Tokyo Nightmare

By Robert Bellaire
FORMER UNITED PRESS CORRESPONDENT
IN TOKYO

Six miserable months of terror and starvation in Japan's worst concentration camp, as told by a man who lived through it. You will wonder how he did it.

In the darkened hallways of the Tokyo concentration camp, the murmur of muffled voices could be heard faintly. Outside, grim-faced Japanese sentries paced their posts, guns alert for use against any of us who might attempt the desperate break for freedom into the wintry night.

In the darkness, half a dozen Roman Catholic priests were quietly saying Mass. They spoke from memory, not daring to light even one candle, for the Japanese police had forbidden religious services in camp. Glass fruit jars served as chalices and water as wine. Several times during the night, footsteps were heard on the stairway leading up from the main office. The mumbling voices fell silent. The footsteps hesitated, then receded. The mumbling began again. In all, seventeen priests said their Masses. They did not know the penalty if they were detected, but every night for two weeks they ran the risk without being caught.

After the Swiss authorities repeatedly protested against this anti-Christian regulation, the Japanese police finally grudgingly permitted the saying of Mass publically.

This was the concentration camp where the Swiss authorities labeled "the worst in Japan." We had been arrested and brought here the day after war broke out, and locked up, thirteen men to a room. The building was formerly a French Catholic orphan asylum, but now heavy bars covered the windows, barbed wire entwined the grounds, and thirty armed sentries guarded us day and night.

A cynical Japanese premier once gave his officials these instructions for dealing with restless, starving peasants: "Neither let them live, nor let them die."

This same policy was adopted against us as enemy nationals. For years, Japanese propagandists loudly extolled the alleged virtues of Bushido, the moral code of Japan. They said Bushido was a higher moral code than Western Christianity or chivalry. But we who have experienced Bushido in this war have this definition for it: "Honor and respect your enemy—after he's dead."

On the first night of our internment, a bespectacled, moon-faced Jap detective in a shabby blue suit read the camp regulations. He barked at us in a menacing manner, frequently resting his hand on a revolver slung from his belt. Deprived of our shoes and shivering in the December night's cold, we sat huddled together in grim silence on the floor, as he read under the dim flicker of blacked-out lights.

"You will be shot on sight," he snapped, "if you try to escape. Don't forget this." He said we were all very suspicious characters and would be held incommunicado indefinitely, and he added that if we permitted light to leak through the blackout curtains, we would be deprived of all lights. In conclusion, he told us he was "very sorry" for us because the camp kitchen hadn't yet begun to operate, and therefore we would somehow have to feed ourselves for the next three days.

When the camp kitchen opened three days later, it was evident that we would not receive sufficient food to maintain our health. The standard breakfast was a cup of hot water slightly colored with tea leaves, one slice of bread, and ground fishbones which smelled like rotten fish as far as fifteen feet away. Lunch frequently consisted of greenish whale meat or rotten fish, with boiled alfalfa. A small, ground meatball and a boiled onion, or fish and rice, were typical dinners.

Even before the war, police investigations showed that ground meat served in the leading hotels of Tokyo and Yokohama was from dead cats and dogs. So there was no reason for us to believe we might get anything better in the worst concentration camp in all Japan. On holidays the cooks failed to appear and we had to eat as best we could.

(Continued on page 49)
Approximately forty-five prisoners were held in the Tokyo camp. There were thirteen Americans, a dozen British, a dozen French-Canadian priests, several Dutch and Belgians, and one Honduran. Once a week we were offered a bath—in the same water thirty policemen and several greasy cooks had used ahead of us. A number of us received serious bites from the scorpions and spiders in the bath water. We also had our share of bedbugs and lice but kept them under control by organizing cleaning parties.

Every month we had a superficial medical examination. On one occasion we complained that diseases were spreading because of overcrowded conditions.

"There are too many men in our room," we said.

To which a Stanford-educated Japanese doctor replied, "Why don’t you pull skirts on some of them?"

Three times a day we were compelled to stand in line for roll call. At all times we were ordered to wear white cloth badges with our number, name and nationality painted on them. Inmates of various rooms were forbidden to speak to prisoners in other rooms; however, we risked punishment by passing messages back and forth through a hastily constructed camp grapevine. For two months, Swiss Legation officials were not permitted to see us, and the Red Cross representative was not allowed to call until the end of our months.

During the first two months of imprisonment, we were on display like circus freaks. High government officials, some bringing wives and children, visited the camp daily to see "white men behind bars." This attraction was especially popular with army officers; we were forced to stand while they stared at us. Frequently our visitors gave us lectures, telling us that Japanese forces would soon capture Washington and London; and until then we could expect to remain incommunicado.

"The era of the white man is ended," they said, "and Emperor Hirohito will now run the world."

At the Yokohama concentration camp, authorities ordered their prisoners to carry paper Japanese flags in a Victory Day parade after the fall of Singapore. When prisoners refused, the chief of police harangued and threatened them.

On several occasions during the winter, the camp’s meager coal supply became exhausted, and through the days without heat, some of us remained in bed to keep from freezing. Almost all of us suffered such severely chapped hands that our knuckles cracked open. Suffering from the cold was increased by the regulation forbidding us to wear shoes indoors.

We were easily able to predict visits from the Red Cross. One Britisher, whose hobby was mathematics, carefully kept a chart of the daily sugar ration, and as soon as the chart showed a sudden spurt upward, we knew the Japs were expecting a Red Cross inspection. We never did receive anything from the Red Cross except visits.

Attempts to Destroy Morale

Worse than the physical suffering were the mental tortures to which we were subjected. Frequently, plainclothes men read us a Japanese report alleging American atrocities against Japanese internees, with the implication that serious retaliation was being planned against us. On one occasion we were told that a gang of "rightists," intent upon killing us, had attempted to raid our camp.

The police claimed credit for saving us but said it might be impossible the next time. Some of the prisoners were questioned about prewar activities and threatened with court-martial if they refused to tell the truth. The obvious intention of the Japanese was to break down our morale—but they failed, although they were unable to understand why.

The priests and missionaries were instructed daily. Some of the priests were accused of having had mistresses among their parishioners and constantly were the butt of the guards’ obscene jokes. The missionaries were not permitted to see their wives in their homes through-
To get more mileage from the gasoline you buy, do these two things—

Have your spark plugs cleaned and adjusted every 4,000 miles.

Replace badly worn plugs promptly.

**REMEmber,—dirty or worn spark plugs waste as much gas as one gallon in ten.**

"Keep 'em Rolling"
Buy War Bonds and Stamps

AC SPARK PLUG DIVISION • General Motors Corporation