

# LIFE'S REPORTS

## TOKYO IN WARTIME

by PHYLLIS ARGALL

I was arrested by the Japanese police on Dec. 8 in Tokyo and imprisoned in a single cell until June 4 when I was released to sail to America June 17 on the diplomatic exchange vessel *Gripsholm*. Unlike the other women arrested, I was handcuffed and beaten and subjected to extensive daily questioning as a result of my work on the anti-Nazi English-language newspaper, *Japan Newsweek*. Our prison ward accommodated some 80 women whom I did not see during my six months, since I was held incommunicado.

My cell was bare except for an iron cot. Its one window of frosted glass opened about six inches at the bottom for ventilation but I could not see out of it. I was allowed a few books: a Bible, a prayer book, an anthology of English literature, two copies of the *Atlantic Monthly* and two P. G. Wodehouse novels. After reading and re-reading these there was little to do except sit and stare. I did fashion a jigsaw puzzle from a State of Pennsylvania advertisement in the *Atlantic*, but my jailer took it away from me.

Prison food was not too tasty nor too nourishing. Every day I was fed a concoction of two-thirds barley and one-third rice. Sometimes I had fish soup and all too often seaweed, unwashed and uncooked.

Despite the endless hours of being alone, one thing did happen during six months which gave me a great lift—Doolittle's bomber raid on Tokyo in April. I could not see the planes but the sound of the bombs hitting home was comforting. The guards double-locked the doors of the prison to prevent the escape of the prisoners in the event the prison was bombed. My first opportunity to find out how the raid affected the Japanese came during the June fortnight I was free in wartime Tokyo. Even then the average Japanese citizen was jittery. Not, peculiarly enough, because of the extensiveness of the U. S. raid, but because of its very smallness. He seemed to figure that, if the U. S. could send over a dozen or so planes, it could equally well send over a couple of hundred. The explanation most widely favored was that the raid was not to drop bombs but to take pictures. The Japanese are fearfully awaiting the next all-out effort.

### All mention of incendiaries censored

The Japanese Government, always paternal, did its best to minimize the effect of the raid on public nerves. In the habit of playing up all acts of bravery, Domei, Government news agency, sent out dozens of tales of patriotic heroism. There was one about an old woman who, having extinguished one incendiary, climbed painfully to her attic, found a couple more fires spreading, and extinguished them. Before this shot of morale could reach the public, the government censors clamped down. They did not want any stories of incendiaries being extinguished, however bravely. In fact, they did not want any mention of incendiaries at all. Such stories might cause panic. Evening papers made over their front pages along less heroic, but less disturbing, lines.

No one knows how much damage the raids actually did. After I was released I saw large burned-out areas, carefully guarded and patrolled, but as far as the public was concerned they were not supposed to be there.

Preparedness against air raids has been Japan's watchword for three or four years. Last year the order was issued that every house must have a bucket of water and a box of sand or earth at the door. Each block had its air defense chief, his house marked by a rope tassel on a pole. Last June I noticed that most water buckets were empty and the boxes of earth had large turnips growing in them to

eke out the short vegetable rations. The air defense chiefs' rope tassels were frayed and bedraggled so as to be unrecognizable.

Fire fighters' suits were made of "sufu," a staple fiber, in other words, a form of paper. Helmets had celluloid eye pieces. School-girls made helmets of paper bags, waxed, with celluloid fronts. No one seemed to remember that paper and celluloid burn, or that staple fiber melts in a real good drenching. These suits were on sale as official fire-fighting models and the Japanese citizens bought them.

### **Mind over matter**

The official Japanese believes implicitly in the triumph of mind over matter, especially when it is the official mind over someone else's matter. Last October, during an air-raid drill, one official stated publicly that incendiary bombs held no fears for Tokyo since wooden houses are the best protection against them. People were expected to believe this. For the fearful, however, there is an officially approved air-raid shelter. It is a hole in the ground with wooden walls to about two feet above ground level, barricaded with earth, and covered with tar paper and bags of sand. It has a wooden chimney for ventilation. When a "certain consulate" ordered a shelter of concrete and iron, it is reported, Japanese officials protested. Such structures, it was pointed out, would give the people the idea that their own edifices of wood and earth are insufficient. I saw a few public shelters being built in June. They looked like earth tunnels, such as children dig at the seashore.

Because I was an enemy alien I had thought that when I was released from prison it would be unsafe for me to go out of doors, but this was not so. I was theoretically "interned" in my own apartment. The policeman in charge of foreigners in my district, however, gave me permission to go "anywhere within the city limits," provided I was "discreet." Not once during these two weeks of relative freedom did I have any unpleasant experience.

Tokyo is bedraggled and looks down at the heels. The street

cars are dilapidated and seamy and the machinery is wearing out. Since they are saving oil, the cars squeak and grind as they make their runs. It is not at all unusual to wait half an hour for a trolley. One gets impatient only when the wait is over 45 minutes. Even then the cars are overcrowded. Trains, too, are jammed. On some of the longer runs of 12 or 24 hours, it is not unusual to have the aisles jammed with standees. I would be afraid to take any long trip on Japanese trains. The road beds have not been repaired and the ride is always wavy and bumpy. The rolling stock has so deteriorated that when some cars pass over switch points the seams actually open and the window frames separate from the side of the car so you can see light coming through.

### **Exit autos**

The streets in Tokyo have gone without repair work for almost a year and pavements are cracking. In one downtown section where a new sidewalk was laid, earth, and not cement, was used to bind the paving blocks. Automobiles are disappearing at a fast rate. The main reason for this is that the engines are simply wearing out. Some of the taxis and private cars have been trying to use soybean oil for a lubricant, but it is so sticky that they usually stall. I also noticed that many cars and cabs were being converted into charcoal burners. Cars can run on charcoal but they have no power. When you approach a hill it is common to see a group of stalled charcoal burners at the bottom. And if you are riding a charcoal cab, you usually have to leave it at the foot of a slope and try and catch another cab at the top.

Near my house, they were building a concrete gas station this spring to sell bottled gas. Too much sand was mixed in the cement and when the wooden forms were removed the whole building collapsed.

Foodstuffs are getting harder to buy even with complete rationing. About 20% of the general stores in Tokyo are closed and three out of four food shops are either permanently closed or are open but one day a week. Ceiling prices have been put on

everything. But no distinction is made for quantity or quality. Coffee by the cup was, at one time, 15 sen but when the government ceiling price was lowered to 10 sen, you were served only a demitasse. When you order a meal at a Tokyo restaurant you know you are paying a government-decreed price for it but you are never certain what sized portion you'll get. Bread, by law, is now cut eight slices to the pound and it is illegal to ask for toast since the Japanese are trying to save electric power.

Many of Tokyo's elevators have been stopped to conserve electric power and people are now allowed only one electric outlet per room. Nor are the Japanese allowed to have electric heaters or stoves to supplement their meager heating aids. Cooking gas has been cut by about 50%.

### **Shredded paper**

To save paper, the Government forced many magazines to amalgamate. Newsprint has so deteriorated that when you try to turn a page the paper rips to shreds. Storekeepers no longer wrap your bundles for you in anything except newspapers and if you want to avoid that you have to bring your own paper.

I found no real amusements left in Tokyo. The great Hibiya Park across the street from the Imperial Hotel and near the Imperial Palace is completely closed—no one knows why. The movie houses still run, but they are only open from 3 p. m. until 10 p. m. Most of the pictures shown are flagrant propaganda films, but they are showing some American films which they use as an anti-U. S. weapon. In June, they were showing *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* as an example of the degeneration of American democracy. Voices are in English with Japanese captions superimposed.

The sale of liquors and beers is also closely regulated. I could buy one bottle of beer but I had to turn in a cap as well as an empty bottle. The bar of the Imperial Hotel opens each day at 5 and is completely sold out by 6. They sell beer, wine and a Japanese-made whisky called Suntory. The distillers of Suntory have been pulling the wool

over Japanese eyes for some time. When the company was only 4 years old they sold a 7-year-old whisky and a year later put a 12-year-old brand on the market. Drinking, once a favorite Japanese pastime, has declined since the war began.

In their effort to turn everything in the country into something capable of being used for the war, the Japanese have stripped Tokyo of ornamental iron street lamps, railings, brass traffic-lane markers, building plaques and decorative metal on bridges. They have taken all benches out of the parks still open and they have even removed all the iron railway-station benches. People now waiting for trains must stand in the stations.

Clothes, as well as food, are rationed. When you can get them it is hardly worth the bother since the material is so poor. Nor can you get cotton thread or buttons when dress material is available. There is no shoe leather except for army boots, so that wooden clogs have become fashionable to wear with foreign-style dresses. The stocking ration is six pairs a year, and one pair does not survive a day's wearing.

## **Eggs and milk**

As the result of rationing, the black market has become a flourishing business. Despite the work of the police, augmented by imprisonment and huge fines, shopkeepers sell their choice goods at an unofficial price to their friends. When eggs were unobtainable at the official price of 10 sen each, I got all I wanted at 30 sen. Milk is obtainable only with a doctor's certificate and the sugar ration is a little less than half a pound a month per person.

One reason for the scarcity of everything and for the shabbiness of the country as a whole is the Government's policy of saving for the future, when Japan may be even worse off than it is now. Japan is determined to win this war, and it can be done as well by citizens wearing wooden shoes as by those wearing leather.

It will be hard to starve Japan out, for the people will live on as little as the Government orders them to.