

¶Will the Japanese soldier revolt?

THE DISILLUSIONED JAPANESE

A JAPANESE soldier was shipped home from the China front in a barrel. This method of transportation was devised because he had lost both his arms and legs and it would have been difficult to put him on a stretcher. When the barrel arrived the village folk assembled in deep silence, to greet him. But a couple of kids thought the man looked funny with only his head sticking out of the barrel, and they giggled. The soldier, who did not think it was funny, shouted over to the silent men and women and to the embarrassed police for a merciful bullet. But they did not kill him and so, in a last, supreme effort, he bit off his tongue, which is one Japanese way to commit suicide.

The story, suppressed by the benevolent press, spread like wildfire. Seventy million people, from the snowy peaks of Hokkaido down to the bamboo forests of Kagoshima, were shocked. So were the authorities who had done their utmost to keep Japan's stupefied millions unaware of the steady stream of bleeding humanity pouring back from the front lines.

Through the courtesy of Japanese friends I was permitted to look around in Tokyo's biggest military hospital. There they were, in their hospital kimonos of cool, white linen, attended by smiling doctors, smoking their cheap Japanese cigarettes, staring up to the blank ceiling with faces too young to look so old. A dark and quite alarming glimmer in their eyes set me thinking about the proverbial loyalty of the soldiers of the Rising Sun and their unconditional readiness to be slaughtered in the interest of Emperor and nation.

That dark glimmer in the eyes of the Japanese soldier has become a pressing problem, haunting gold-braided generals and semi-gods in morning coats. The great question, looming more tangibly than the specters of foreign intervention and of guerrilla warfare, is this: Will the Japanese army revolt?

Information on the subject is scanty if not altogether unavailable. An almost ridiculous secrecy, shrouding the movements of the Japanese army and navy, sucks in the individual soldier who goes to the front. His parents, his wife, and his friends

have not the faintest idea about his destination. Not even the captain of the transport knows where he will have to unload his cargo of valiant cannon fodder. It is only after he is out on the high seas that a wireless message from the War Office tells him his destination.

People back home, scanning the newspapers for a clue, find themselves utterly confused by dispatches from the front which run like this:

"The 00 unit, under second lieutenant 00, advanced from its position at 00 before six o'clock this morning and took the walled city of 00, inflicting heavy damage on the stubborn enemy. There were no Japanese casualties."

The coupled zeroes, pronounced *maru-maru* in Japanese, and usually translated with "undisclosed" in the local English language press, offer small comfort to waiting mothers and sweethearts.

It was the Front-Letter Scandal which for the first time revealed that coupled zeroes were not all that came back from the front. Individual soldiers in their Chinese garrisons wrote at great length to relatives and friends about the position, strength, movements, and plans of their units, and about the orders under which they were

marching; complained of the food; reported the formidable resistance of the enemy; and wound up by sending their love. The censoring authorities, after passing on hundreds of thousands of such "revealing" letters, concluded that this was more than harmless and naive tale-telling. Censorship was tightened immediately and efforts were made to recover part of the sinister mail.

Another scandal broke a few months ago. Here in the much discussed Comfort-Bag Scandal, the evildoers were inside Japan.

To elevate and cheer the soldiers in China for the greater glory of the Rising Sun, people had been preparing comfort-bags, small parcels containing homemade whiskey, cigarettes, soap, a toothbrush, a book, and other useful utensils. Through the good offices of the War Ministry these bags were passed on to the soldiers, anonymously. The soldiers were glad to get them and everything worked out all right—until, quite recently, counter-propaganda suddenly was unleashed by the authorities. People, it was intimated, should not bother any longer with these silly gifts; Nippon's soldiers, eager to fulfill their heroic mission with a minimum of luxury and comfort, had no use for them in the field.