Ishikawa assumed command. While he was the commandant, the conditions gradually improved in the camp, as it became apparent to Ishikawa that Japan was losing the war. There were no casualties in the camp after the spring of 1944 until the end of the war (Uesaka 1986).

13B

POWs at this camp worked cracking aggregates for war production 12 hours a day in two shifts (7 AM to 6 PM, or 6 PM to 7 AM). They were allowed one day a week for rest. POWs lived in a small wooden bunkhouse. From a Japanese point-of-view, this camp was run very poorly, as staff did little to control the POWs. Some Japanese civilians remember having the experience being confronted by POWs who forcefully demanded food from them. Some were discovered stealing food and drink, but were not disciplined by the camp staff. This situation, however, was very different from the conditions at the beginning of the camp's creation. According to a GHQ report by the solicitor's office, entitled "Tokyo POW Camp 13B, Omi" (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 12), in 1943, during the establishment of the camp, at least 59 POWs died while waiting for the facilities to be finished. In the perversity of

bureaucratic thinking, these casualties weren't included on Table 2 because the POWs died before the camp was officially established. In reality, however, there were 601 POWs and 59 casualties. The person who was most responsible for this atrocity was the first commandant, Torataro Yoshimura, who denied the POWs adequate food and shelter while the camp facilities were being finished (Peace Bridge Committee 1999, pg. 12).

15B

POWs has lived in the dormitory of NgT and worked mainly in the iron foundry. The memories of POWs about 15B are scarce, but those that have been discovered show that conditions at this camp improved after the leadership of the camp was separated from 5B, and new commandants took control of the camp. The amount of food was increased, medical care was provided quickly, and employees in the foundry often gave candy or other bits of food to the POWs. There were, as always, "good guards" and "bad guards". At this camp, however, the bad guards, in the estimation of the POWs, never crossed the line, and never entered the bunk house of the POWs (which was severely infested with lice and other vermin). The relations between most of the guards and the POWs were so good at this camp that, by the end of the war, when B-29s began to drop food and supplies on POW camps, the POWs happily shared their bounty with the guards and their families (Niigata City 1998; Huff 2004).

16B

POWs at this camp also produced carbide at the infamous Showa Denko factory for eight hours a day in two shifts. In actuality, most POWs worked more than ten hours

a day. The leadership of this camp focused on work efficiency and production. If POWs could not meet the work quotas set for them, they were beaten. POWs noticed, however, that Japanese workers were also beaten if they didn't produce fast enough.

Working conditions at Showa Denko were especially dangerous. In a police report at the time, an electric furnace at the factory (that had a long-standing cracked carbide receptacle) exploded on Mar 9, 1945, killing three British POWs and one Japanese employee (「新潟県警察史」 Niigata Police Department History, 1959, pg. 716). The victims had been working near the furnace when it exploded, and were burned to death by the superheated carbide.

In spite of these problems, the commandant of the camp, Hiroshi Wagatsuma, tried to improve morale as much as possible. For example, a Christmas party was held in 1944. The whole town pitched in to help, and a local baker, Yoshio Aoki, gathered ingredients to bake Christmas Cakes for the POWs. The relations between guards and British POWs were better than the relations between the British POWs and the American POWs at this camp. British POWs looked down on the Americans as boorish and culturally awkward. William Rose, a POW at the camp who recently returned to Kanose Village at age 92, recalls with disapproval how Americans would trade food in the camp for cigarettes, sneak out of the camp and steal food from the stores, and purposely work slowly in the factories. He felt that this behavior was unbecoming of a disciplined soldier in any army, especially when the civilians, from whom they were stealing, were in an equally bad situation as the POWs.

Rose began to see the Japanese guards and factory workers as equally unfortunate as the POWs. He realized that they were all prisoners in the same camp, and he began to reach out to guards and employees in an effort to try to understand them and

eventually, to make friends with them.

Rose remembers one time when he looked to the mountains surrounding the camp. It was late spring, and the mountain *sakura* (cherry blossoms) were in full bloom. He mentioned in broken Japanese to a nearby guard (who was also looking at the flowers) how beautiful the flowers were. He looked to the guard and said haltingly, “those flowers...could you possibly...” The guard, looking at him knowingly, walked away.

Later, the guard came back and gave Rose a branch full of cherry blossoms. He had walked to the top of the mountain and picked them from one of the trees. Rose was deeply moved by this gesture of decency and quiet elegance, and kept the flowers in a jar of water near him as he went to back to work in the hot, dangerous and dark carbide plant (Rose 2004).

Relations between the British POWs and the Japanese staff became so good that some, such as the former British POW Morris Jannis, did their best to commute sentences of Wagatsuma and other military staff at 16B after the war. In a note to Wagatsuma’s wife, he wrote, “Your husband was a generous and fair person indeed. He was honorable and did his duty very well as the commandant (Tachihara 1997, pg. 226, my translation).

After the War

The Occupation government under General Douglas MacArthur set out to punish those who had brutally abused POWs. Criminals were classified as either “A”, “B” or “C” criminals. Basically, Class A criminals were those who were found guilty of starting the war and setting policies that resulted in the death of millions of people. Class B criminals were those judged as willingly carrying out the orders of these

superior officers, and Class C criminals were those who were following orders under duress, or who indirectly were involved in crimes against humanity. The trials were held in Yokohama with extensive media coverage. More than 400 people appeared in court from all over Japan. In all, 60 suspects from Niigata's POW camp personnel were found guilty, and eight were executed.

	Death Sentence	Indefinite Sentence	41 to 50 Years	31 to 40 Years	21 to 30 Years	11 to 20 Years	3 to 10 Years	Under 2 Years
3B	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
3KB	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
4B	8	3	1	1	0	1	0	1
5B	0	0	0	3	2	5	6	2
13B	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15B	0	0	0	0	0	3	3	11
16B	0	0	0	0	0	1	4	2

Table 3 (from 「BC 級戦犯裁判資料」*The Yokohama Judgments of B and C criminals*, 1985, Chaen)

After being found guilty, however, many of the criminals had their sentences reduced, and some were even set free on parole. Take, for example, the case of Lt. Tetsutaro Kato, He was the first commandant from the Niigata POW camps to be sentenced to death by hanging. However, his family, as members of Tokyo's elite society, gained access to MacArthur. As a result of their backroom negotiations with MacArthur, Kato's sentence was reduced to 30 years hard labor. A few years after control of the Sugamo Prison (where Japanese war criminals were being held) passed from American to Japanese control, Kato was set free.

Kato's case is not uncommon. My research leads me to believe that in most cases, the commandants of the POW camps got off lightly. The guards, however, who carried out their orders or who followed the example of their commanders through the

implicit, unspoken communication that exists between a Japanese superior officer and his subordinates, were punished far more heavily. Occupation judges imposed a Western standard on the accused, and were unconvinced by the argument that guards had to be totally obedient to their superior officers or face certain death. Former POWs testified against the guards who had (often enthusiastically) beaten and tortured them, and called for retribution against these men who had caused so much suffering and pain. These guards in effect, had no friends after the war, and were left to bear the responsibility of their superior officers' decisions, the consequences of their obedience, and the vengeance of the POWs.

Former POWs, however, also remembered the camp personnel who had been humane and kind to them. Some, as in the case of Niigata Camp 16B, lobbied GHQ for leniency on their behalf. These guards had chosen to ignore their superior officers' commands and instead show the concept of *jishi* (慈悲) to their captives. This word, which comes from Buddhism, means for one in power to show kindness and mercy to those below them, even though they may not often deserve such kindness. It corresponds to the Judeo-Christian concept for grace.

It is not within the scope of this paper to study the psyche of the Japanese guards during World War Two. Suffice it to say that the Japanese mentality is far more complex and subtle than what many of the former POWs could judge from their observation.

Nevertheless, regardless of the guards' personal sentiments, Niigata was still the home of the worst POW camps in all of Japan. Many POWs died in misery and hunger. Nothing can or should change our recognition of this fact. I believe that Japanese, especially those of my generation, must face this fact and think about this

issue. What should we do? I will suggest one possible way.

Reviving the Japanese Spirit of Consideration

In Japan's group oriented society, empathetic consideration for others, known as *kikubari* (気配り), is widely accepted as an admirable and important trait. I feel that this same spirit of consideration can be and should be applied towards understanding Japan's history as it relates to the POW experience. I think that if Japanese try to consider how everyone felt, thought and acted, they will get a more balanced understanding of the dark side of their own history, and hopefully avoid making such societal mistakes in the future.

As it is today, however, when most Japanese think about the war, what they did, and what they became, most would agree with Tetsutaro Kato's words, saying, "I want to be a clam." The issue of the war still raises bitter memories for many, and most don't want to remember the shame of those times. This is a natural reaction to painful memories. When William Rose, who recently came to Kanose Village to visit the factory where he was a POW (now called Niigata Showa) was asked about his saddest memories, he became stiff, silent and grim, mumbling quietly that he would rather not talk about it (「BSN ニュースワイド」 BSN News Wide, October 13, 2004).

Most of the former POWs living today still carry scars and bitterness from their days of captivity. Equally, Japanese war criminals and their families are still the object of scorn and dishonor in their communities. No one who was in the POW camps of Japan came back truly alive. These camps were terrible places where the worst part of human nature was allowed to run free. As a result, those who have nothing to do personally with POW history in Japan would prefer to let it fade away, focusing

instead on more positive aspects of Japanese culture.

But history is not made that way. We cannot make the future without remembering the past. Certainly, it is difficult to know everything about the past, and studying documents and oral histories reveals that there are many different “pasts” to explore. Documents and reports from the Allied Occupation Government only scratch the surface of what truly happened in the POW camps. Oral histories collected from Japanese tend to conveniently omit many of the darker sides of life in the camps. The memories of many of the POWs are clouded by starvation, wartime animosity and culture shock. There are few people alive who could contribute significantly to the history and explain what really happened in these camps, and when contacted, most don’t want to talk about it anymore.

However, if younger generations were allowed to find out more, we could understand what happened to POWs in Japan. We could better understand other issues in Japanese politics, such as the issue of comfort women, relations with China and Korea, or the controversy surrounding the Smithsonian Institute’s exhibition of the Enola Gay. Today unfortunately, more and more people in Niigata don’t even know that POW camps existed in their towns or villages. I think this is a problem. It is no exaggeration to say I wrote this thesis so that I will be able to tell other Japanese about the actual conditions of POW camps in Niigata. In the same way that Hiroshima has been made a shrine of Japanese victimization, I believe that Niigata should be given equal attention for the atrocities committed against POWs by their Japanese captors. In the same manner that survivors of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima go and speak to children about their suffering, we need people who were on both sides of the POW experience to share their memories with the young, so that we will never again resort

to militarism and cruelty as a society.

Conclusion

If there is one thing that I have learned from the experience of writing this thesis, it is the importance of preserving history. Throughout this research, I witnessed many positive activities from groups in Japan that still seek for reconciliation between Japanese communities and former Allied POWs. I experienced this for myself when William Rose visited Kanose Village recently. He seemed to have complex ideas and deep reasons for traveling to Japan from England at the age of 92. It was not an easy trip for him physically or emotionally. Still, he chose not to focus on the negative, and instead reached out to people in the community and the local junior high school with a message of peace. For the part of Kanose Village and Niigata Showa, they showed great hospitality towards Rose, and though a Western-style, verbal apology was not spoken, the groups of people who stood and bowed deeply, in schools, at the factory, and in the city office. This was a Japanese way of communicating their complex feelings of remorse for the past and their admiration for Rose. Not many former POWs would care to make such a trip, but if there is a person like William Rose in a hundred, younger Japanese can study objectively from them. I think the influence of William Rose's recent visit will be incalculable. Actually, after this event, my motivation to study POW history deepened. I believe that progress in the issues related to ex-POWs and other victims of the former Japanese Empire will depend on how many people in Japan can be introduced to these issues, and invited to participate in activities related towards reaching out to others. If this can be accomplished, I believe that we will see more people beginning to accept each other, and we will build a better future based on common understanding and reconciliation.

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