

JAPAN AFTER TWO MONTHS:

A Former Resident Answers Some Questions

THE day after the attack on Pearl Harbour we asked Colonel Orde Lees to discuss Japan in a special article. Colonel Orde Lees, it will be remembered, lived in Japan for many years, has a Japanese wife, and for a portion of his stay in Japan was attached to the Japanese Navy. With other British and American people he was evacuated with his wife and child in the last ship to sail from Japan before the crisis reached breaking point.

Last week at our request he called on us again. We wanted to know what he thought of events after two months, and how far he would like to forecast the future. Here, almost word for word, is a conversation between the Colonel and the Editor taken down by a stenographer.

Editor: To begin with, Colonel, we have been at war with Japan for about two months. In that time Japan has taken Hongkong, just about captured the Philippines, and now is at the gates of Singapore and in New Guinea. Does it surprise you?

Colonel: No, not very much. Having lived in Japan I was well aware of the strength of the enemy, and it seems to be a British failing to underestimate the strength of the enemy.

Editor: Yes, that is our British failing, and it's true that in this case we did very greatly under-estimate the Japanese. One of our senior officers told me the other day that the official view in New Zealand until quite recently was that the Japanese army was not first-rate or second-rate, but third or fourth rate. Of course that is hopelessly wrong. But what are the facts?

Col.: I think the Japanese can be considered inferior man for man to our own forces, but for a conscripted army they certainly are as efficient as any other. Their efficiency has always seemed to me to be rather academic in the matter of training, but one must go by what one has seen—in China especially and in Manchuria—and they have certainly shown in those places that they have a great deal of strategic and tactical knowledge. It has always been recognised by observers that the training of the Japanese army has been for fighting in Manchuria against Chinese, and therefore what has surprised me is that they have been so efficient against soldiers of the western races.

Ed.: Then, you don't think that this great offensive they are now carrying out has been part of their military plan for years?

Col.: Twelve months ago I would have answered with a strong negative, but from the facts themselves it would now appear that everything had been thought out beforehand.

Rehearsal in Formosa?

Ed.: It has even been suggested that Formosa has been used as a kind of rehearsing ground for a drive against Singapore. Formosa, I suppose, has been forbidden territory to the outside world for a long time?

Col.: That is exactly what I was going to say, but you anticipated me. It was strictly forbidden for us for-

eigners to travel in Formosa in the last two or three years. I myself wanted to visit a friend there and found it impossible to do so. I have, however, been to Formosa, and from the formation of the ground I should think it is very probable that the island was used as a practice ground for attacks in Malaya.

Ed.: If that is the case then Japan must have given herself special equipment—midget tanks for the jungle and all that kind of thing?

Col.: Yes. That is undoubtedly the case. The terrain of Formosa is very similar to that of Malaya, with the exception that it is less tropical and therefore has less jungle; but the marshy ground in both is very similar.

Army Strength Kept Secret

Ed.: Is it a surprise to you, Colonel, that the army and the air force especially were so well equipped?

Col.: Yes, it certainly is. It was the general opinion among foreigners in Japan that so much equipment had been used and lost in China that the Japanese would not be able to make a major offensive against great powers for a long time.

Ed.: Did the Japanese army when you were in Japan show itself to the people? Would there be parades in the streets that would include tanks, guns, and all the other equipment of modern war?

Col.: Practically never. Certainly tanks had to travel by road from place to place and could not help being seen, but to take photographs of any such procession would have meant instantaneous arrest. The only big military demonstrations I saw were processions of men carrying the ashes of their deceased comrades sent home from China for interment. But as for the army marching in demonstration with any view to reassuring the public, such a thing is practically never seen in Japan. So careful were they that nothing should be seen that when we were travelling not only was there a detective in our railway coach, but all the blinds were pulled down and kept down while we were, passing through areas of military activity.

Home Leave—And Drunkenness

Ed.: Do Japanese soldiers in Japan get any home leave?



"... EVERYTHING had been thought out beforehand": The above photograph of Japanese marines engaged in invasion exercises was taken as long ago as the beginning of 1936

Col.: Well, I can give you the case of my brother-in-law, who was a Japanese conscript soldier, a married man with two children. He was away in China for two years without any home leave, and during his training I believe he saw his family once a month.

Ed.: Then the Japanese soldier could be trusted to keep military secrets?

Col.: Yes. My brother-in-law would not give the slightest information. He would not even say where he had been in China. I should say he was a good type of Japanese soldier.

Ed.: So the Japanese soldier does not get drunk on leave and talk under that influence?

Col.: No, serious drunkenness is very rare indeed. It is in fact difficult on account of the wishy-washy stuff they drink—sake. On that it is very difficult to get drunk.

Ed.: Do Japanese officers mingle with the men off duty?

Col.: Yes, quite freely, but I think a Japanese officer would draw the line at actually interchanging drinks with his men.

Ed.: Are the officers usually selected from the ranks?

Col.: Yes, nearly all of them are. But they have to show educational qualifications, and graduate through the military colleges before receiving their commission.

Discipline is Strict

Ed.: What would be the difference in pay between a senior non-commissioned officer and a junior officer?

Col.: The pay of all ranks is paltry. A junior officer would be receiving no more than 2 yen 50 a day, which is in New Zealand money about 3/9. A full Colonel would not be receiving

more than four times that amount—say 15/- a day. They have, however, their food and clothing.

Ed.: The discipline in the army, I take it, is very strict?

Col.: The discipline is strict, but discipline is a habit with the Japanese. Partly owing to their school-teaching, and partly to the family system, they obey authority without question. It is ingrained in them. I have never heard of any case of a Japanese soldier having an argument with an officer. Another curious thing is that in the army they speak an almost different language—that is, things are not called by their common names. It would be like this. Whenever they wished to use the word "house" they would have to say "personal domicile." If they wished to speak of a fire they would say "incendiary thing"; and so on. A most foolish system, it seems to us, but they claim that it helps to maintain discipline.

Experience in Nanking

Ed.: Then if discipline is so important and so strict, the abominations that we believe took place after the capture of Nanking must have been permitted?

Col.: What happened at Nanking has been so well authenticated that one must believe such things did occur. But personally I am inclined to think that the men got loose rather than that they were let loose.

Ed.: Was drunkenness a factor there?

Col.: To some extent, I think. When the soldiers were given leave they got hold of unaccustomed liquor and the reaction from months of hardship made beasts of them.

Ed.: We are told that before Hongkong surrendered hundreds of thousands of bottles of spirits were des-

(Continued on next page)