

Strategic Thought behind the “Honorable Death” (*gyokusai*) of the Attu Garrison

Masayasu Hosaka

Attu Island is a volcanic island, approximately 35 kilometers along its east – west axis, and is located on the extreme western end of the Aleutian Islands. At the time of the outbreak of the Pacific War in December 1941, Japan felt that it must put the Aleutian Islands under its control for strategic reasons, i.e. in order to break a key line of communication between the United States and the Soviet Union, thereby interfering with the ability of the two powers to cooperate militarily. Following Japan’s defeat in the Midway Operation, approximately half a year after the start of the war in the Pacific, the Aleutians momentarily dropped out of Japan’s strategic picture. Japan’s Imperial General Headquarters (IGH), however, eventually recognized anew the strategic value of Attu and its neighbor, Kiska Island, because the IGH realized that the Americans could very well follow the route Alaska – Aleutians – Kurile Islands – Hokkaido when they began their counteroffensive against Japan.

In September 1942, the IGH established a Northern Research Group directly under the Army Chief of Staff, which conducted studies of the Aleutian Islands over the next month. As a result of these studies, an Imperial Order was issued in October, which ordered the creation of a North Seas Garrison under the command of the Northern District Army, and whose mission was to secure the vital areas of the Aleutians. In February 1943, the Northern District Army was reorganized into the Northern General Army, under the command of Kiichiro Higuchi, and was assigned the defense of the Aleutians.

According to the writings of Higuchi, the commander, the Northern General Army at this stage had the characteristics of both an “operational army” and a “home army.” However, Higuchi also instructed his subordinates that the Northern General Army’s character as an operational army had been strengthened, after the former units of the Northern District Army, the North Seas Garrison, the First Air Division and the Northern Shipping Force had been placed under its command. It was at this time that the reinforcement of the Attu and Kiska garrisons was commenced.

In fact, Higuchi had inspected a number of the islands in the Aleutians, starting with Attu and Kiska, and realized that the defenses of the area were weak and that the supply situation was a cause for concern. Higuchi therefore ordered the Attu and Kiska garrisons to set up a lifestyle which took into account their supply difficulties. In April 1942, Colonel Yasuyo Yamazaki was appointed commander of the Attu Island garrison, which numbered 2,500 at this point.

One month after Yamazaki's appointment, on May 12, 1943, the Americans began operations to recover the Aleutians, starting with a landing on Attu. The American assault force consisted of 30 ships, and approximately 20,000 combat soldiers (11,000, according to some sources). The escorting naval force consisted of two aircraft carriers, two battleships, four heavy and four light cruisers, seven destroyers and 70 fighters and bombers. The ratio of the American and Japanese fighting strengths is often given, albeit somewhat crudely, as "ten to one."

In this presentation, the battle of Attu Island will be used as a model case to clarify the strategic views and ideas of the Japanese Army. The details of the combat between the Japanese garrison and the Americans from May 12 to 29, the strategic views which resulted in the Japanese garrison's decision to seek an "honorable death" (*gyokusai*), or to literally fight to the last man, the difference in the strategic views between the Northern General Army and the IGH, are among the issues which shall be investigated in this report.

In addition, I will look at the strategic thought which lay behind the withdrawal of the Kiska Island garrison, which took place two months after the battle of Attu Island.

Session 1

Japan's War Guidance : Three Key Points

Ryoichi Tobe

According to Kazuo Horiba, who authored *Shina Jihen Senso Shido-shi* (History of War Guidance in the China War), the key points in the guidance and prosecution of a war are the establishment of war objectives, the observation of an army's culminating point of victory, and the firm grasp of the need and method of

terminating the war. In my presentation, I will consider the problems in Japan's war guidance during the Greater East Asia War, based upon the three points given by Horiba.

1. Establishment of War Objectives

During the Greater East Asia War, "Self-preservation, Self-defense" and "Establishment of a New Greater East Asian Order" were both given as Japan's war objectives, and Japan's war leaders could not agree among themselves regarding which of these should be given priority. While "Self-preservation, Self-defense" was the war objective in the Imperial Prescript issued in December 1941 at the start of the war, the Information Bureau, at almost the same time, explained that "(the war has been) named the Greater East Asia War because it is a war whose objective is the establishment of a New Greater East Asian Order." Mamoru Shigemitsu argued that "Self-preservation, Self-defense" was a state of mind for fighting the war and not a war objective, and wrote Japan's war objective into the Greater East Asia Joint Communiqué. As a result, the "Establishment of a New Greater East Asian Order" was finally given a clear and actual definition, two years after the start of the war. Until then, Japan had not stated a universal ideal and used it as a political strategy within the grand strategy of the war as a whole. When Japan finally announced the Greater East Asia Joint Communiqué, however, it no longer had the capability to realize its war objective. The efforts at the highest military and political levels in Japan to achieve that war objective therefore did not last for long, and, shortly thereafter, Japan's war objective reverted to "Self-preservation, Self-defense."

2. Observation of culminating points of victory

Japan's culminating point of victory as it was perceived at the start of the war is stated clearly in its strategic plans as follows: "The centers of operation of the Americans, British and Dutch in East Asia and the Southwest Pacific shall be destroyed and a strategically superior position shall be established. Simultaneously, the vital resource areas and main lines of communication shall be secured, and a long-term condition of self-sufficiency shall be prepared." In Japan's First Stage of Operations, excluding the Hawaii Operation, Japan advanced to this culminating point of victory, achieved its strategic objectives, and refrained from advancing

further. The Army and Navy argued among themselves, however, regarding the Second Stage of Operations. The Army sought a strategic defensive, i.e. the establishment of a “Long-term, Undefeatable Condition,” while the Navy favored a more positive stance and wished to stay on the offensive. Had the Army thoroughly studied Japan’s war with America when it opted for the strategic defensive? Had not the Army left the war with America up to the Navy, because the Army had no operational plans for a war with America, and instead merely prepared for a war on the Asian continent against China and the Soviet Union, which were the Army’s traditional enemies? If the Army had truly recognized its culminating point of victory, would they have been dragged into the Guadalcanal campaign, unable to refuse the Navy’s requests for assistance? On the other side, why did the Navy ignore Japan’s culminating point of victory and try to continue the offensive? Even when Japan had to shift to the strategic defensive and tried to establish the Absolute National Defense Zone, the Navy insisted on attacking the enemy beyond the borders of that zone. Did the Navy have no concept of defense at all? The end result was that the Army and Navy followed entirely different strategic ideas in fighting the war. This difference in strategic ideas is a key reason why the Army and Navy were unable to cooperate in guiding and prosecuting the war at the highest levels.

3. Grasp of the need and method of war termination

Japan recognized early on that it could not fix America as its main enemy and force it to capitulate by military means. Japan therefore sought to defeat China, or, alternatively, defeat Great Britain with the help of the Germans and Italians. Isoroku Yamamoto most likely had tried to apply Japan’s military power directly against America, rather than rely upon the defeat of China or Great Britain, to make America lose its will to continue fighting the war. However, this possibility evaporated after Midway. Japan could still conceivably have defeated China on its own, but the Chungking Operation, which had to be successful to force China to its knees, could not be executed because of the demands of the Guadalcanal campaign. The possibility of cooperating with the Germans and Italians to bring about Great Britain’s defeat resulted in the Army’s vision of an advance across India and into western Asia, in concert with Rommel’s 1942 offensive in North Africa, but this eventually ended as nothing more than a momentary dream. Thereafter,

discussions of how the war would be won, or how the war should be terminated, were not part of Japan's war guidance efforts, and Japan kept fighting not to win, but to keep from losing. The fact that Japan, upon the loss of Saipan, disregarded all options other than to continue the war, even though the loss of Saipan meant not only that victory could no longer be expected, but also that Japan's prewar objective of "Self-sufficiency, Self-defense" had become unattainable, could only mean that Japan did not sufficiently grasp the importance of thinking about war termination. That can only be understood as an error in Japan's war guidance at the highest levels.

The Asia-Pacific War Reconsidered: Restoring Contingency to the Inevitable War, 1937-1945

Allan R. Millett

The Asia-Pacific War, 1937-1945, began as a war of territorial dominance between traditional rivals: China, Russia, and Japan. It ended as an oceanic war between two great naval powers, Japan and the United States. In a war essentially decided by air and naval power, an industrial-technological conflict, the United States was bound to prevail, given its access to raw materials and safe economic structure. In retrospect, an American (or allied) victory appears inevitable. Although not dismissing this "main narrative" explanation, this paper attempts to restore a sense of contingency to the Asia-Pacific War and to examine the interplay of political will and military capability.

The author applies the analytic model he and Williamson Murray developed for the collaborative study, *Military Effectiveness* (3 vols., Allen & Unwin, 1987). This model divides military activity, including war-waging, into four categories: political, strategic, operational, and tactical. This model allows meaningful comparisons between adversaries and allies and helps identify crucial elements in defeat and victory. It led the co-editors and authors to conclude that operational and tactical innovation became common to all 20th century, industrial warfare belligerents, but that such innovation, often technology-dependent, could not redress crucial political-strategic misjudgments. The Asia-Pacific War fits this paradigm.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on the decisiveness of politico-strategic decisions also increases the focus on the contingency of warfare, not the inevitability of outcomes driven by material factors or uncontrollable historical trends.

Session 2

Japan's Military Administration of Indonesia: Light and Darkness

Michio Haga

The military occupation of the Dutch East Indies by the Japanese Army and Navy, and the military administration of that region by the two services lasted for the relatively short time of three years. Evaluations of that occupation vary widely, however, with some calling it the “dark days of Japanese control,” while others view that period as “the start of change.”

On November 20, 1941, the “Guidelines for Conducting the Administration of Occupied Areas of the Southern Area,” which became the basis for the military administration of occupied areas of the Southern Area, was adopted by Japan's Government – Military Liaison Committee. The Army and Navy, which emphasized that operations and reconstruction were indivisible, decided that a military administration would be established “for the time being,” and that that administration would emphasize “the recovery of security,” “the rapid securing of vital resources for national defense,” and “the securing of the self-sufficiency of operational forces.” The ultimate jurisdiction over the occupied Southern Areas was to be “determined separately,” and that decision was postponed until later.

On November 26, 1941, the “Army-Navy Central Agreement on the Conduct of the Military Administration of Occupied Areas” was signed, according to which the respective areas that the Army and Navy would occupy were determined. In the Dutch East Indies, Java and Sumatra would be placed under Army administration, while the Navy would be responsible for governing Celebes, Dutch Borneo and other areas. Differences between the Army and Navy regarding the military administration of occupied areas which had surfaced in Manchuria and China, conflicts of interest and struggles over power and influence between the Army and Navy, the presence of oil in the Dutch East Indies, and differences in the Army and

Navy's capabilities of governing occupied areas were all factors in this division of areas of responsibility between the Army and Navy.

While Japan succeeded to a certain extent in the securing of natural resources in the East Indies, such as the development and use of oil fields, the division of areas of occupation resulted in friction between the Army and Navy and a host of other problems. In addition, while the Japanese military administration of Indonesia produced some results which, in effect, played a role in Indonesia's independence after the war, such as the creation of military organizations, the participation of Indonesians in politics, and the establishment of organizations which made preparations for independence, the use of forced labor, the forced "Japanization" of Indonesians and other measures led on the other hand to anti-Japanese resentment and anger among the Indonesian people. Japan's military administration of Indonesia therefore had both positive and negative aspects, i.e. resulted in both "light" and "darkness."

Japan's military administration of Indonesia never fully realized its objectives, and had to continually take measures to the end in response to Japan's overall war situation and other circumstances. The underlying cause was the fact that Japan opened hostilities against the Allied powers without fixing and clarifying its overall war concepts or grand strategy. The fact that Japan had not decided upon certain basics of its military administration policy, such as who would ultimately be responsible for governing the Dutch East Indies (as well as other occupied areas), also was a factor. Furthermore, the inability of the Army and Navy to fully cooperate with each other, which produced both conflict and compromise between the two services, led not only to the inconsistent and disjointed conduct of operations, but also a lack of unity and inconsistency in the occupation policies of the two services, such as in their handling of policies aimed at the eventual independence of Indonesia.

A Tale of Two Occupations: American Military Government in Japan and Korea after World War II

Conrad C. Crane

While the American military administration of Japan after World War II has

been held up as a model for the reformation, reconstruction, and stabilization of a defeated enemy, other Allied postwar occupations in Asia were much less successful. When the home islands surrendered, the Japanese empire was largely intact. Significant and viable Japanese military forces remained in China, Korea, Indochina, Malaya, and the Netherlands East Indies. While the Allies were successful in liquidating the Japanese empire and repatriating the Japanese who had administered and controlled it, the new occupiers could not restore peace to the region. As noted Pacific War historian Ronald Spector has written, "By 1948, all the states of the former Japanese empire were at war, either with their former colonial masters or with political factions within their own country, sometimes both." Even the United States contributed to this record of occupational failure, as it could not create a stable and peaceful South Korea. It is worthwhile contrasting that experience of military government with the more well-known achievements in Japan.

In speeches in August 2007 discussing American involvement in Iraq, President Bush held up Japan as an example of what could be gained from nation-building with a long term commitment. He also mentioned Korea, though he was referring to the rebuilding of Korea after 1953. The Bush administration would have profited more from analyzing the post-WWII occupation of Korea, and still might. The cost of a hasty departure from Korea was a weak state with an ongoing insurgency that tempted an invasion from an aggressive neighbor. As a result the United States was drawn back into war again, committing a great deal more men and material than an extended occupation would have required.

There are many insights to be gained from the American military governments in Asia after World War II. Douglas MacArthur's cultural knowledge, extensive resources, and systematic planning shaped a successful occupation in Japan, while their lack contributed to a worse outcome in Korea. There seems to be an advantage in working with existing power structures to maintain stability, though there are obvious cautions about such an approach if an occupier truly wants to reform a state. Steadfast commitment over time is also important. And the most important insight to be gained may be the observation that a quagmire is preferable to a bloodbath.

Session 3

The Japanese Treatment of Allied POWs: Background and Policy

Kyoichi Tachikawa

The Japanese treatment of Allied prisoners of war during the Pacific War is generally regarded as a failure. What kind of policy did the Japanese leaders set? Why did they follow the wrong course?

As soon as the war broke out and prisoners started to be taken, the Allies asked the Japanese government regarding its intention of whether or not it would comply with the Geneva Convention of July 27, 1929, which Japan had signed but had not ratified. The Japanese government replied on January 29, 1942, that it would “apply *mutatis mutandis*” the clauses of the convention. This was the Japanese policy of treating POWs at the beginning of the war.

What did the Japanese government mean by “apply *mutatis mutandis*”? According to Prime Minister and Minister of the Army General Hideki Tojo, who was in charge of treating POWs, “the Imperial government meant that it would apply the clauses of the Geneva Convention with necessary changes to conform to the domestic laws and reality.” At the beginning of the war, therefore, the Japanese leaders intended to treat the Allied POWs according to international law, with few if any exceptions.

As stated above, however, the Japanese treatment of Allied POWs during the Pacific War is generally considered a failure. Did not the Japanese follow its original course?

In no more than three months since the reply on January 29, 1942, two things happened that greatly affected the Japanese treatment of Allied POWs. First, due to the vast success of its initial operations, the Japanese Army took much more POWs than it had expected. Second, and more important, was the Doolittle Raid against the Japan main islands on April 18, 1942.

As a result of these two events, Japan veered away from its initial decision and policy to apply “*mutatis mutandis*” the Geneva Conventions. Mid-1942 therefore is the point in time from which Japan’s guidance and prosecution of the war, as far as the treatment of Allied POWs is concerned, turned toward the creation of a situation

which resulted in the postwar evaluation of Japan's wartime POW policy and treatment as a failure.

American POWs and Japanese Holdouts: Forming Memories of the Pacific War

Mark P. Parillo

The Pacific War was a struggle between two cultures as well as two military establishments, and so it is not surprising that the two principal belligerents had different perceptions of the war, both then and afterwards. Central to the process of just how Americans and Japanese remember the war were the experiences of captured Americans and Japanese soldiers who continued fighting beyond the surrender in 1945, respectively.

American POWs endured extremely difficult conditions, and many were so physically or psychologically damaged that their captivity became the defining experience of their lives. But, for several reasons, the prisoner-of-war experience was not well known among the American public during or immediately following the war. The public's understanding of what happened to Japanese captives was shaped more by the portrayal of the experience in the popular media than by the reality of it. As more evidence of the actual American POW experience became available, the public's perception of the prisoners' experience was molded into something that fit comfortably with Americans' views of the war as they had evolved by the end of the twentieth century.

In the case of the Japanese holdouts, there was initially a lack of attention to the phenomenon by the Japanese public as part of the general reaction to the war. But when the most celebrated of the holdouts returned to Japan in the 1970s, it touched some repressed feelings of national pride and spurred attempts to deal consciously with the recently shunned militaristic past. The holdouts served as the basis for one of the major interpretations of Japan's role in the Pacific War among the factions vying to shape Japanese memory of the causes and nature of the war.