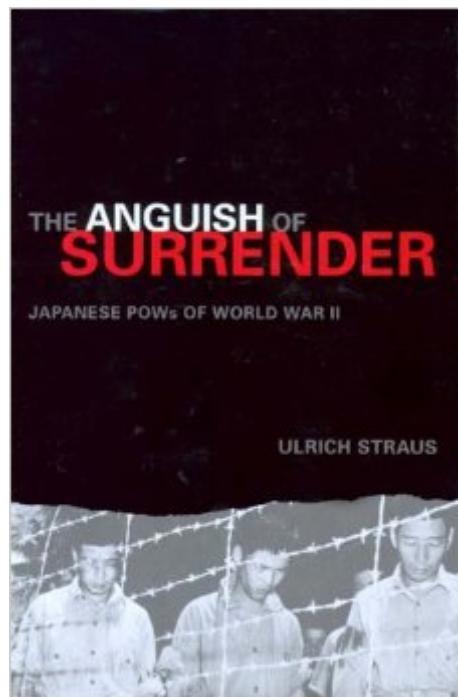


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The Anguish Of Surrender: Japanese POWs Of World War II



Synopsis

On December 6, 1941, Ensign Kazuo Sakamaki was one of a handful of men selected to skipper midget subs on a suicide mission to breach Pearl Harbor's defenses. When his equipment malfunctioned, he couldn't find the entrance to the harbor. He hit several reefs, eventually splitting the sub, and swam to shore some miles from Pearl Harbor. In the early dawn of December 8, he was picked up on the beach by two Japanese American MPs on patrol. Sakamaki became Prisoner No. 1 of the Pacific War. Japan's no-surrender policy did not permit becoming a POW. Sakamaki and his fellow soldiers and sailors had been indoctrinated to choose between victory and a heroic death. While his comrades had perished, he had survived. By becoming a prisoner of war, Sakamaki believed he had brought shame and dishonor on himself, his family, his community, and his nation, in effect relinquishing his citizenship. Sakamaki fell into despair and, like so many Japanese POWs, begged his captors to kill him. Based on the author's interviews with dozens of former Japanese POWs along with memoirs only recently coming to light, *The Anguish of Surrender* tells one of the great unknown stories of World War II. Beginning with an examination of Japan's prewar ultranationalist climate and the harsh code that precluded the possibility of capture, the author investigates the circumstances of surrender and capture of men like Sakamaki and their experiences in POW camps. Many POWs, ill and starving after days wandering in the jungles or hiding out in caves, were astonished at the superior quality of food and medical treatment they received. Contrary to expectations, most Japanese POWs, psychologically unprepared to deal with interrogations, provided information to their captors. Trained Allied linguists, especially Japanese Americans, learned how to extract intelligence by treating the POWs humanely. Allied intelligence personnel took advantage of lax Japanese security precautions to gain extensive information from captured documents. A few POWs, recognizing Japan's certain defeat, even assisted the Allied war effort to shorten the war. Far larger numbers staged uprisings in an effort to commit suicide. Most sought to survive, suffered mental anguish, and feared what awaited them in their homeland. These deeply human stories follow Japanese prisoners through their camp experiences to their return to their welcoming families and reintegration into postwar society. These stories are told here for the first time in English.

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Customer Reviews

Totalitarian regimes tend to discourage very strongly their soldiers from surrendering, even when the situation is hopeless and they already did their best. Staline treated Soviet POWs as traitors, Mao did the same thing with Chinese POWs after Korea War and even if from 1939 to 1943 Hitler didn't always ask his soldiers to fight to death, it changed very radically in 1944 and 1945 - in those years some Wehrmacht soldiers were shot for nothing more than simply discussing the idea of surrendering...However, with the possible exception of North Korea, no other country in modern history did a greater effort to indoctrinate its soldiers in a real cult of fight of death and absolute refusal to surrender, than Japan in the years between 1931 and 1945. In earlier Japanese wars against China (1894-95), against Russia (1904-05), against Germany in WWI (1914) or during the intervention in Russia (1918-1922) imperial soldiers were of course disocuraged from surrendering, as it was considered cowardly and dishonorable, but it was nevertheless tolerated in extreme circumstances, after all ways of fighting were exhausted. However with the advent of militaristic regime soon after the invasion of Manchuria in 1931, things changed. Since then the whole nation was intensely indoctrinated and instructed that surrendering in ANY situation was more than a dishonor, but a crime against the Emperor, the country and ones family - and therefore if fighting was no more possible, soldiers and even civilians were supposed to suicide rather than let themselves be captured. And during the great wars waged by Japan between 1937 and 1945 a large majority of soldiers and quite a lot of civilians (in places like Saipan and Okinawa) obeyed this rule.

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