

A Positive Method for Prevention of Venereal Disease

(Summary)

Dr. Tetsuo ASO, Second Lieutenant, an Army Medical Doctor attached to the 14th Clearing Hospital of the Eleventh Army, notes in his essay that venereal diseases should be considered threats as any other communicable disease to the lives of both soldiers and civilians and outlines a general plan of eradicating sexually transmitted diseases which places particular emphasis on preventative measures so that soldiers do not get infected in the first place. By eradicating venereal disease, the physical fitness of the soldier is maintained, whose primary duty is to perform strenuous and stressful tasks on the battlefield. While it could be said that it would be better for to prohibit front-line soldiers from sexual activity, the Japanese Army, as well as European armies clearly recognized that total abstinence is an highly impractical goal. Thus, as with other armies, Dr. Aso suggests that it would be better to embrace reality and implement measures, hygienic as well as social controls, that recognize that soldiers are human.

It should not be surprising that prostitution is closely associated with the military and Dr. Aso describes the rate of sexual disease infection in the militaries of Europe and America. Rates of infection were high enough to concern military officials who then implemented countermeasures to reduce infection rates. Since complete cures for sexually transmitted diseases were difficult to attain at the time, there was always the risk that a soldier or prostitute that underwent treatment was still infected. Thus, prevention and increasing awareness through education were used to reduce infection rates. It should be noted that outright prohibition of prostitution was never mentioned as a solution—military commanders everywhere took the pragmatic view. At the same time, no one, including Dr. Aso, supported prostitution as recreation for soldiers.

Thus, Dr. Aso advises that “comfort stations” should be placed under military supervision for the single purpose of reducing sexually transmitted disease. Prostitutes staffing comfort stations are to be checked for disease and, where possible, unregulated prostitutes and brothels were to be examined as well. Operators of comfort stations were also to be supervised, so that hygienic standards are maintained. Dr. Aso stresses that women who are unable to make a living otherwise should not be sent to military comfort stations, who, given their lack of experience, would likely be the source of disease, more so than experienced prostitutes. Dr. Aso also advises that alcohol consumption be limited, since alcohol intoxication can lead to unsafe sexual practices and that soldiers be given access to other forms entertainment. Clearly, prior to World War II, prostitution and the spread of venereal disease were not problems limited solely to Japan but problems of great concern faced by all militaries.