Japan Stands Revealed

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There is another side to their valour. When the question of patriotism is not at stake, Japanese as a whole show a curious lack of determination, and, under certain circumstances, a lack of courage. In sports and recreative pursuits, such as long-distance swimming or mountain climbing, they will often show a surprising want of perseverance, and unashamedly admit defeat or incapacity long before we, in the ordinary course of events, would think it dignified to do so. A case in point: I, an English and a Japanese friend set out to climb Mount Fuji (12,365 feet) one mid-winter's day. We had carefully made all preparations beforehand, and our Japanese companion was the most experienced mountaineer of our team.

We had barely reached the ridge of Hoeizan, the only part presenting any real difficulty, and which is about two-thirds of the way up, when our Japanese colleague suddenly sat down and declared that it was impossible, adding that many had lost their lives in the attempt. This assertion contained a modicum of truth, for of the very few parties who previously had tried to reach the summit in winter a few had actually perished by being caught in blizzards and, as a result, sitting down too long waiting for the air to clear and getting fatally frost-bitten before making up their minds to do something about it. On the occasion in question, and at his own request, we left our fellow-climber at one of the mountain huts for summer climbers and proceeded to the summit without difficulty. We felt sure that he was capable of descending by himself, and on our return, about midnight, were thankful to find that he had apparently done so. We were less pleased on reaching the foot of the mountain to find that he had reported that we had gone on against his advice and that it would be necessary to send out search parties to locate our remains.

Fear of Ghosts

All Japanese have a great fear of apparitions and things supernatural, as the following story will indicate. I was on a simple walking tour in the mountains with a British and a Japanese officer who spoke perfect English. Darkness came on when we were still two miles from our destination, a mountain hot spring inn. It certainly was an unusually dark night. We were following a road through a wood. I was ahead, and it was difficult to keep to the road, and avoid turning off between the trees at the many sharp bends. All at once the Japanese officer protested: "It is madness to go on; you don't know what might come out of the wood." At first we thought that he was trying to scare us with a bogy story, until we found that he was almost trembling with panic for fear of ghosts.

Finally we calmed him down and placed him between us, and thus escorted him for the rest of the journey, but he was as shaken as he was grateful for our protection when we arrived at the inn. Yet we were sure that he was not a man to be found wanting in courage when it was a case of military duty.

So much for the almost suicidal psychology of the Japanese fighting man. He is able to put up with hunger, and hardships if not too long sustained, but he certainly is not tough in the sense that New Zealanders and Americans are; and when it comes to the implements of war placed in his hands it is quite a different story.

No Mechanical Tradition

It must, in the first place, be remembered that the Japanese have no mechanical tradition comparable to ours extending over several centuries. It is only recently that they have been able to construct mechanisms and armaments of any kind, and, judging from Japanese mechanisms that I have had in my hands, especially bicycles and motor cars, and from the glances I have had at military mechanisms and equipment, I should say that such things are always inferior to our own.

Take the case of their capital ships. These are most imposing structures, but I have heard on quite good authority that in their construction money-saving short cuts and cheapened material are used in non-essential parts.

This is in line with what I have actually been shown by a leading foreign engineer engaged by the Japanese to organise a huge factory for the construction of small cars following closely the lines of the famous Austin Seven. He said that whereas, in the Ford car there were some 150 different metals used, he found the greatest difficulty in convincing the board and engineers that it was absolutely necessary to employ at least 40 or 50 different kinds, especially in the case of the more expensive metals.

In commercial goods, too, cheapening devices and materials are often used, as New Zealanders may occasionally have found when buying Japanese goods. There is the case of the elegant looking pencil which had graphite for more than an inch from either end but something different or nothing at all in the centre. When the importer protested that the goods received were not up to sample he received the reply, "Please examine the sample." He then found that the centre three inches of the pencil were entirely innocent of lead.

I have seen too many motor cars broken down in Japan, too many locomotives on the main train lines with broken or damaged parts bound together with copper wire and with missing lock-nuts or no nuts at all, to believe that the mechanisms of the guns and other offensive weapons in Japanese warships are always kept up to 100 per cent. efficiency. As to the actual serving and handling of the guns, this is much too great a secret for anyone but the actual Japanese personnel ever to observe, but on account of their smaller stature and a general tendency to neglect precision in movement it is probable that their gunnery is inferior to ours on those grounds alone, while it is certain that they have been unable to keep up to date with us in the highly specialised art of gunnery control which we taught them during the last European war.

"Not Bad" Pilots

In the air I am more competent to speak, for I have flown many times with Japanese military pilots. It was our opinion that they were not bad pilots, nor were they very good ones. Either they were forgetful or they were careless. In an open training aeroplane, a pilot is made conscious that his machine is side-slipping by the extra draught on one or the other cheek. Our Japanese pupils had to be reminded of this elementary fact many more times than it was necessary to tell British learners.

The ground crews were even more negligent. It required a great deal of urging to convince them that lumps of mud adhering to the undersides of the wings tended to retard the air-speed of the plane and that these must be daily washed off. Again, both ground staff and pilots were sometimes oblivious of the fact that an engine "missing," if only occasionally, on one of its cylinders was dangerous to take off with. One fatal accident occurred partly from this cause. The pilot, knowing by his revolution-counter that the engine was "missing," disregarded advice and took off. Finding that he could not gain height to clear some trees at the end of the aerodrome, he turned back, then made the fatal mistake of looking over the side of his plane and estimated his speed by the rate at which the grass appeared to be rushing past beneath him instead of keeping his eyes on his air-speed indicator in the cockpit as he should have done.

As a result he side-slipped, crashed, and was killed, while his observer was seriously injured. I remember it because I had only just changed places with the observer.

Southward Aims

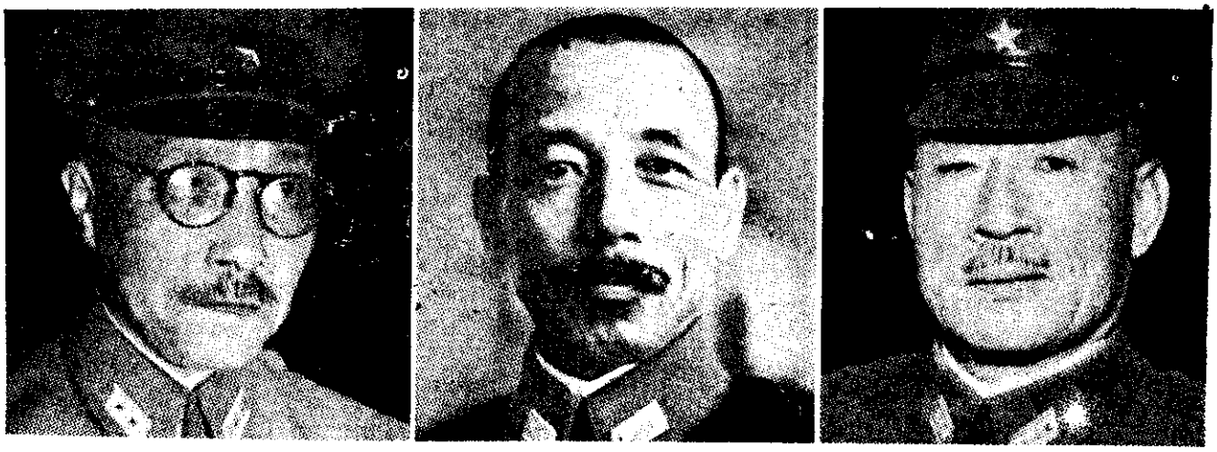
Of Japan's southward aims it is hardly necessary to speak. They have been discussed and have been patent to all for nearly a decade; in fact, Japan's covetousness of the Philippines was no secret 20 years ago. Next she began to cast affectionate eyes on the Dutch East Indies.

It was about then that the intensive militarism in boys' schools, alluded to at the beginning of this article, began. Siam, now Thailand, followed, Japan for years having made every kind of attempt to do by peaceful means what she has now done rough-shod in a day. Had it not been for the foresight of British statesmen, Japan would have had a walk-over at Singapore. At the same time, it was the vigorous policy of fortifying Singapore that especially piqued Japan to seize it if possible.

Lost Opportunities

Those who have not had time to read much about the medieval and more recent history of Japan may not know that from the year 1660 until the Restoration of the Emperor's sovereignty in 1867, Japan shut her doors to foreign intrusion.

Not only did she shut her doors to foreigners, but she neglected the easy acquisition of all the land that lay to the south of her — the Philippines, Malay, the Dutch East Indies, New Guinea, and the greatest prize of all, Australia and New Zealand. Now she thinks that she can gain by force what she was too stupid to take for the asking. One could have commiserated with her over her lost opportunities, but for her underhand attack of the present, and for her departure from her age-old tradition of *Bushido*, who will ever forgive her?



GENERALS TOJO, YAMADA AND SUGIYAMA, the "big three" of the Japanese army. General Tojo took over the leadership of his country last October from Prince Konoye; General Sugiyama is the army's Chief of Staff; and General Yamada, who once commanded the Central China expedi tionary force, is a member of the Supreme War Council