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“We Have Been Reborn”: Japanese Prisoners and the Allied Propaganda War in the Southwest Pacific

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On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor gave rise to frenetic efforts by the United States to mobilize for war against the “treacherous and inscrutable” Japanese enemy. The racial aspects of the Pacific War were overt and have dominated the scholarship and public perceptions of the conflict against Japan since the final Allied victory. The World War-II era Japanese soldier is most often remembered for his fanatical fight against insuperable odds and an adherence to the principle of “death before dishonor.” Another common recollection and historiographical theme is that of the American GIs’ unmitigated hatred of the Japanese as a monomaniacal, fierce, and suicidal adversary. John W. Dower’s fascinating study of the impact of racial hatred on the Pacific War provides an abundance of evidence of the extent to which stereotypes of “the other” dominated the fighting in the Pacific. Dower concedes that occasionally “fair numbers of Japanese were taken prisoner,” but concludes that “most Japanese fought until they were killed, or committed suicide.”¹ In like manner, historians characterize American GIs as being unwilling to take Japanese prisoners because of their perverse hatred of the “little yellow enemy” who drove them to seek human trophies of war.² In a number of ways,

1. John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1986), 67.

2. *Ibid.*, 53; James J. Weingartner, “Trophies of War: U.S. Troops and the

however, common perceptions are misleading. Large numbers of Japanese soldiers did seek to surrender, and American GIs along with their Australian counterparts did take many prisoners, an estimated 19,500 in the Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA) alone.³ Even so, the eventual successes of propaganda efforts in the theater came only after much difficulty during the early years of the war.

The United States was woefully unprepared in late 1941 to wage total war against the Axis powers. Military unpreparedness affected not only the nation's ability to undertake a conventional war with the Japanese enemy, but also its capacity to wage an effective propaganda war against that enemy. Mobilization efforts eventually met with considerable success by mid-1943 when the tide of the Pacific War had clearly begun turning in the Allies' favor. Taking somewhat longer was the creation of a psychological warfare capability in the SWPA. Not until June 1944 did General Douglas MacArthur establish the Psychological Warfare Branch (PWB), the primary mission of which was the dissemination of propaganda to demoralize Japanese soldiers and hasten the collapse of organized resistance.⁴

Mutilation of Japanese War Dead, 1941–1945," *Pacific Historical Review*, LXI (1992), 55.

3. While exact figures are elusive, a close approximation of the numbers of Japanese prisoners of war captured annually in the Southwest Pacific Area of operations (which encompassed Australia, New Britain, New Ireland, New Guinea, Borneo, the Celebes, and the Philippine Islands) is as follows: 1,167 in 1942; 1,064 in 1943; 5,122 in 1944; and 12,194 in 1945. Figures compiled from "Japanese Prisoners of War," May 19, 1945, box 333, entry 172, Records of the War Department General Staff, Military Intelligence Division (G-2), Record Group 165, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as RG 165, NA); records of the Psychological Warfare Branch, Southwest Pacific Area on POWs taken during the Philippine campaign, box 15, Bonner F. Fellers Papers, Hoover Institute on War, Revolution and Peace Archives, Stanford, Calif. (hereafter cited as Fellers Papers, HL); and Brig. Gen. Bonner F. Fellers to Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Aug. 5, 1945, box 14, Records of Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area (SWPA), 1942–1945, Record Group 3, MacArthur Memorial Archives, Norfolk, Va. (hereafter cited as RG 3, MMA).

4. Prior to June 1944 an Australian organization entitled the Far Eastern Liaison Office (FELO) engaged in psychological warfare operations against Japanese forces in the Southwest Pacific. American military personnel assumed a leading role in the propaganda war with the establishment of the Psychological Warfare Branch.

In the Pacific Ocean Areas (under the command of Admiral Chester W. Nimitz), the Office of War Information (OWI) began full-scale propaganda

Besides getting a late start, the propaganda effort also had to overcome a severe shortage of adequately trained personnel. One of the most vital resources in psychological warfare is people familiar with the language and culture of the enemy. To wage a "war of words" against a foreign enemy without trained linguists is comparable to engaging in combat with defective ammunition. In the propaganda war against the Japanese the United States had few Japanese linguists and, as a result, limited success. Nonetheless, as was true of U.S. military efforts generally, the caliber of the propaganda war waged against the Japanese armed forces improved over time. Effective psychological operations required propagandists to transcend easy stereotypes, and much of the eventual success of the Allied effort was due to Japanese POWs, who contributed their considerable skills as linguists, cultural mediators, and advisors to the Allied propaganda war in the Pacific.

Once Japanese soldiers fell into the hands of the Allies they proved to be indispensable to psychological warfare operations. They served as a gauge of the morale of Japanese troops still in the field, revealed the causes of demoralization among Japan's fighting men, evaluated the quality of Allied combat propaganda and offered suggestions for its improvement, devised leaflets of their own, and in some cases broadcast them directly to their former comrades at the front lines. But before the Allies could make use of Japanese prisoners they had to capture them, and this proved difficult because the Japanese possessed a deep-rooted aversion to the idea of surrender and because Allied servicemen had a similarly strong reluctance to take them prisoner.

The consensus among Allied troops during the first years of the conflict was that Japanese soldiers never resorted to surrender, although they would use it as a ruse. Allied reluctance to take seriously surrendering Japanese can be attributed to the brutal nature of the fighting in the Pacific and the fact that many Japanese did indeed feign surrender in order to inflict greater damage on their enemies. Allied intelligence reports that often

activities in the North and Central Pacific Ocean Areas in March 1944. After June 1944, the OWI worked alongside Nimitz's Psychological Warfare Section, which was created at that time and operated under the jurisdiction of the Joint Intelligence Center, Pacific Ocean Area.

referred to Japanese “cunning, treachery, fanaticism, and brutality” also contributed to the problem, as did the Allied press, which, according to personnel in the Psychological Warfare Branch, emphasized that a Japanese soldier “fights until he can fight no longer, then commits Hara-Kiri,” thus confirming American soldiers’ preconceptions that surrender was simply unfathomable to the enemy.⁵ By 1944, the “American Caesar” himself, General Douglas MacArthur, accepted the obvious conclusion that combat troops who shot surrendering Japanese posed one of the most significant threats to the success of the propaganda war.⁶

To overcome the unwillingness to accept Japanese prisoners, the U.S. Army launched a multifaceted informational campaign designed to make the armed forces aware that Japanese troops did surrender and that Japanese prisoners were a valuable source of intelligence.⁷ Psychological warfare operatives publicized the increasing incidence of surrenders in hopes of destroying the perception that “Japanese prisoners” was an oxymoron.⁸ Commanding officers contributed to the educational campaign by impressing upon their men that the killing of Japanese soldiers attempting to surrender encouraged the enemy to “fight to the

5. For intelligence reports describing Japanese treachery, see U.S. War Department, Military Intelligence Division, *Intelligence Bulletin*, vol. I, no. 3 (Nov. 1942), 1; vol. III, no. 1 (Sept. 1944), 33; vol. III, no. 3 (Nov. 1944), 24; vol. III, no. 7 (March 1945), 55. For a description of propagandists’ antipathy toward the press, see Capt. William R. Beard to Brig. Gen. Bonner F. Fellers, Jan. 3, 1945, box 16, entry 283 K, Records of Allied Operational and Occupational Headquarters, World War II, General Headquarters, Southwest Pacific Area, Record Group 331, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as RG 331, NA). Regarding the brutality of the “race war,” see Dower, *War without Mercy*; and Lt. Col. Arthur Murphy for the Commanding Officer of United States Army Forces in the Pacific (hereafter cited as USAFIP), North Luzon, to Commanding Gen. Sixth Army and Maj. Paul T. Anderson, Psychological Warfare Branch (PWB), G-2, Feb. 11, 1945, box 1, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA.

6. Gen. Douglas MacArthur to Commanding Gen. Alamo Force, May 14, 1944, box 3, entry 283 J, RG 331, NA; and Beard to Fellers, Dec. 2, 1944, and Jan. 3, 1945, box 16, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA.

7. Ken R. Dyke, Information and Education Officer, U.S. Army Forces in the Far East (hereafter cited as USAFFE), to G-1, General Headquarters (hereafter cited as GHQ), May 28, 1944, box 3, Fellers Papers, HL.

8. G-2 Summary, undated, box 3, Fellers Papers, HL; leaflet (2-A-8) entitled *Troops of 40th Division*, undated, and leaflet (1-A-8) entitled *Take Prisoners* (Jan. 31, 1945), box 10, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA; Col. J. Woodall Greene to Beard, Dec. 16, 1944, box 3, Fellers Papers, HL.

bitter end," which was precisely what combat troops wished to avoid.⁹

Members of the U.S. Army Information and Education Section, in conjunction with the Psychological Warfare Branch (PWB), informed soldiers of the benefits that accrued to GIs for every enemy prisoner. As a pamphlet entitled *A Short-Cut to Victory* noted, every prisoner taken meant one less Japanese shooting at American troops and one less enemy to pursue. It pointed out that the GIs' favorite line, "the only good Jap is a dead one," should be accompanied by the thought that "a dead Japanese can do them no good," for the information provided by Japanese prisoners of war saved the lives of many GIs and shortened the war. "We haven't the troops, the resources, or the time to kill them all," concluded the leaflet; "our short-cut to victory is through Japanese surrender."¹⁰

A related problem was persuading the Japanese to overcome their fear of being killed while attempting to surrender. This task was a far more monumental challenge to the propagandists than making American combatants "surrender-conscious." The Imperial Japanese Army had a longstanding no-surrender policy. In 1908 the Japanese army's penal code dictated that any commander who "allows his unit to surrender to the enemy without fighting to the last man...shall be punishable by death."¹¹ The army's revised military law of 1942 specified a less harsh but still severe penalty: "a commanding officer who surrenders his troops to the enemy in combat, even though he has done his utmost, will be sentenced to a minimum of six months imprisonment."¹²

9. Lt. Col. Charles W. Clegg, Asst. Adj. Gen. by command of Lt. Gen. Walter Krueger for broadest circulation, "Accepting Surrender of Japanese Military Personnel" (March 18, 1945), box 1, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA; and Col. H.V. White to Brig. Gen. Charles A. Willoughby, May 18, 1944, box 2, entry 283 J, RG 331, NA.

10. U.S. Army, Southwest Pacific Area, Psychological Warfare Branch (hereafter cited as PWB, SWPA), G-2 Summary Report, "A Short-Cut to Victory," undated, box 2, entry 283 J, RG 331, NA.

11. Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War: World War II and the Japanese, 1931-1945* (New York, 1978), 49.

12. Allied Translator and Interpreter Section, SWPA (hereafter cited as ATIS, SWPA), Research Report no. 76 (Part III), "The Warrior Tradition as a Present Factor in Japanese Military Psychology" (Oct. 30, 1944), p. 11, box 119, RG 3, MMA.

Japanese officers and enlisted men alike internalized the no-surrender policy, believing that “it was absolutely forbidden in the Japanese army to withdraw, surrender, or become a prisoner of war.”¹³ Imperial officers sometimes issued instructions prohibiting their troops from surrendering to the enemy or being taken prisoner.¹⁴ More often, Japanese troops simply assumed surrender to be unacceptable. There was little need for formal statements to that effect since Japanese tradition taught that soldiers never surrendered and the implications for individual behavior in wartime were clearly understood. Japanese POWs stated that “surrender is absolutely unrecognizable” or “Japanese don’t surrender,” though most had not received explicit instructions prohibiting them from doing so.¹⁵ Japanese military indoctrination thus assumed a “no surrender” policy and presented a daunting challenge to American propagandists who strove to destroy this “death before dishonor” mentality.

Once Japanese prisoners of war had been taken, however, the no-surrender tradition benefited the American war effort in two ways. First, Japanese soldiers were not instructed as to the proper course of action one should take as a captive of the enemy. Both American and Australian studies of Japanese prisoners concluded that they were “psychologically unprepared” to deal with their status as prisoners and had no formal guidelines for behavior under those conditions.¹⁶ Consequently, Japanese prisoners proved to be surprisingly cooperative, truthful, and willing to discuss exceedingly useful military matters with

13. Ienaga, *Pacific War*, 49.

14. See, for example, ATIS, SWPA, Research Report no. 76 (Part I), “Self Immolation as a Factor in Japanese Military Psychology” (April 4, 1944), pp. 16–18, box 119, RG 3, MMA.

15. See, for example, Office of War Information, Area III—Japan Section (hereafter cited as OWI, Area III), “Study of the ‘No-Surrender’ Slogan and ‘Self-Sacrifice’ Principle of the Japanese” (March 23, 1945), box 228, entry 366 A, Records of the Office of War Information, Record Group 208, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as RG 208, NA); Far Eastern Liaison Office, SWPA (hereafter cited as FELO, SWPA), Report no. 17, “Reactions to Propaganda” (Feb. 15, 1945), p. 8, box 225, entry 366 A, RG 208, NA.

16. Australian Military Forces, Allied Land Forces Headquarters, Intelligence Summary no. 188, July 31, 1942, p. 4, box 1, Facsimiles of Papers of Major General Charles A. Willoughby, United States Army, from the National Archives, 1942–1945, Record Group 23 A, MacArthur Memorial Archives, Norfolk, Va. (hereafter cited as RG 23 A, MMA).

American military personnel. Second, having been conditioned to believe that surrender or capture constituted the equivalent of losing one's citizenship, Japanese soldiers exhibited a tendency to view themselves as having begun life anew once taken captive. As a result, many of them worked for the Allies as if they had been "born again." Believing that prisoner of war status was the ultimate disgrace for Japanese soldiers, the great majority of men captured by the Allies considered themselves lost to their old lives. Nearly all expressed a fervent desire never to return to Japan.¹⁷ They frequently avowed that Japan's manual of military law stipulated that "Japanese soldiers taken prisoner would be shot on returning to Japan."¹⁸ Japanese POWs thus feared court martial and execution for their dishonorable conduct, or at the very least fully expected to be treated as social outcasts. In addition, they believed their families would also be disgraced in the eyes of all Japanese.¹⁹ Most prisoners determined they could never return to Japan and had little choice but to start a new life.

One Japanese prisoner (a lieutenant) maintained, for instance, that "almost all Japanese prisoners of war have the idea of new life and rebirth," a phenomenon that he attributed in part to Buddhist doctrines of reincarnation. A Japanese POW had already "died as a Japanese soldier," he stated, and as such "all we prisoners of war have been reborn. We all fight against the American Army with all our might before capture," but "from that time on we must fulfill our loyalty to America the same as we did to the Emperor before capture."²⁰ Thus, the orthodox attitude toward capture—the perception that one's ties with Japan had been severed forever, that one had for all intents and

17. According to ATIS figures, eighty-eight percent of all Japanese prisoners questioned regarding the prospect of returning to Japan after the war stated that they had no desire to do so. See ATIS, SWPA, "Self-Immolation," p. 21, RG 3, MMA. Arnold Krammer also discusses Japanese POWs' sense of having been lost to their former lives, as well as their desire that their status as captives of the enemy not be revealed to relatives in Japan in his "Japanese Prisoners of War in America," *Pacific Historical Review*, LII (1983), 67–91.

18. OWI, Area III, "No-Surrender Slogan," p. 19, RG 208, NA.

19. ATIS, SWPA, Research Report no. 76 (Part IV), "Prominent Factors in Japanese Military Psychology" (Feb. 7, 1945), p. 7, box 119, RG 3, MMA; and ATIS, SWPA, "Self-Immolation," pp. 21, 32–33.

20. Australian Military Forces, "Weekly Intelligence Review," no. 137 (June 2, 1945), pp. 23–24, box 6, RG 23 A, MMA.

purposes become dead to his previous life—produced a desire to “make a start on an entirely new life.” “I would like to do anything I can for America if you can make use of me,” commented another prisoner. “After all,” he said, “under such circumstances we are theoretically dead.”²¹

Once in the hands of Allied personnel, Japanese prisoners proved to be an immensely valuable source of critical analysis for propagandists during the Pacific War. POWs assisted in the propaganda war in a variety of ways. During interrogations they evaluated the effectiveness of Allied propaganda and suggested ways to improve its quality. Propagandists subsequently adopted many of these ideas. Japanese soldiers in captivity became the subject of surrender propaganda that pictured POWs in Allied camps, thus attempting to prove to Japanese troops that Imperial soldiers did surrender and that they were not tortured by their captors. Some Japanese prisoners assumed a more active role in the propaganda war by writing leaflets or delivering loudspeaker addresses. On a few occasions, “reborn” Japanese took it upon themselves to recruit prisoners by returning to Japanese lines and affirming that the propaganda describing good treatment of prisoners was accurate.

Japanese prisoners pinpointed those factors that led to a loss of morale among Japanese combatants. POWs demonstrated that Japanese troops were in fact susceptible to demoralization and psychological manipulation. Interrogations of Japanese prisoners provided a large body of evidence that many soldiers experienced not only a crisis in confidence, but also a collapse of faith in themselves as soldiers, in their military leadership, and in their nation’s ability to win the “Greater East Asia War.” Prisoners captured in New Guinea, for example, noted that continued battlefield reverses severely affected Japanese morale. They reported that soldiers refused to follow their officers’ orders to attack the enemy, troops became “completely deteriorated spiritually,” defeatism was common, and that defeat and disease succeeded in destroying the stamina and courage of many men.²²

21. ATIS, SWPA, “Self-Immolation,” p. 33.

22. OWI, Bureau of Overseas Intelligence, Foreign Morale Analysis Division (hereafter cited as OWI, FMAD), Report no. 18, “Aspects of Japanese Fighting Morale during the Papuan Phase of the New Guinea Campaign” (April 23, 1945),

Japanese POWs testified that the most prevalent causes of dissatisfaction and declining morale were matters of everyday concern to soldiers, such as the lack of supplies, reinforcements and weapons, and poor performance by the officer corps. Abstract concepts or ideological principles had considerably less impact on morale.²³ To capitalize on this information, psychological warfare personnel designed propaganda that stressed the declining strategic position of the Japanese empire as a whole and highlighted the consequences of that state of affairs for specific Japanese units in the field. Propaganda also emphasized the material superiority of the Allies in an effort to exploit the Japanese dissatisfaction with their own material and logistical deficiencies.

Propagandists also took advantage of information supplied by the prisoners about abusive superior officers. One prisoner noted that he had been beaten so severely by his commanding officer for a minor violation of discipline that he was unable to eat for days. Another prisoner recalled that men were slapped with such force that their noses bled.²⁴ Others reported being struck in the face with rifle butts, "continually beaten at the officer's whim," or commented that "face-slapping, kicking and beating with boots or wooden clogs were practically everyday occurrences."²⁵ Persistent abuse by officers produced demoralization throughout the ranks and provided propagandists with a fruitful area for exploitation.

In their efforts to capitalize on vulnerabilities in the Japanese ranks, American propagandists suffered from a crippling affliction: ignorance of Japanese culture and language. Throughout the early years of the Pacific War the Allies pro-

box 9, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA; OWI, FMAD, Report no. 19, "Group and Individual Morale of the Japanese during the Lae-Salamaua Campaign" (May 12, 1945), box 9, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA; and Headquarters, Allied Air Forces, SWPA, "Intelligence Summary" no. 175 (Jan. 22, 1944), p. 23, box 39, Papers of Lieutenant General Richard K. Sutherland, United States Army, 1941-1945, Record Group 30, MacArthur Memorial Archives, Norfolk, Va. (hereafter cited as RG 30, MMA).

23. Headquarters, Allied Air Forces, SWPA, "Intelligence Summary," no. 189 (March 11, 1944), box 40, RG 30, MMA.

24. ATIS, SWPA, "Prominent Factors," pp. 9-10.

25. ATIS, SWPA, Research Report no. 122, "Antagonism Between Officers and Men in the Japanese Armed Forces" (April 19, 1945), pp. 10-11, box 120, RG 3, MMA.

duced propaganda that was either so simplistic as to be childlike or so sophisticated as to be incomprehensible to most Japanese enlisted men. Moreover, until late in the war American propaganda failed because it was, according to Japanese linguists, obviously written from a Western perspective, in a foreign language, and only subsequently translated (rather ineffectively) into Japanese.²⁶ Prisoners described the language of American propaganda as clumsy, foreign-sounding, overly “bookish,” stylistically awkward, grammatically incorrect, or “overly difficult.”²⁷

Despite considerable improvement, even by the summer of 1944, propagandists were forced to admit that inappropriate “Japanese phraseology, calligraphy, and mixing various forms of Japanese together” continued to limit the effectiveness of their efforts.²⁸ Prisoners stressed that *how* a particular leaflet was written was just as important as its content, for the Japanese evaluated words much more carefully than Americans. The Foreign Morale Analysis Division (an agency of the Office of War Information) reported that Japanese were offended by words whose literal translation meant “surrender,” whereas expressions that meant something akin to “negotiation for resumption of peaceful conditions” were deemed inoffensive. Thus, two phrases that meant almost the same thing to Americans made two very different impressions upon the enemy.²⁹ In short, it was clear that Japanese linguists, and preferably Japanese themselves, needed to play a more active role in propaganda operations. The problem then became one of finding an adequate number of people well-versed in both the language and culture of Japan. Prisoners of war fulfilled at least part of that need.

26. U.S. Department of War, Military Intelligence Service, Captured Personnel and Material Branch, “Suggestions for American Propaganda Leaflets” (Sept. 23, 1944), and “Criticism of Leaflets 404 to 1003: Psychological Warfare, Part II—Propaganda Material” (Sept. 25, 1944), box 7, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA; “General Criticisms of American Leaflets by Okano” for Propaganda Committee of the Japanese People’s Emancipation League at Yenan, Nov. 7, 1944, box 20, entry 148, Records of the Office of Strategic Services, Record Group 226, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as RG 226, NA).

27. OWI, FMAD to Harold M. Vinacke, OWI, Area III, Nov. 27, 1944, box 443, entry 378, RG 208, NA; and OWI, FMAD, Semi-Monthly Report no. 14 (Dec. 25, 1944), pp. 17, 19, box 335, entry 172, RG 165, NA.

28. Maj. Harold G. Henderson to Col. J. Woodall Greene, Oct. 30, 1944, box 14, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA.

29. OWI, FMAD, Semi-Monthly Report no. 13 (Dec. 1, 1944), p. 2, box 9, entry 6 G, RG 208, NA.

The surprising level of cooperation exhibited by Japanese prisoners inspired increased efforts to convince Japanese combatants to surrender. To this end, and always as the final phase of a specific combat propaganda campaign, propagandists distributed direct surrender appeals to Japanese combat forces.³⁰ Surrender passes commonly described the military situation as hopeless, declared that further resistance was futile, and urged Japanese combatants to cease resistance and live to assist in the reconstruction of postwar Japanese society.³¹ In this and other ways, propagandists made a concerted effort to destroy the “death before dishonor” mentality. Japanese prisoners assisted American leaflet writers in encouraging Japanese combatants to focus on their responsibility to their ancestors and their progeny by surviving the war and devoting their lives to rebuilding the homeland.³² A group of prisoners in a message to Japanese troops still in the field confessed that “we found it useless to continue as it was clear that our duty lay in preserving our lives in order to work for Japan after the war.”³³

American propagandists also used leaflets and frontline loudspeaker broadcasts to convince Japanese troops that Americans treated POWs well. “In spite of the fact that POWs are enemies,” noted one leaflet, “Americans never look down upon them like Japanese do. Rather they respect the Japanese soldier who surrenders, as a brave soldier who fought to the very last

30. The typical combat propaganda campaign began with news leaflets designed to keep Japanese troops informed of the progress of the war. Subsequent leaflets were aimed at inspiring despair, sowing discord among the services and between officers and enlisted men, subverting Japanese military indoctrination, and informing Japan’s fighting men of the Allies’ true intentions with regard to the Pacific War and its aftermath. The dissemination of surrender appeals to enemy combatants was always the final phase of combat propaganda operations.

31. FELO, SWPA, Leaflet (J-184A), undated, box 18, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA; and Headquarters XIV Corps, Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, “Propaganda Drop no. 10” (Sept. 3, 1944), box 28, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA.

32. PWB, SWPA, Leaflet (10-J-10), May 31, 1945, Sandberg-Hallgren Collection, Love Library, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, (hereafter cited as Sandberg-Hallgren, UNL).

33. FELO, SWPA, Leaflet (J.224), undated, box 18, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA. Despite the fact that most POWs originally expressed the desire not to return to Japan after the war for fear of being court martialed, many subsequently concluded that Japan was destined to lose the war. That being the case, POWs surmised that the wartime leaders of Japan would be removed from power and not be in a position to punish POWs for their dishonorable conduct.

and survived.”³⁴ Prisoners created their own propaganda messages which testified to the falseness of Japanese claims that the Allies tortured prisoners. “Our fear of ill treatment and torture has completely vanished,” one POW wrote. “We are convinced that the tales of American cruelty were all false propaganda.”³⁵ Another former Japanese soldier informed his colleagues that Allied

soldiers are not trying to kill all the Japanese soldiers, even though they are trying to win the war. They are not thinking about killing the Japanese one by one. Our thinking about the U.S. forces is entirely wrong. They are not angry with us when we are captured. They show their friendliness like fellow comrades.³⁶

As the number of POWs increased, greater efforts were made to use their expertise in psychological warfare. Allied interrogators continually questioned Japanese prisoners about their own morale and that of the men in their units. Prisoners thus assisted planners in the Psychological Warfare Branch in determining long-term trends in the enemy’s state of mind, as well as short-lived opportunities to exploit immediate vulnerabilities. They also encouraged POWs to offer critical analyses of American propaganda. Their suggestions ranged from confirming the effectiveness of specific propaganda themes to advising on how to correct deficiencies. The reactions of prisoners to Allied propaganda, however, were diverse and often contradictory. It was unusual for two prisoners to react in precisely the same manner to the identical leaflet.

Nevertheless, interrogation reports showed that Japanese prisoners were in fundamental agreement on some issues.³⁷ They

34. *Ibid.*

35. PWB, SWPA, Leaflet (106-J-6), “Personal Surrender Appeal,” undated, Sandberg-Hallgren Collection, UNL.

36. PWB, SWPA, Leaflet (2-J-40), “Negros Surrender” (March 28, 1945), box 24, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA.

37. The following discussion on the reaction of Japanese prisoners of war to Allied propaganda is based upon the abundance of information provided in the following sources: FELO, SWPA, “Information Bulletins,” box 16, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA; FELO, SWPA, “Information Reviews,” box 228, entry 366 A, RG 208, NA, and box 333, entry 172, RG 165, NA; FELO, SWPA, “Reactions to Propaganda,” box 225, entry 366 A, RG 208, NA, box 334, entry 172, RG 165, NA, and box 4, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA; OWI, Area III, “Leaflet Newsletters,” boxes 18, 21, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA; OWI, FMAD, Report no. II, “The Influence of Allied Propaganda as Revealed in Reports of Interrogations with 556 Prisoners of War”

stated almost to a man, for instance, that leaflets should include maps showing the strategic juggernaut created by the Allied forces in the Pacific, as well as local situation maps illustrating the adverse tactical conditions confronting specific enemy units. Prisoners agreed that news leaflets were well-received by Japanese troops and that they had, over time, established the credibility of American propaganda. In this regard, however, many Japanese suggested that news leaflets be more narrowly focused on military events occurring in the Pacific and in the home islands, as these were of immediate concern to soldiers. World news, they maintained, was of little interest to troops engaged in the Greater East Asia War. Japanese prisoners uniformly believed that the United States ought to increase the quantity of leaflets dropped to ensure greater saturation of targeted areas and more frequent contact with a variety of leaflet themes.

Prisoners similarly agreed on a number of ways to improve surrender leaflets. They stated unanimously that the fear of torture continued to be the chief obstacle to surrender, and they urged propagandists to exert every effort to convince the Japanese that they need have no fear of mistreatment. They also maintained, however, that Japanese troops had a most difficult time believing American promises of good treatment no matter how sincere or how insistent. Most prisoners confessed that they themselves did not place much faith in such reassurances until after they had surrendered and discovered firsthand the truth of these claims. They therefore encouraged greater emphasis on the good treatment theme, but could not guarantee that it would have any better results at producing prisoners than previous efforts.

POWs had more concrete advice about surrender leaflets

(Aug. 1944), box 335, entry 172, RG 165, NA; OWI, Psychological Warfare Team, Burma-India Theater, Reaction Report no. 9, "Reasons Why Japanese Soldiers Accept or Reject Allied Propaganda" (April 20, 1945), box 18, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA; PWB, SWPA, "Psychological Warfare Reactions and Developments," box 31, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA; PWB, SWPA, Daily Collation Summaries, Reactions to Psychological Warfare, box 16, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA; Headquarters, Supreme Allied Command, South East Asia (hereafter cited as SACSEA), Psychological Warfare Division, "Information Reviews," box 18, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA; Pacific Ocean Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas, CINCPAC-CINCPOA Bulletins, boxes 4-5, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA; SACSEA, Translation and Interrogation Center, "Psychological Warfare Bulletins," boxes 5-6, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA; and ATIS, SWPA, Prisoner of War Interrogation Reports, boxes 111-118, RG 3, MMA.

that referred to international laws pertaining to prisoners of war. Initially, U.S. propaganda stated simply that the Allies adhered to international law respecting prisoners of war. Interrogations of captured enemy personnel soon revealed, however, that Japanese troops were unaware of the Geneva Convention's proscriptions regarding the treatment of prisoners. According to one prisoner, "most high ranking Japanese officers, who would have influence in persuading their men to surrender, were ignorant of the rules of the Geneva Convention and actually believed that prisoners of war were executed legally upon capture."³⁸ The POWs encouraged U.S. propagandists to inform Japanese troops not only of the existence but also the precise terms of such international conventions. This advice underscored a significant shortcoming in Allied surrender propaganda and inspired the widespread distribution of revised leaflets containing the precise terms of the Geneva Convention and the Allies' firm commitment to treating prisoners in accordance with those terms.³⁹

The surrender process also concerned Japanese POWs. They noted that surrender leaflets sometimes neglected to provide Japanese troops with adequate information about how and where to surrender. Propagandists responded to this criticism by supplying enemy soldiers with explicit instructions as to how, when, and where to surrender. Prisoners also recommended that surrender leaflets state that the United States would not reveal the identities of prisoners of war to their family members in the home islands. They maintained further that American promises of good treatment would be more effective if they were relayed by Japanese soldiers who themselves had surrendered and could thus verify the truth of such claims.

Japanese prisoners observed that American propaganda failed to discuss one's status after surrender. Besides assurances that prisoners would be well fed, given immediate medical attention, and not be mistreated in any way, surrender appeals said little about how prisoners spent their time. Several Japanese soldiers remarked that the constant reassurances of the freely

38. Information Section, ATIS, GHQ to Co-ordinator ATIS, GHQ, "Propaganda Leaflet: Geneva Convention" (May 31, 1945), box 3, Fellers Papers, HL.

39. FELO, SWPA, Leaflet (J-196), undated, Sandberg-Hallgren Collection, UNL.

given good treatment that awaited prisoners made the idea of surrendering seem even more cowardly than if troops were told they would have to earn their keep.⁴⁰ Psychological warfare personnel responded with propaganda stating that prisoners who wanted to work could do so, or showing photographs of prisoners engaged in productive pursuits.

Questions about the legality of photographing POWs for propaganda purposes arose soon after psychological warfare operations against Japan commenced. Japanese prisoners often stated that surrender appeals would be more persuasive if they included pictures of soldiers already in captivity. They thought that leaflets depicting the condition of Japanese troops at the time of their capture followed by photos of the same men after they had regained their health would be particularly effective. They also suggested that pictures include a large number of prisoners to prevent the appearance that the scene had been staged. Such photographs would show that the Allies had taken many prisoners thereby allaying soldiers' fears of living an isolated existence after surrender.

Propagandists agreed that the best way to prove the truth of their statements was to disseminate photographs of the prisoners. The U.S. State Department determined that the photographing of POWs for use in propaganda materials did not constitute a violation of international law, but at first the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) required that all photographs of prisoners be "masked" by covering the eyes of the subjects. The CCS justified this policy on the grounds that "the possession of such photographs by the enemy authorities would lead to identification, to reprisals against the prisoners' families, and to a decrease in future surrenders." In March 1945, the CCS decided that this precaution was unnecessary. The change in policy resulted from Geneva Convention regulations that required nations at war to inform their enemies of all prisoners taken. Moreover, propagandists themselves argued that altered photographs were inherently suspicious and often made it difficult for the intended audience to discern that the prisoners depicted were in fact prisoners or, in this instance, even

40. PWB, SWPA, "Psychological Warfare Reactions and Developments" no. 2 (Oct. 13, 1944), box 31, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA.

Japanese. As a result, the practice of photographing Japanese prisoners for propaganda purposes continued but without “masks” to hide the faces of the men pictured.⁴¹

In the meantime, the search continued for an appropriate expression to convey the meaning of “surrender” without using that word. The “Anglo-American Outline Plan for Psychological Warfare against Japan,” which was approved by both the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and the CCS, recommended that Allied propaganda avoid the “use of the word ‘surrender’ (*kosan*, *kofuku*) or other words which the Japanese associate with dishonor.” Yet the document did not become official until May 1944. By that time, psychological warfare personnel had discovered for themselves that Japanese soldiers objected strenuously to such terms and hence propagandists were careful not to use the offensive expression in Japanese. They chose instead to rely on phrases suggesting that Japanese troops “come to an honorable understanding with the Americans.” In the Southwest Pacific, however, the leaflets bearing such appeals in Japanese carried on their flip side the English words “I SURRENDER” in large letters. By September 1944, American propagandists began voicing their concern that the English portion of the text was “intelligible to a fair proportion of Japanese troops.”⁴² According to the commanding officers of the Sixth and Eighth armies, the English translation had been designed solely for the benefit of U.S. soldiers, who had been reluctant to accept Japanese surrenders early in the war.⁴³ Nonetheless, POWs were adamant that Japanese troops understood the meaning of the English word and insisted that it not be included in surrender passes.⁴⁴

41. Breckenridge Long to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, Aug. 12, 1943, box 333, entry 172, RG 165, NA; and Acting Chief, Propaganda Branch to Joint Security Control, “Identifiability of Photographs of Japanese Prisoners,” March 30, 1945, box 333, entry 172, RG 165, NA.

42. Leaflet Section to Members of the Operations Board, “Field Party’s Request for Japanese Surrender Leaflet,” Sept. 4, 1944, box 2, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA.

43. Greene to Fellers, Sept. 6, 1944, box 3, Fellers Papers, HL.

44. R. G. Ferguson, HQ, Seventh Infantry Division to Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, United States Army Forces, Pacific Ocean Area (hereafter cited as USAFPOA) through Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2 XXIV Corps, “Psychological Warfare,” Jan. 10, 1945, box 14, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA.

In January 1945 propagandists in the Southwest Pacific eliminated the word "surrender" from the leaflets. They did so for two major reasons: an increasing number of criticisms from both intelligence officers and prisoners, and changing perceptions among Allied combatants. At the time the leaflets first appeared, "the primary concern was to interest the American troops in taking prisoners," declared Colonel J. Woodall Greene of the Psychological Warfare Branch, but by 1945 U.S. soldiers had become more "surrender conscious" and willing to take prisoners. "The time has come to change our 'surrender' leaflet," concluded Greene, "to make the strongest appeal possible to the Japanese."⁴⁵ By early March a new leaflet had appeared carrying the words "I CEASE RESISTANCE" in place of "I SURRENDER."

Besides merely reacting to Allied propaganda texts and techniques with criticism and advice, POWs sometimes played an active role in psychological warfare efforts. Some of them, for example, drafted original leaflet texts. Many such leaflets focused on persuading Japanese forces that Americans did in fact treat prisoners in accordance with international law, while other texts commented on the abundance of war material possessed by the Allies and encouraged Japanese troops to awaken to the realization that the war was lost and continued resistance would lead to Japan's destruction. POW interrogations revealed that such leaflets achieved significant results primarily because they were written by Japanese and thus contained none of the errors so characteristic of propaganda authored by Westerners. Leaflets created by prisoners also did much to convince Japanese troops that fellow soldiers in the field had surrendered and that the "death before dishonor" credo was not universal among Japanese forces. Another contribution of POWs was the establishment of their own newspaper for distribution to Japanese armed forces. The first issue of *Rakkasan News* (Air Drop News) appeared in March 1945 and emanated from the Philippine Islands. Its purpose was to weaken morale by informing Japanese troops of the "true picture of the war." Distributed

45. Greene to Fellers, Feb. 4, 1945, box 3, Fellers Papers, HL.

on a weekly basis, *Rakkasan News* focused on the progress of the Pacific War and current developments in Japan.⁴⁶

Besides creating leaflets and a newspaper, Japanese prisoners made loudspeaker addresses to concentrations of enemy troops at the front line and occasionally returned to the field in an attempt to convince others to surrender. On March 6, 1945, a POW delivered a surrender broadcast to Japanese troops trapped in a cave in the Zambales Mountain area of the Philippine Islands. This resulted in the surrender of one man who then volunteered to speak over the loudspeaker. He exhorted those still in hiding to give themselves up, promised they would be well cared for, and concluded with the statement: “an honorable surrender is preferable to certain death.”⁴⁷ The sources do not reveal whether this POW’s appeal obtained immediate results, and propagandists would have been surprised had it done so, for they knew that combat propaganda had a cumulative effect and was more likely to produce the desired response in the days and weeks to come than as a direct result of one front line broadcast.

Yet, immediate results—or near immediate—could be achieved on occasion. One of the more dramatic successes of front-line broadcasting occurred on Luzon where two Japanese

46. OWI, Area III, “Leaflet Newsletter,” vol. I, no. 2, April 6, 1945, p. 14, box 21, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA. Issues of the *Rakkasan News* are located in box 3, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA; and box 56, Records of General Headquarters, United States Army Forces Pacific (USAFPAC), Record Group 4, MacArthur Memorial Archives (hereafter cited as RG 4, MMA).

Japanese POWs in Burma created a similar newsletter for distribution to Japanese armed forces still in the field. Entitled “New Life,” it first appeared in March 1945 and placed particular emphasis on convincing Japanese troops that they had a responsibility to survive the war and build a new Japan. See OWI, Area III, “Leaflet Newsletter,” vol I, no. 5, May 18, 1945, pp. 18–21, box 21, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA.

47. PWB, SWPA, “Psychological Warfare Reactions and Developments,” no. 9, May 3, 1945, p. 7, box 31, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA. Other examples of the use and results of frontline broadcasting can be found in a report issued to Eighth Army’s PWB officer on Dec. 8, 1944, box 15, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA; the text and description of broadcasts made to Japanese troops on Bougainville, March 26, 1944, box 13, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA; a summary of propaganda broadcasts made by Sixth Division to frontline troops in a report to XIV Corps’ PWB officer, July 20, 1945, box 18, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA; and PWB’s Collation Section reports concerning the “Effectiveness of Frontline Broadcasts in Inducing Surrender and Lowering Morale,” box 4, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA.

medical officers surrendered to the XI Corps of the U.S. Army after a series of public-address system appeals that spanned several days. These men then volunteered to lead American troops into a cave which concealed more Japanese troops who wished to give themselves up. Eventually, twenty-four soldiers surrendered.⁴⁸

On other occasions prisoners received permission to return alone to Japanese lines for the purpose of gaining additional prisoners. During September 1944 both Japanese and Formosan prisoners made such an attempt on Noemfoor during the New Guinea campaign. The operation resulted in the return of all the POWs released for this purpose as well as the surrender of several Japanese soldiers and over two hundred Formosans.⁴⁹ A similar operation on Morotai in July 1945 ended in failure, however, when two of the six prisoners sent to obtain the surrender of other Japanese failed to make contact with any Japanese units, two were captured by the indigenous population, and the remaining two escaped into the jungle when they encountered an armed native patrol. (The latter were subsequently recovered unharmed by the Allies.)⁵⁰ Since such operations posed a grave danger to the physical well-being of Japanese prisoners, they were rarely attempted.

Most importantly, Japanese prisoners confirmed the effectiveness of Allied psychological warfare operations. Many acknowledged they trusted Allied news bulletins and had been influenced favorably by the various propaganda messages.⁵¹ Japanese troops not only read enemy leaflets, although they were forbidden to do so by their officers, but also discussed their contents with other Japanese soldiers. Many prisoners noted that Allied propaganda contributed to a defeatist state of mind, particularly if it focused on developments that "confirmed their own bitter experiences" in the war, and convinced some soldiers

48. PWB, SWPA, "Psychological Warfare Reactions and Developments," no. 11 (June 1, 1945), pp. 2-3, box 31, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA.

49. PWB, SWPA, "Psychological Warfare Reactions and Developments," no. 5 (Dec. 20, 1944), box 31, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA.

50. FELO, SWPA, "Information Bulletin," no. 12 (Aug. 16, 1945), p. 1, box 16, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA.

51. HQ, SACSEA, Psychological Warfare Division, "Information Review," no. 19 (July 1945), p. 2, box 18, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA.

to give up the fight altogether.⁵² Prisoners estimated that propaganda weakened the morale of fifty to sixty percent of the men in their units. Some of the evidence on the effectiveness of propaganda took the form of negative testimony. One POW noted that “only half of them [men in his combat unit] believed the ‘good treatment’ promises” in the leaflets.⁵³ In view of the widespread belief among Japanese soldiers that the Allies tortured and murdered prisoners, for even half the men in a given unit to take seriously the U.S. promise of good treatment would be a significant propaganda victory indeed.

Japanese prisoners proved to be an indispensable weapon in the Allied psychological warfare arsenal during the Pacific War. At times their importance caused propagandists to come vigorously to their defense against other Americans. In October 1944 when a U.S. officer planned to return to a POW camp two prisoners who had been working on propaganda texts, J. Woodall Greene of the Psychological Warfare Branch objected vehemently. “These two boys have been of great value in helping with the Japanese leaflets we completed and are working on those now in production,” Greene remonstrated. “Personally, I don’t see how we can get along without them or someone of similar ability.”⁵⁴

In 1941 experts on Japanese language and culture were a rare commodity in the Allied camp and in the short run it proved impossible to train an adequate number of Westerners as Japanese linguists. Only in late 1944 and 1945 did effective psychological warfare operations take root. This can be explained in part by the fact that effective propaganda operations

52. FELO, SWPA, “Reactions to Propaganda,” no. 13 (Oct. 15, 1944), pp. 2–7, box 4, entry 283 K, RG 331, NA.

53. FELO, SWPA, “Reactions to Propaganda,” no. 13 (Oct. 15, 1944), p. 3, box 225, entry 366 A, RG 208, NA; PWB, SWPA, “Psychological Warfare Reactions and Developments,” no. 2 (Oct. 13, 1944), p. 4, and no. 10 (May 8, 1945), p. 2, box 31, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA; and OWI, Area III, “Leaflet Newsletter,” vol. 1, no. 8 (June 29, 1945), p. 7, box 21, entry 283 L, RG 331, NA.

54. Greene to Fellers, Oct. 10, 1944, box 3, Fellers Papers, HL. As of May 27, 1945, the PWB, SWPA, employed the services of nineteen Japanese POWs. In the Pacific Ocean Area, the psychological warfare apparatus (under the jurisdiction of the Joint Intelligence Center) included twelve Japanese POWs. See “Report of Lt. Col. Edward A. Pagels, China Theater Psychological Warfare Officer, to the Psychological Warfare Board on 27 May 1945,” box 13, entry 148, RG 226, NA.

became possible only after Allied military successes created a vulnerable target population. Brigadier General Bonner F. Fellers, head of the Psychological Warfare Branch in the Southwest Pacific Area, aptly summarized this principle: "psychological warfare can proceed no faster than winning armies."⁵⁵ In their efforts to exploit battlefield victories, American propagandists moved beyond the stereotype of Japanese soldiers as fanatical and suicidal automatons to a deeper understanding of "the enemy" as human beings with many of the same physical, emotional, and spiritual needs as soldiers anywhere. In this transformation, Japanese POWs proved indispensable.

Ironically, however, the same "death before dishonor" mentality that distinguished Japanese troops and convinced most Americans that they would not surrender produced Japanese prisoners who were amazingly cooperative. "Reborn" Japanese contributed more to the American propaganda effort against Japan than any other single group except the Nisei, whose assistance was essential for the same reasons: greater familiarity with the language, cultural traditions, and psychological profile of Japanese fighting forces. Indeed, many of America's psychological warfare successes in the Southwest Pacific must be attributed to Japanese prisoners who assisted American propagandists in waging a surprisingly effective propaganda campaign against their former comrades in arms.

55. Brig. Gen. Bonner F. Fellers, "Report on Psychological Warfare in the Southwest Pacific Area, 1944-1945" (March 15, 1945), p. 2, Center of Military History, Historical Records Branch.