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Research Note

GRANT K. GOODMAN

“As The Days Go By: Throbs of Grateful Hearts” Reeducation Under the Japanese of Filipino POWs at Camp Del Pilar, Dau, Pampanga, 1942

This research note presents samples of previously unpublished testimonial letters written by Filipino officer prisoners of war (POW) to their Japanese POW camp commander in 1942. A preface to these letters, 184 in all and kept in the US National Archives, provides a glimpse of the day-to-day activities of the reeducation propaganda conducted by the Japanese Propaganda Corps in Camp Del Pilar, Dau, Pampanga. The Filipino officers' expressions of gratitude showered upon the Japanese show another dimension of the otherwise tumultuous occupation period.

KEYWORDS: SECOND WORLD WAR · JAPANESE OCCUPATION · WARTIME PROPAGANDA · DOCUMENTARY SOURCES · GREATER EAST ASIA CO-PROSPERITY SPHERE

This research note seeks to examine the carefully compiled collection of 184 testimonial letters written by Filipino officer prisoners of war (POW) to their Japanese POW camp commander. These letters, filed under the somewhat emotional title and subtitle “As the Days Go By” and “Throbs of Grateful Hearts,” uniformly express profound appreciation for the reeducation that these Filipino officers received between 17 July and 10 August 1942. Thus, what becomes important for the historian is to try to analyze both the purpose and the process by which the Japanese Hodobu (Propaganda Corps) sought to reeducate these Filipinos and, in turn, to comprehend the seemingly positive response of those same Filipinos to this Japanese effort.

Dual Shocks

At the outset one must recount very briefly the dual shocks to the Philippines, then under American colonial control, of the invasion of the islands by the Japanese and the speed of their advance and the defeat of the combined American and Filipino military defenders. Apparently no one, and especially no one of high rank—including Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the commanding officer of the USAFFE (United States Army Forces in the Far East), which included both American and Filipino troops—had truly anticipated a Japanese attack on the Philippines. The simplest explanation of the utter surprise in the Philippines when the Japanese did invade is psychological, namely, the somewhat incredible presumption that “they would never dare.” Further, there had been nurtured for many years in the Islands another important psychological phenomenon, that is, the invincibility of the United States. Pipsqueak, myopic Japanese soldiers, the Filipinos and the Americans believed, would, if they indeed cared to invade, make a mess of such a crazy undertaking that their bodies would literally form stacks of death on the shores of whatever Philippine beachhead they might attempt to secure.

Accordingly the truly tragic result of the Japanese invasion was harshly revealed in the complete surrender of the USAFFE in Bataan on 19 April 1942 and in Corregidor on 10 May 1942. Hostilities were at an end, but the aftereffects of that unconditional American surrender linger to the present day. Indeed, for the Americans the Bataan Death March of American POWs

to Camp O’Donnell has become an integral if shameful part of American history and folklore.

For the purposes of this research note, however, it is most significant that, even before the surrender, hunger and disease had not only taken a toll on the USAFFE fighters but had also generated very unfortunate serious tensions between American and Filipino soldiers. Racial epithets and bitter mutual accusations became frequent between the two retreating nationalities in the face of shortages of food, clothing, medicine, and ammunition. Unwarranted American accusations of cowardice or duplicity on the part of the Filipinos were not uncommon. Concurrently Filipino disillusionment with America’s visible inadequacies contrary to its touted invincibility increased rapidly.

What may be forgotten today is that the Japanese were extremely sensitive to and cognizant of those tensions. They fully intended to take as much advantage of them as they could. One of their rather sophisticated techniques, evident after the surrender, was to humiliate their American captives before the eyes of their Filipino captives. During the Death March the Americans suffered the most, as they were beaten up, kicked, and deprived of food and water en route to their final destination at Camp O’Donnell, the half-finished barracks built originally for the nascent Philippine Army before the war. Here the Japanese separated the Americans from the Filipinos, having made relatively generous plans for the treatment of the latter.

Reeducation of Filipino POWs

As any victorious occupying power might, Japan’s general intention in its occupation of the Philippines was to engender, in so far as possible, loyalty to Japan among the populace and, to that end, to bring the Philippines as quickly as possible into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. For those purposes the Japanese hoped first of all to utilize the extant corps of elite leaders who had been in key positions under the Commonwealth regime, which was established by the Americans in 1935 as a ten-year transition government to prepare the country for full independence. Further, the Japanese also determined to create a different and additional corps of younger “new leaders” who would be inculcated with Japanese values and imbued with the “ideals” of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.

In line with this latter intention, the Japanese military decided to “reeducate” as many of the Filipino officer POWs as practicable. And in early July 1942 Gen. Wachi Takami, chief of staff of the Imperial Japanese

Army, and Lt. Col. Katsuya, chief of the Propaganda Corps, founded the “Educational Corps” at Camp Del Pilar, Dau, Pampanga. The announced purpose of the school was “to train Filipino prisoners of war in the Japanese ideology in order to fit them into the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, and to reconstruct a new Philippines under Japanese doctrines” (Educational Corps, Camp Dau, Pampanga [1942], 1). Filipino officer POWs who were ill or incapacitated were to be freed immediately, and the rest were to receive “spiritual training and rejuvenation” at the school at Camp Del Pilar. Two Filipino generals, Brig. Gen. Guillermo Francisco and Brig. Gen. Mateo Capinpin, were selected to head the school under Japanese supervision. Both these officers actually attended the first class and graduated with 400 fellow Filipino officers on 10 August 1942. General Francisco subsequently headed Camp Del Pilar under Col. Ymamura Yeikichi (ibid.). It was specifically Col. Ymamura to whom all of the trainees’ letters, which I will discuss, were addressed.

There is a preamble to the 184 letters (found in a bound volume at the US National Archives Building in College Park, MD) in which a day-to-day account of the reeducation program is provided ([Diary and Letters of Gratitude Sent to Yeikichi Ymamura 1942]). I include it here both as an example of the excellence of the Japanese planning of such a short intensive course of study (from 17 July to 10 August) and because the contents of the course clearly had a very positive impact on the enervated yet receptive Filipino officer POWs.

July 17, 1942: Left Camp O'Donnell early in the morning; arrived at Camp del Pilar about noon. The Ymamura Group was organized into three companies and assigned respective areas of responsibilities.

July 18, 1942: General cleaning of barracks and surroundings and construction of additional emergency latrines.

July 19, 1942: The group continued the cleaning of the barracks as well as the construction of the latrines.

July 20, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – lecture by our group commander, Col. Ymamura; 10:00 a.m. – addresses by Col. Katsuya and Col. Ito at the Assembly Hall; 5:32 p.m. – address by Dr. Mariano de los Santos at the Assembly Hall.

July 21, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – classroom discussions presided over by Mr. Dominador Ambrosio, assistant instructor; 7:00 p.m. – informal talk by Mr. Pedro Aunario at the Japanese Headquarters, attended only by group commanders and staff officers.

July 22, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – speech by Mr. Pedro Aunario at the Assembly Hall; 3:00 p.m. – message by Lieut. Kano of the Japanese Imperial Army in Manila at the Assembly Hall; 8:00 p.m. – first moving picture show at the Assembly Hall, depicting Japan's might on land, sea, and air.

July 23, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – speeches by the Rev. T. Ayura and Dr. Julio Luz at the Assembly Hall; 1:00 p.m. – inter-group athletic competition in which the Ymamura Group placed fourth; 7:00 p.m. – moving pictures of Japan's industries.

July 24, 1942: 11:00 a.m. – general inspection of barracks by staff officers from the Imperial Japanese Headquarters in Manila; 1:00 p.m. – singing of Japanese patriotic songs before the inspectors at the Assembly Hall; 7:00 p.m. – speech by Prof. Miki, one of Japan's foremost philosophers.

July 25, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – classroom instructions; 3:00 p.m. – classroom instructions; 7:00 p.m. – speech by Dean Conrado Benitez, manager of the NACOCO; 10:00 p.m. – Tagalog movie (*Dugo ng Alipin*).

July 26, 1942: 8:00 a.m. – first Catholic mass at the Assembly Hall; 3:00 p.m. – musical entertainment by the Misses Anparo Karagdag and Diana Foy and party.

July 27, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – classroom instructions; 3:00 p.m. – Major General Kawani gave message at the Assembly Hall, followed by Auditor General Teofilo Sison; 7:00 p.m. – speeches by Col. Katsuya and Rev. Ayura.

July 28, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – speeches by Lieut. Musisuki and by representatives from the seven groups at the Assembly Hall; 3:00 p.m. – speech by Mr. Hamamoto in our classroom; 7:00 p.m. – moving pictures of athletics in Japan.

July 29, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – classroom discussions; 3:00 p.m. – speeches by Commissioner of Justice Jose P. Laurel and of Asst. Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce Jose Sanvictores.

July 30, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – Capt. M. Romualdez gave a lecture on the monetary system in the Philippines at the classroom; 3:00 p.m. – speech by Commissioner Jorge B. Vargas at the Assembly Hall; 7:00 p.m. – musical program rendered by representatives from the seven groups, followed by moving pictures.

July 31, 1942: 8:45 a.m. – classroom discussions; 3:00 p.m. – speeches by Major Sugiyano and Commissioner Benigno Aquino at the Assembly Hall.

August 1, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – message from Rev. Ayura at the Assembly Hall; 1:00 p.m. – speech by Marquis Tokogawa, president of the Japan–Philippines Association; 7:00 p.m. – speech by Dean Francisco Benitez, followed by a Tagalog film, *Ang Handog na Banal*.

August 2, 1942: 8:30 a.m. – Catholic mass at the Assembly Hall; 3:00 p.m. – lecture by Lt. Col. Ito on “Yamato Gokoro” which he likened to the cherry blossom blooming and smiling under the sun; 5:00 p.m. – flag ceremony, followed by a brief message from Gen. Artemio Ricarte.

August 3, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – speech by Gen. Artemio Ricarte at the Assembly Hall; 3:00 p.m. – instruction in Japanese close order drill at parade ground; 8:00 p.m. – speech by Prof. Ka of the University of Meiji.

August 4, 1942: 11:00 a.m. – Inspection of barracks; 3:00 p.m. – fatigue work.

August 5, 1942: 9:00 a.m. – fatigue work; 7:00 p.m. – message of Gen. Honma to Filipino people as read by Mr. Hamamoto at the Assembly Hall, followed by Tagalog film “Ang Kaban Ng Tipan”.

August 6, 1942: preparation of records and announcement of the holding of the commencement exercises on August 9 in the morning.

August 7, 1942: general cleaning of barracks.

In addition to the special lecturers mentioned above, instructors were carefully selected for their teaching ability, scholastic attainment, and military proficiency (Educational Corps, Camp Dau, Pampanga [1942], 2). These instructors were almost all Filipino officer POWs, most of whom had been among the best and the brightest when they were selected for

officer training in the Commonwealth Army before the war. In toto there were three classes, and the last batch graduated on 18 September 1942. The letters examined here were all from the first class.

Upon completion of the courses all trainees were given some degree of choice in their assignments. Positions available to them were: (1) instructor in Camp Dau itself; (2) coastal defense under the Japanese Army; (3) Propaganda Corps; (4) government jobs in the civil service; and (5) Bureau of Constabulary (*ibid.*, 1). Appointments to the Japanese-controlled Constabulary were usually given to former Philippine Constabulary officers. Those so assigned were provided with passes to go home and visit their families and then to report back on a certain date for further training.

Graduation Ceremony

Upon graduation from Camp Del Pilar all trainees were required to sign an oath of loyalty to the Imperial Army. The commencement ceremony for this first group on 10 August is recorded in great detail. Present at the event were Philippine Executive Commission Chairman Jorge B. Vargas and Commissioners Claro Recto, Quintin Paredes, Antonio de las Alas, plus Consul Kihara Jitaro. After the guests had ascended the stage, the entire gathering faced east and paid their respects to the Emperor of Japan.

The Tribune (1942, 1–2) has this report on the historic graduation ceremony:

Lieutenant-Colonel Katuya [sic], chief of the Hodoo-bu, was one of the first speakers. . . .

The great task of reconstruction of the Philippines rests to a great extent upon your shoulders,” declared Lt. Col. Katuya, chief of the Educational Corps, in his talk before the Filipino officers. He reminded them that the establishment of the course was made possible through the infinite and illustrious virtue of His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of Japan.

To educate war prisoners and to find employment for them during the course of the war is an example of benevolence unparalleled in the history of the world, Col. Katuya said. Such magnanimity and benevolence on the part of the Japanese Commander-in-Chief is but a reflection of the Imperial will whose consuming aim is to save the people of East Asia, he continued.

"Understanding such deep and broad spirit of Nippon, you men should march in the vanguard towards reconstruction of a new Philippines and cultivate such a spirit as the true foundation of Asia for the Asiatics," said the colonel, "Your sphere of activity along these lines will be only as wide as your recognition of the new generation and your faith in Nippon is deep and unbounded. Unless you cultivate your heart in that vein and forego worldly happiness for common good you can never lead the Philippines to a happy and prosperous end."

In conclusion, Col. Katuya expressed the desire that "you who have gone through a life and struggle from which you have gained great recognition, should stand in the front line of reconstruction of your country along the lines of politics, economics, industry, culture and education."

Former Major General Guillermo Francisco, who commanded the Filipino troops in the battle of Bataan up to the time of surrender, representing the graduating officers, declared that the men in the camp wish to express their gratitude to the leaders of the Educational Corps for "opening our eyes to the great realities of the times and to the great opportunities which these realities offer.

"It is high time for us to stand up as a nation and assert our Oriental self, and divest our system of the ideas and influences of the Occident which are bad and retain only those which are good and will add to our strength," said the former Filipino commander. "We must be imbued with the idea of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, understand fully the motives with which it was conceived and without mental reservation wholeheartedly collaborate with all the Oriental nations in its successful establishment, for therein lies our salvation as a nation.

"Although we love Japan and her people from the bottom of our hearts," he concluded, "reciprocating that love of the Japanese people for us Filipinos so sentimentally expressed by Colonel Katuya in one of his lectures to us, and although we believe without mental reservation in the great idea of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, with full trust and confidence in the uprightness, magnanimity and benevolence of the Japanese Empire, however, we express our deepest sentiments that we love our country more."

Accompanied by the band from Camp O'Donnell, the graduating, now former, Filipino officer POWs sang "Aikoku" in Japanese. The playing of "Auld Lang Syne" and the shouting of "Banzai" thrice, in unison, to the emperor ended the commencement ceremony (ibid., 2).

Letters to Yeikichi Ymamura

The letters to Ymamura (sometimes spelled Imamura) from the Filipino officer POWs were mostly dated 2 August, although a few were written as early as 30 July. A beautifully hand-printed dedication precedes the collection, which is titled "As The Days Go By" (fig. 1). It reads:

To Yeikichi Ymamura

whose fatherly solicitude in our personal well-being is equalled only by his sincere and intense efforts to bring about a complete understanding amongst our people of the lofty ideals of great and mighty JAPAN, this little book is gratefully dedicated. ([Diary and Letters of Gratitude Sent to Yeikichi Ymamura 1942])

The tone and verbiage of the 184 individual letters (182 in English, one in Spanish, and one in Tagalog) are actually somewhat monotonous because of the unanimity of the gratitude to and praise for Col. Ymamura and the reeducation program. Col. Ymamura himself is varyingly addressed as father, brother, friend, leader, guardian, counselor, and even "Reverend." Moreover, he is described with such adjectives as generous, kindhearted, noble, pious, selfless, inspiring, honorable, and even beloved. The experience at Camp Del Pilar is equally touted for giving these men "new hope, new courage, new life" and by showing them "the falsity of the Americans" and revealing to them that they too, like the Japanese, are truly "Oriental" and must generate a New Philippines as a stalwart member of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Some of the letters stress that the coming of the Japanese was indeed an act of "divine providence" and that God had decreed that the Philippines at long last would recognize its true Asianness.

In the paragraphs that follow I wish to quote entire letters from some of them, namely, Salvador Encinas (1942), V. Enriquez (1942), Felipe Pilapil Jr. (1942), and Vicente Garcia (1942), in order to exemplify what I have described above. These letters are among the longest and most expressive of the lot. In each instance the diction and the grammar, although at times clearly flawed, remain unaltered.

Camp Del Pilar, Dau, Pampanga
August 8, 1942

Col. Y. Imamura:

When I answered the call to the colors and I consented to fight Nippon, I did so in the belief that I was fighting against a ruthless invader who came here with no other purpose but to enslave my people and grab my land. At least American propaganda made me believe so, and I was happy that I had an opportunity to be able, in my own way, serve the Country that gave me birth. I went willingly to the fastness [sic] of Bataan and there endured hunger, fatigue, diseases and untold sufferings under the impression that I was serving a righteous cause. I stood my ground to the bitter end.

The fall of Bataan was the death knell of all hope for my Country, so I believed then. But Divine Providence works in His own mysterious way, for what I thought was the end turned [out] to be just the beginning, the dawn of a New Era.

I went to the Concentration Camp at O'Donnell relieved of all physical and mental agonies. While there I had time to meditate upon what was going on around me. My eyes, until then blinded by a haze of cloud began to open up. I asked myself: For what did I fought [sic]? Did I fight for my country? The final answer came to me on that fateful day, July 17, 1942, the day I arrived here. The cataract that covered up the eyes of my soul peeled off, and I saw the light of truth.

You, Sir, was [sic] the one that completely opened up my eyes. You made me see my errors. You made me realize that I fought for a false cause, that I was a Sohrab fighting a Rustum. You and your fellow instructors who are guiding us in this crucial hour of our lives have shown me the magnanimity of a Nipponese heart and the nobility of a Nipponese soul. At least I have come to find out that your Country, Great Nippon, has come to redeem us from slavery and bondage and bring to my dear Philippines the blessings of freedom and prosperity; that you and your countrymen, true to the traditions and teachings of your illustrious ancestors have come to spread KODO all over my land.

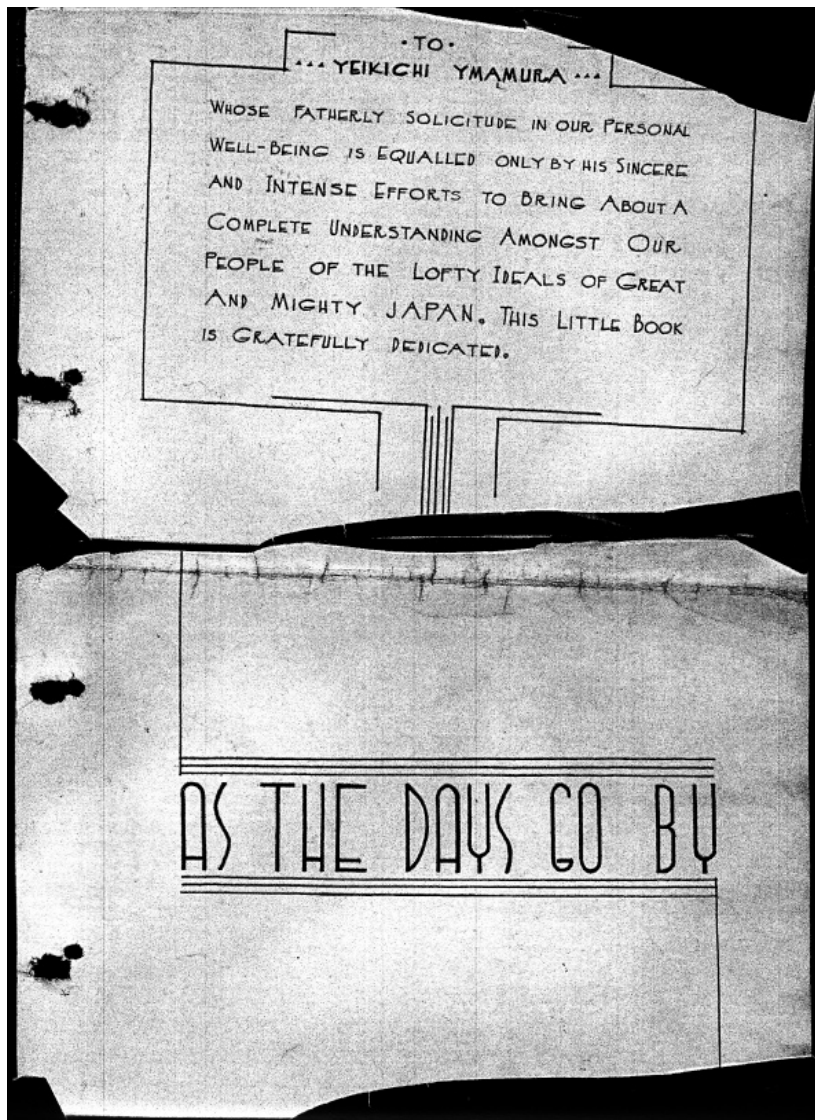


Fig. 1. Dedication and title page of the collection of letters to Yeikichi Ymamura, US National Archives and Records Administration

Lastly, Sir, allow me to express to you personally and to your loving wife my eternal gratitude for what you have done and are doing for me and my family. I have no means with which to repay you, Sir, but at least rest assured that in my breast beats for you a grateful and loyal heart.

Salvador Encinas

Camp Del Pilar, Pampanga
August 2, 1942

Before, during and shortly after this War, we knew little about Japan, its people, its might, its industrial life and its culture, spiritual and moral. The little we know pictured Japan or The Japanese as an aggressive people whose national ambition is to expand its frontiers by invading and grabbing [sic] the lands of its neighbors.

This War has erased this wrong impression from our minds, thanks to the high officers of the Imperial Japanese Forces in the Philippines and the many famous leaders of Nippon, who gave lectures and addressed us in very convincing manner stating the reasons for this War which has been waged by Japan, for the establishment of the Co-Prosperity Sphere in Greater East Asia and the intended role of the Philippines in this sphere. We cannot but be convinced by the soundness of their logic and idealism; and at the same time appreciate the spiritual and moral culture of the Japanese people.

I want to avail the use of this limited space to express my profound gratitude and pledge my wholehearted cooperation in the reconstruction of the New Philippines, in sincere response to the very able leadership and sterling character of our Group Leader, Col. Y. IMAMURA. In my brief association with Col. IMAMURA we find him to have a sympathetic heart and a kind soul, a true friend of the Filipinos.

(sgd.) V. Enriquez (Captain-FS)
25 Tangab, Sta. Mesa Heights, Manila

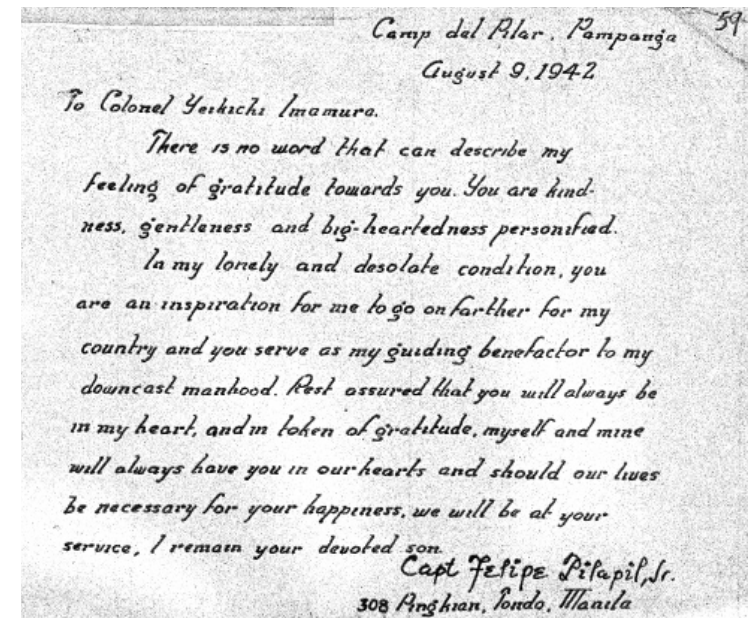


Fig. 2. Letter of Capt. Felipe Pilapil to Col. Yeikichi Imamura, 1942

Camp del Pilar, Pampanga
August 9, 1942

To Colonel Yeikichi Imamura,

There is no word that can describe my feeling of gratitude towards you. You are kindness, gentleness and big-heartedness personified.

In my lonely and desolate condition, you are an inspiration for me to go on farther for my country and you serve as my guiding benefactor to my downcast manhood. Rest assured that you will always be in my heart, and in token of gratitude, myself and mine will always have you in our hearts and should our lives be necessary for your happiness, we will be at your service, I remain your devoted son.

Capt. Felipe Pilapil, Jr.
308 Pingkian, Tondo, Manila

Camp del Pilar, Pampanga
August 2, 1942

To Col. Y. Ymamura:

You are the personification of Japan and all that she stands for in this [sic] Great Struggles. Your presence in this training camp have [sic] inspired me, if not all of us, to look upon Japan as the Saviour of all Orientals.

My contact with you has righted my course of thought and saved me from the pitfalls of America's sugar-coated propaganda. Your messages fell into fertile grounds.

The history of my country henceforth, will not be complete without your name and works playing a prominent role and occupying an important space.

Wishing you health and power always.

1st Lt. Vicente S. Garcia
273 Dapitan, Manila (Lingayen, Pangasinan)

Conclusion

These letters then, it seems to me, reveal a reality that perhaps has not been sufficiently recognized. That is, that in the terrible shock of defeat and surrender these obviously educated young men were extremely open to acts of kindness and generosity, which clearly were inherent in the Japanese reeducation program. Conversely the Japanese Propaganda Corps was remarkably adept and careful in their preparation for and execution of this reeducation program. The curriculum the Japanese devised was remarkably informative and focused from the Japanese point of view. Of course, it was entirely conducted in English, which by 1942 clearly was the language of the Philippine colonial elite. Also, one needs to remember that in Philippine culture kindness begets kindness, something the Americans did not always remember.

Further, the image of Japan generated in this reeducation was totally opposite to the Ogrish image that, again, the Americans had sought to impress upon the Filipinos. Indeed, it seems safe to say that a good part of

the sentiments expressed in these letters is probably relief that the Japanese behaved so differently from the expectation of the Filipino POWs. In short, if we try to read between the lines, perhaps they are expressing appreciation for the Japanese, who seem to be reasonable and decent human beings.

Moreover, the Filipinos had been told that at the end of the reeducation course they would be allowed to go home and choose a future career in their Japanese-occupied country. Accordingly, gratitude was not only logical, but it would also guarantee that hopefully the Japanese would abide by their promise.

In addition, the idea of further education, even reeducation, stirred a responsive chord among these relatively well-educated Filipino officer POWs. That the Japanese, whom none of them really knew, would take on the guise of educators was a tremendous plus. Philippine society, historically and especially under American colonial rule, has traditionally placed a very high value on education, and the Japanese reeducation program may well have been seen as an attractive opportunity to learn something entirely new.

Ultimately what one learns from these effusive letters (and effusiveness is very Philippine!) is that the Japanese had done a superb job in devising and carrying out this reeducation program. Impressively, too, for the variety of reasons suggested above, their Filipino officer POWs responded to it with what I believe to be genuine gratitude.

Note

The editorial office of this journal thanks Kendall Jones of the US National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD, for his kind assistance in providing access to and copies of the letters discussed in this research note. Thanks also to Paul Stephen Lim, for facilitating the correspondence between the editorial staff and Professor Goodman in the past couple of years.

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Grant K. Goodman was codirector, Center for East Asian Studies, University of Kansas, after having obtained a doctorate in Japanese history from the University of Michigan. In his long career as an international scholar, he authored nine books (including two memoirs) and published over forty-five articles and was awarded many professional fellowships and grants by such organizations as the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Japan Foundation, Fulbright and Fulbright-Hays, and the Sumitomo Foundation. He passed away on 6 April 2014.