

## BEARING WITNESS TO THE RAVAGES OF WAR IN NORTH CHINA: PART 5

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### THE HORRORS OF TONGZHOU

We arrived in Beiping<sup>1</sup> on August 28. The next day marked the one-month anniversary of unspeakable atrocities committed in Tongzhou at 2:00 a.m. on July 29. On that fateful night Tongzhou, a city located eight kilometers outside Beiping, was the scene of horrific acts of violence — acts that will forever remain in the memories of all 90 million Japanese. The perpetrators were Chinese members of the Tongzhou Peace Preservation Corps, rebels who engaged in unspeakable acts of murder, violence, savagery, and cruelty against our innocent compatriots.

That first important anniversary of the murders of so many Japanese residents of Tongzhou happened to coincide with our group's journey to the place that claimed their lives. We set out for Tongzhou under the watchful eye of Mr. Honda of the Osaka Mainichi newspaper's Beiping bureau.

Two automobiles took us through Beiping's Chaoyang Gate amid brisk winds and whirling dust. The sorghum plants in bleak fields on both sides of the scholar-tree-lined road were covered in yellow dust. Each time they rustled in the wind I felt slightly uneasy.

After all, I had heard that remnants of the murderous Peace Preservation Corps rebels were lurking in the area, and were known to have broken into and ransacked Chinese houses. Furthermore, someone at the Military Attachés' Office in Beiping had told us that the area was still "not entirely safe."

But the drive to Tongzhou was uneventful; the only obstacle we encountered was a dog that took its time crossing the road in front of our car. We saw no Chinese stragglers, and no one who looked suspicious.

Perhaps because we were aware of the evil that had visited Tongzhou, even the gate to the city seemed unearthly and desolate.

On a gatepost we saw two white cotton banners on which calligraphy had been written in bold, vivid strokes. The first read, "The Japanese military shall mourn for the victims, punish the guilty, and eradicate the loathsome rebels," and the second, "Let us join together, military and civilians, in building a vibrant Tongzhou."

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<sup>1</sup> Now Beijing.

The northern Chinese sun beat down on the banners, making them look even whiter and forlorn. I felt a lump in my throat.

The automobiles came to a stop; we alighted and passed in front of a sentry. Then, back in the car again, we proceeded to the Peace Preservation Corps barracks. During the drive we saw no one. We heard no voices. We had entered a city of death! The sight took our breath away.

At the entrance of the Peace Preservation Corps barracks we began to see bullet holes everywhere we looked, so many that we couldn't count them. On the white wall of one room someone had scribbled, in pencil, "Sato Yasuichi of Aichi Prefecture died here at the age of 26 on July 29, 1937 at 2:00 p.m." The last few words dropped down and off toward the left.

I shuddered at the sight. I noticed that the windowpanes had been replaced, but the window frame was riddled with bullet holes.

Commander Hirobe came into that same room to greet us. He had won acclaim for his heroic deeds as head of the Hirobe Unit during hostilities (on July 26, 1937) connected with the Guang'an Gate Incident in Beiping. Mr. Honda, the leader of our group, had met Commander Hirobe at that time. I would describe the commander as dignified but not overbearing. He seemed like a mild-mannered military man (if he had been wearing a suit, I would have taken him for a professor). He spoke to us informally and kindly.

The events that took place in Tongzhou were extremely disheartening. We will leave no stone unturned in our search for stragglers from the Peace Preservation Corps. All of us are determined to capture and punish the murderers of our compatriots. After the tragedy occurred, I came here from Beiping to defend Tongzhou. When I went upstairs to bed on the night I arrived, I could not sleep a wink. It seemed as though the victims of the massacre were calling out to me, pleading with me to avenge their deaths.

The commander's tone of voice was subdued but earnest.

On August 21 I was finally able to gather and cremate the remains of the victims. In the distance I saw three suspicious-looking Chinese men emerge from an American Christian church (they had probably sought refuge there) to watch the funeral pyre. It turns out that they were members of the Peace Preservation Corps. One of them told other Chinese soldiers which houses to raid and otherwise issued orders. Another, a servant for a Japanese family, told his accomplices where Japanese were hiding. When I interrogated them, they told me all sorts of lies, but I finally obtained the evidence I needed.

Having listened to the commander's words thus far, his voice still soft, calm, and reassuring, we were overcome by a powerful emotion. We were convinced that

displaying the heads of those three men in front of the makeshift crematorium would bring comfort to the victims of the massacre — much more comfort than flowers or incense ever could.

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Commander Hirobe was kind enough to personally escort us through the barracks. There were countless bullet holes in the walls. When we went up to the roof, we had a good view of the city of Tongzhou. At the southern edge of the roof was a white wooden marker on which was written “Infantry Captain Fujio Shin’ichi was killed in action here.” We stopped there and offered a silent prayer.

In the distance we could see a church with a cross on its roof. I thought it must be the American church that Commander Hirobe had mentioned earlier, the church in which the despicable Peace Preservation Corps stragglers had sought refuge. When I realized that the Japanese are powerless to apprehend fugitives who have entered the American sphere of influence, I felt bitter and frustrated. I stood there glaring at that cross beneath the white clouds floating in the blue sky.

Ever since childhood when I was a Sunday school student, I had believed that crosses were sacred and precious. But now, under the late summer sky in Tongzhou, North China, the sight of that cross was repulsive to me. Just a month ago, on July 29<sup>th</sup>, that cross had borne witness to the senseless slaughter of innocent human beings!

But when I thought about it, I realized that that cross — nothing but pieces of wood or iron joined together — was of no use to us. Imagine the cross those 190 souls had to bear when they died in this place on that fateful day!

Our next destination was the Special Service Agency, where Deputy Commander Captain Yamamoto served as our guide. The toll had been terrible there, as everyone in the building at the time of the massacre was killed. We saw, again, countless bullet holes in the wall of a room on the left side of the building. Captain Yamamoto said, “This is where Major Kai died,” pointing to a spot on the floor.

We bowed our heads and offered a silent prayer. On July 29 the Chinese rebels numbered 3,000, while fewer than 50 members of the Japanese garrison force were on the scene. There were fewer than 10 special agents. But everyone fought valiantly to the death. Every member of the Special Service Agency guarded important documents with his life. The men exhausted their supply of 5,000 bullets, firing at the enemy till they could fire no more. Then Major Kai drew his sword and used it to stab as many of the rebels as he could. His strength exhausted, he was felled by a bullet right where we were standing.

Major Kai repelled the enemy with his sword until he was killed; at least he died the death a soldier wishes for. We bowed our heads and prayed for the repose of his soul.

When we proceeded further into the building and came to a courtyard, we noticed what had been a small building on the right. Only the stone walls remained, everything else having been destroyed by fire. Important documents were stored in that building. Six young clerks defended it to the death. The building burned when enemy soldiers threw a can of gasoline into it. But not even one sheet of paper fell into enemy hands.

“Look over there. That’s the gasoline can the enemy threw into the building.” With those words Captain Yamamoto pointed, and there it was, a reddish-brown, rusted object hanging from the edge of the charred roof. The bodies of two of the boys, their pistols still in their hands, had been found on the stone pavement in front of the storehouse. I wonder if they cried out for their mothers. Each new sight, each new bit of information felt like a knife in my chest.

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Wordlessly, we travelled by car through the city of Tongzhou. It was more like a small town than a city. The center of this small place was where 3,000 rebels, monsters, perpetrated their acts of savagery and violence, creating a hell on earth. If it had been larger, perhaps there would have been more places for the victims to hide. On both sides of the city were modest, rustic Chinese-style buildings. Japanese homes that were still standing were boarded up. Scattered among them were Chinese houses with Japanese flags hanging from their eaves. Most of the flags were homemade, and some of them were quite crude. But it is easy to make a Japanese flag when the need arises. At that time I was reminded that the design of our flag is pure and simple, but very meaningful.

Some of the Chinese who displayed Japanese flags outside their homes did so because they thought the flags would guarantee their safety. But I took some comfort in the knowledge that, on that terrible day, other Chinese had sheltered and protected Japanese, or hid them in their homes, or given them Chinese clothing to wear so they wouldn’t become targets of the enemy. It made me feel calmer when I learned about people who possess true human souls, and I could bring myself to walk past some Chinese houses.

Now, walking down the streets, one saw only a few Chinese faces. The rows of low-slung roofs called the ruins of Pompeii to mind.

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We headed for the wall at the edge of the city. When I stepped out of the car, I was in a front garden, behind which stood a large, Japanese-style two-story building. Above the entrance was a blue neon sign that read “Kinsuiro.” Some of the most terrible, shocking, and most often told and retold accounts of the massacre described crimes committed at this Japanese inn. By some miracle, the neon sign continued to emit a purplish glow. We stood there and stared at it, shuddering.

The sign is just like one you might find on a café in Ginza. But looking up at the pale blue neon sign on a deserted building in the aftermath of a massacre here in this silent city of death, we sensed only unearthly horror.

The people who had lived, worked, and stayed here had vanished without a trace, their lives extinguished. All that remains of the blood-soaked building is the still-glowing, pale blue neon sign. Only here and now did I realize that a neon sign, normally a symbol of splendor and cheer, can also evoke ghastly images.

The glass door at the entrance has been shattered, but the sliding *shoji* paper doors were intact. Possibly the detestable intruders, thrilled to discover that their victims were unarmed and unable to resist them, made a triumphant but leisurely entrance into the inn.

The *shoji* from the first room on the right were gone. We could see right into the room. Our group paused there, so I took a look inside. I recoiled immediately, but what I had seen during those few seconds was blackish-red blood spatter extending from the inside of the closet to a post and then a wall. There were bloodstains all over the floorboards. The *tatami* had been removed, but judging from the blood I had already seen, I was sure they were covered with blood as well.

I slipped out of the room into a side hallway. I waited there, alone, until the others returned.

Someone told me that we had just been in the maids' room. Again, I began to tremble uncontrollably. The bloodstains I had just seen came from the maids who once worked there!

I clasped my hands in prayer. How could those savages use weapons against helpless young women? How could they subject them to unspeakable atrocities, and force them to endure cruel and brutal acts akin to the torments of hell as they killed them? The monsters responsible for the atrocities were members of the East Hebei Autonomous Council's Peace Preservation Corps! In actuality they are enemies of the human race, the most despicable, most lowly specimens of the male sex on this earth! They are no better than beasts! The Japanese Army established the Peace Preservation Corps here in Tongzhou, the center of Japanese-Chinese friendship and peaceful relations. They trained you; they turned you into full-fledged soldiers! That is why the garrison trusted them. That is why the Japanese residents of Tongzhou trusted them. Even in the wake of the North China Incident,<sup>2</sup> the people of Tongzhou believed that peace would prevail here, even if it did nowhere else. They went about their daily lives, their minds at ease. What a cruel fate awaited them!

The deceitful savages raised their voices in support of Japanese-Chinese friendship, but their words were empty. All of us became convinced that the men in Chiang Kai-shek's

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<sup>2</sup> The outbreak of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident.

Central Army who, fueled by anti-Japanese ideology, have sacrificed their lives to wage war with the Japanese, are far more manly and honorable than the subhuman rebels.

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Our party was about to explore the second floor of the Kinsuiro Inn. I had seen more than enough and didn't want to go any further. But I was just as leery of staying downstairs all by myself. It was frightening to be in that huge building, now steeped in silence. And that horrible maids' room was downstairs! I all but clung to the soldier in front of me as we climbed the stairs.

I was very relieved not to see any bloodstains upstairs. There was a huge hole in the ceiling, as well as signs that bayonets had been thrust through the floor from below.

“A guest was hiding here. The rebel soldiers pulled him out. They bound him with rope and dragged him out in front of their firing squad.”

That description filled us with rage and sadness. We stood there, speechless, staring at the holes in the ceiling.

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We departed (or more accurately, escaped) from Kinsuiro, the house of death. Our group then climbed to the top of the city wall. We could see Kinsuiro from there, as well as a large lotus pond behind it. Broad green leaves covered the surface of the water, and a few late-blooming, sad-looking flowers were visible in the distance.

Looking out at the vegetation on its surface, we were wondering why the maids didn't jump into the pond. They might have been able to hide under the lotus leaves and possibly escape with their lives.

Lotus blossoms! According to Buddhist belief, they are the flowers that bloom in the Pure Land of Amida Nyorai. How ironic that they were blooming behind a building that was anything but pure land — a hell where rivers of blood were spilled.

On the wall some words had been formed from white plaster: “Sharing hardship and joy with the people.” Next to this was “Yin Jukeng.”<sup>3</sup> Mr. Yin Jukeng, head of the East Hebei Autonomous Council, what sort of joy will you share with the people? Do you know what your sentries have wrought?

How hollow these words sound, and how ridiculous! Words are everywhere in China, but they are meaningless.

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<sup>3</sup> Yin Jukeng (1885-1947): Chinese politician active in the early days of the Republic of China.

While on the wall we fashioned a bouquet of summer grasses and zinnias picked from the flower bed that had been planted at the Kinsuiro Inn to give pleasure to the guests. We were escorted to the site near the North Gate where the executioners massacred their victims. We placed the flowers on the ground at a gruesome spot in front of a stagnant puddle, where the soil was yellow and blackish-red, and said a prayer.

We were told that the Peace Preservation Corps murderers tied 30 or 40 Japanese together, forced them to stand in a hollow beyond that puddle in front of the city wall and, from the other side of the puddle, shot them one by one.

At that point my nerves were raw; I didn't see how I could possibly bear to see any more.

At the spot where we had left our flowers and offered our prayers, we saw what looked like soil-encrusted locks of long black hair strewn over the ground, and a half-buried flowered child's kimono. Horror upon horror upon horror!

We offered our bouquet, clasped our hands, and closed our eyes. We prayed facing the execution site, the place where the martyrs spent their last moments.

Our hearts go out to all of you for what you have suffered. Know that you have given your lives for your country. Your struggle is over. We are compatriots who have come here to weep and pray for you.

The noonday sun beat down mercilessly on the surface of the murky puddle. We were all weeping. All we could do was weep. We had no words of comfort to offer.

I hope that the tears that streamed down our cheeks into the mud that had mixed with the blood of our compatriots helped, even a little, to assuage the thirst of their souls.

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Our final stop was the remnants of the consulate and police station, both of which had been destroyed. They were located in the center of the city, near Chinese homes and stores. The interior of the police station had been burned. In the middle of the night, the rebels had stormed the station. They killed all the policemen, who were prepared to defend the station, pistols in hand.

Beyond the station, surrounding three sides of a courtyard, were tiny Chinese-style houses, each consisting of one room with a dirt floor, and another Japanese style, with *tatami*. What humble, stark quarters they were. Just looking at them saddened us. The one on the left had been ransacked; everything of value had been stolen. I noticed a white, bloodstained child's quilt among the debris.

As horrible as it sounds, our nervous systems seemed to have become accustomed to the sight of bloodstains!

Looking into another room, I saw stains that must have been left by a huge amount of blood on a rush mat in a corner under a wall. Pieces of broken furniture lay scattered about.

Offering a silent prayer, we went inside. The floor was covered with scraps of paper. I saw several postcards and unopened letters. All of them were addressed to Mr. Hino Seichoku, Japanese Consulate and Police Substation at Tongzhou. This building had served as the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hino. Now they were gone, and so was their little baby. How horrible!

There was a calendar on an interior wall, the sort that has a page for each day. The date showing was 28, for July 28. It is unlikely that anyone will ever tear off another page.

Overcome with sadness, I was about to leave in a hurry when I noticed an object on the floor near my feet. It was a geography textbook for girls. On its cover was the owner's name, Miyoshi Chieko, and "4<sup>th</sup> grade, 6<sup>th</sup> Class" written in neat characters.

"This must be Mrs. Hino's maiden name," said the officer who was escorting our group.

I picked up the book and opened it, and saw that it was an East Asian geography textbook! When Mrs. Hino came to live in Tongzhou with her husband, she must have packed the book from her school days with her belongings so she could learn more about Chinese geography. What a thoughtful young woman!

On the wall above the mat with the huge bloodstain on it I was surprised to see something familiar. It was a painting done on heavy pink paper, a supplement to the January issue of *Shufu no Tomo* magazine! It was done by artist Domoto Insho! I stood there gazing at it, stunned. I had no tears left to shed. Then, I heard the sad voice of an officer.

"I found Mrs. Hino's account book on the floor here. She wrote down how much she had paid for vegetables she bought on the 28<sup>th</sup>."

Oh, why did I have to hear something so sad?

She brought an East Asian geography textbook with her to her husband's new post. She tried to create a pleasant atmosphere in her tiny home. She decorated a wall with a painting that came with a women's magazine. She was meticulous about recording her purchases in her account book. She was a conscientious housewife, a loving wife, and a gentle mother. She was still young, a sweet bride. What had she done to deserve to die by the swords of assassins? I wanted to wail and scream to heaven and earth; I wanted to curse the gods and Buddhas. I brushed the dust off the geography textbook, placed it carefully in front of the blood-soaked mat, and clasped my hands in prayer.

When I went outside, I saw a pair of cute little children's rubber boots lying on a concrete slab in front of the house next door. The sight was more than I could bear.



What I would have given to bring Chiang Kai-shek's wife, Soong Meiling, to this place, and show her the atrocities that Chinese men, born of Chinese women like her, had committed here, show her how they slaughtered women and tiny babies.

The Peace Preservation Corps savages did not fall from trees. Chinese women gave birth to them. The crimes committed in Tongzhou by Chinese troops will bring eternal shame to their mothers.

I appeal to the women of the world who have been, are, and will be mothers: Let us transcend national boundaries and join together in banishing the unlawful use of force and violence. Let us join together in creating peace on this earth.

Even if it takes us a hundred years to realize this dream, this is the path we women must tread.

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After having wandered around this city of death for nearly three hours, we expressed our thanks to Captain Yamamoto, Lieutenant Sakurai, and Ensign Innami, and bid farewell to them and to Tongzhou. As we passed through the city gate, we saw several dozen crows, birds of evil omen, gathered in a field behind us.

When we arrived in Tongzhou, I was afraid that we would encounter stragglers from the Peace Preservation Corps. But when we departed, our outrage was so strong and our wrath so ferocious that we would have welcomed such an encounter and the opportunity to avenge our compatriots.

(Beiping, night of August 29, 1937)

Even as I write this article, the images I saw at the policeman's residence remain vivid in my mind, and tears come to my eyes. I have a favor to ask of all readers: as often as you can, please offer a silent prayer for the souls of the men, women, and children who lost their lives in the massacre at Tongzhou.