

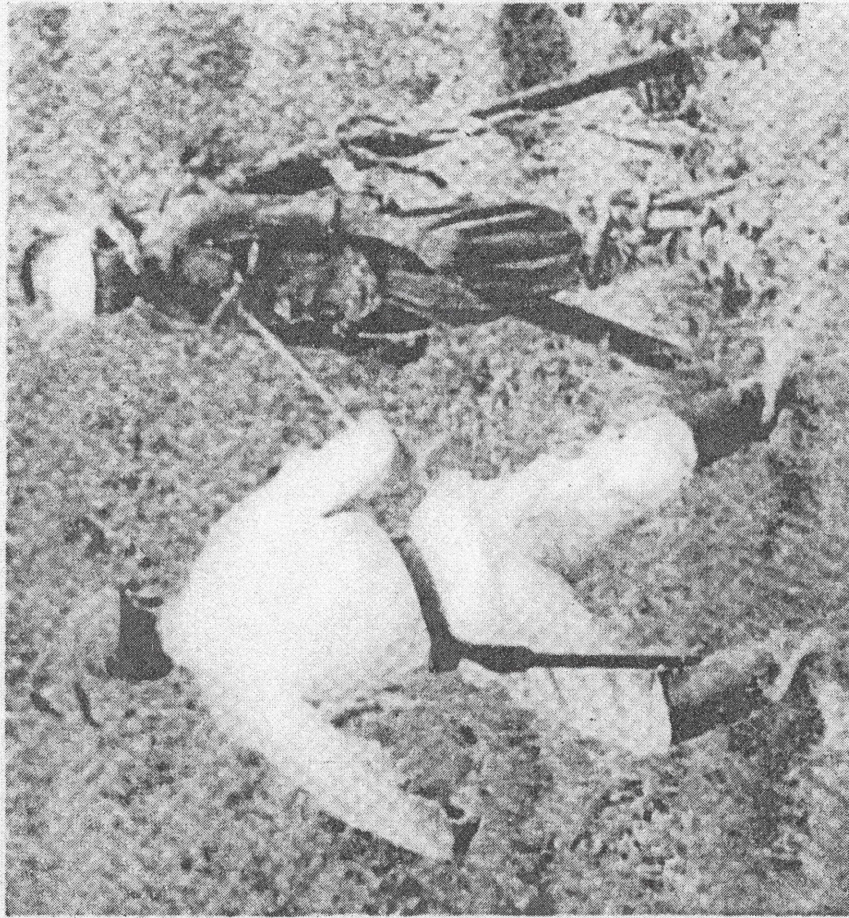


***T**he 1937 sack of Nanking (above, Japanese bayonet Chinese prisoners) was a preview of Japanese military excesses U.S. soldiers later came to know personally.*

LIFE

SPECIAL ISSUE

Japan



JAP OFFICER BLOODED HIS SWORD ON A DYING CHINESE PRISONER



JAP INFANTRYMAN CONTINUED "WAR GAMES" WITH HIS BAYONET

LIFE'S PICTURE HISTORY OF WORLD WAR II

TIME INCORPORATED • NEW YORK • 1950

JAPAN

One Man's Crusade

Kenji Ono lifts the veil on the Nanjing massacre

ies such as the Nanjing massacre, suggests Yoshiaki Mine, a member of the Cabinet Councillor's Office on External Affairs. He'll announce a series of programmes during the first half of next year, in time to mark the 50th anniversary of the surrender," he says. Mine hopes the programmes will settle the problem. But others are far less certain.

Paying compensation to Asian victims of the war tends to be handled by sections of the Foreign Ministry dealing with bilateral relationships, says Sumiko Shimizu, a leftist upper house MP who has taken a keen interest in the comfort-woman issue. They don't have much leverage, budget-wise, or otherwise, and the country's political leadership is too badly split to resolve problems properly.

The result, says Shimizu, is that the government adopts a "little by little" approach to solving war-claims problems. "This has been going on for years and it's highly unlikely that we'll be able to settle everything by August 1995," Shimizu says.

The tragedy of Japan's fumbling approach to the war, says Seiichiro Takagi, professor of modern Chinese history at Aoyama University, is that there are "real issues to discuss," but neither side is tackling them properly.

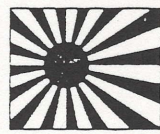
Takagi believes the juridical status of the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, set up by the victorious allies to judge Japanese war criminals, is one such issue.

Many people in Japan probably feel resentful about the status of the Tokyo Tribunal, but it doesn't help when a politician asks questions about it in the same sense as with an assertion that the Nanjing massacre was 'fiction'," he says.

Another issue that analysts say sticks in the minds of many Japanese is the dropping of atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While the current mayor of Hiroshima has called for Japan to repent its history of aggression and invasion, Japanese look at this city and see themselves as victims, an emotion that hinders full acknowledgement of Japan's role in the war all the more difficult.

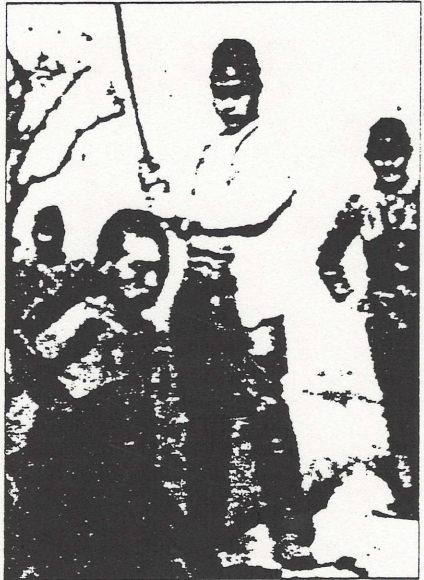
The United States and Europe may not see Japan raising such issues, but Takagi says it's time to look at the war from a perspective of history not just as a defeated nation that can't look beyond its role as an American client state.

Meanwhile, the Cabinet councillor, is marginally more optimistic that Japan may eventually be able to come to terms with its past. "We've emerged from a period when there was little or no discussion about the facts and wrongs of the war, but now at least people are speaking up and voicing their opinions on it," he says. The danger is that the debate may take more time than Japan can afford if it wants to be more than a bit-player in the post-Cold War



Time and silence have conspired to obscure the truth about the Nanjing massacre. Scholars — and the general public — have found it difficult to unearth the facts about the "rape" of the Chinese city by Japanese soldiers in 1937 because those who were there at the time are either dead — or don't have much to say on the subject. Tokyo housewife Miki Matsubara's comment is typical: "My father did something in the war, but he never told us what or why."

It's the same story in the countryside. "If someone was in China during the war, other people in the village are likely to know about it, but they probably won't ask for details," says a school teacher in north-



Japanese killing field.

eastern Japan, a major recruiting-ground for the Imperial Army. "That's because most people would rather get on with their daily lives than spend time digging into a subject that can only cause pain and embarrassment."

But Kenji Ono is not a soldier. A 44-year-old factory worker who lives in a small town in Fukushima prefecture, 200 kilometres north of Tokyo, Ono is making a one-man effort to change that reluctance to face up to the past. Starting in 1988, he has made an avocation of interviewing farmers in his area who served in the notorious Aizu Wakamatsu battalion, one of the Imperial Army units most closely associated

with the massacre.

Ono says that his bosses in a major chemical firm probably know about his research, although he has never told them how he spends his free time. His work schedule — long shifts on the factory floor punctuated by 36-hour breaks — is one reason he has the time to drive around Fukushima interviewing farmers.

Not being married is another. "My mother tolerates what I do — but I could never afford to spend my time like this if I had a wife," he says. But Ono's phone number is unlisted, and he refuses to be photographed, ostensibly so he won't become a target of the *uvoku*, extreme-rightist groups who have harassed those looking into Japan's role in the war.

Ono's findings, published in part in the weekly magazine *Shukan Kinryohi* and reported in the *Asahi* newspaper, have been hailed by liberal Japanese scholars as the first work on what happened in Nanjing to be based on Japanese sources.

Previous estimates of the Nanjing death toll relied either on Chinese claims that the Imperial Army killed as many as 420,000 people — more than the entire population of the city at the time of the occupation — or on the evidence of American scholars who were teaching at Nanjing University before the invasion.

Ono's research has focused on only a single incident in what may have been a series of killings that lasted for months. But he claims to have established from first-hand sources that Japanese soldiers shot or bayoneted several thousand Chinese prisoners of war and civilians during a three-day period in mid-December 1937.

"The tragedy," says Ono, "is that no one knows the names of the victims. Except for one Chinese soldier who managed to write a letter to the Japanese Government which was eventually delivered in Tokyo, we are dealing with numbers only, not with individuals who can be traced like the victims of the Nazi Holocaust."

His methods are simple enough. "I began by getting a list from the prefectural public library of families who had someone in the Aizu Wakamatsu battalion," he says. "I wrote to hundreds of families asking for an interview to discuss the war and was eventually able to visit about 600 homes. Two hundred people talked to me seriously, and about 30 turned out to have kept diaries covering the crucial days when the killing started in Nanjing."

Ono claims to have photocopied 20 diaries from the 30 he was able to locate

FACING THE PAST

NON-COMBATANT VIEWED WAR THROUGH LENS Photographer's negatives resurrect horrors of war

By AKO WASHIO
STAFF WRITER

When Japan surrendered to the Allied powers in August 1945, Yahachiro Bessho was instructed by his supervisors at Toho-sha, the publisher of the overseas propaganda magazine Front, to leave Tokyo and hide from the Occupation Forces.

The 28-year-old had reason to heed the instructions that led him to Aomori. Between October 1944 and April 1945 Bessho took some 20,000 pictures in various warfronts in China while gathering materials on the country's culture.

When he was drafted as an Imperial Army photographer dispatched from Toho-sha, Bessho willingly accepted the order.

"I didn't want to take up guns to kill people but I wanted to serve the country in some way," he told The Japan Times.

Toho-sha, a semigovernmental company controlled by the Imperial Army, issued Front editions in 15 languages between 1942 and 1945 to disseminate wartime propaganda and boost the fighting spirit of Japanese soldiers.

When it appeared the Occupation Forces were not planning to interrogate him in their search for evidence of war crimes, Bessho returned to Tokyo and soon became engrossed with his own postwar life.

Photos found

Two years ago, however, while sorting through his belongings after moving to Sapporo, Bessho discovered some 700 undeveloped wartime photographs hidden among film he had taken after the war.

"When I developed them, I immediately remembered China vividly. Also blowing



Iron helmets from Chinese soldiers whose bodies were dumped in a river near Shanghai are saved by Japanese troops for recycling. YAHACHIRO BESSHO PHOTO

"He sank into the creek, calling out 'Mother!' as blood spouted up," Bessho recalled. "I was outraged and cursed every Chinese."

