The thoughts and opinions expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily of the U.S. government, the U.S. Department of the Navy or the Naval War College.
XVII. Japanese Atrocities

United States Protests and Representations to Japan

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Immediately after the attack on Pearl Harbor the Department of State took up with Japan the matter of according proper treatment for American nationals in Japanese hands. Although Japan is not a party to the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention the Department obtained from the Japanese Government a commitment to apply the provisions of that convention to American prisoners of war, and, so far as adaptable, to civilian internees held by Japan. Since the very beginning of the war, by repeated protests and representations through the protecting power, the Department has again and again called to the Japanese Government’s attention failures on the part of Japanese authorities to live up to their Government’s undertakings.

Horrified at the accounts of repatriates who returned on the first exchange voyage of the Gripsholm, accounts with which the public is familiar through the statements of Mr. Grew and other repatriates, the Department made these accounts the basis of a vigorous and comprehensive protest to the Japanese Government.

The American people are familiar with the protest addressed to Japan following the Japanese Government’s barbarous action in executing our aviators who fell into Japanese hands after General Doolittle’s raid over Tokyo. In that pro-
test the Department again called upon the Japanese Government to carry out its agreement to observe the provisions of the convention and warned the Japanese Government in no uncertain terms that the American Government will hold personally and officially responsible for their acts of depravity and barbarity all officers of the Japanese Government who have participated in their commitment and, with the inexorable and inevitable conclusion of the war, will visit upon such Japanese officers the punishment they deserve for their uncivilized and inhuman acts against American prisoners of war.

When it received from the military authorities reports of the brutal atrocities and depraved cruelties inflicted by the Japanese upon American prisoners of war in the Philippines the Department again called upon the Japanese Government to honor its undertaking to apply the provisions of the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention and to observe in its treatment of American nationals held by it the international common law of decency.

These protests are but three of the many that have been sent by the Department to Japan.

In order that the public may be familiar with the Department's efforts to obtain from Japan fulfilment of its undertakings to treat American nationals in its hands in accordance with humane and civilized principles, there is printed below a statement giving the dates of the principal representations and protests made by the Department, with a brief résumé of their purpose. The latest of these, representations comprehensively citing
categories of abuse and of neglect to which American prisoners in the hands of the Japanese have been subjected and calling for amelioration of the treatment accorded to American nationals, both prisoners of war and civilian internees, went forward on January 27.

1942

January 13. The exchange of names of prisoners of war in accordance with article 77, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention, and of interned civilians in accordance with the same article when applied to the treatment of civilians, was proposed.

January 31. Request that representatives of the Swiss Government entrusted with the protection of American interests in Japan and Japanese-occupied territory be permitted to visit all camps where Americans are held, in accordance with article 86, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention. Similar facilities requested for representatives of the International Red Cross Committee in accordance with international usage.

February 3. Proposal to exchange names of civilian internees and prisoners of war repeated.

February 7. Request for permission to visit camps repeated.

February 13. Proposal that in application of clauses of Geneva Convention which relate to food and clothing, racial and national customs be taken into account.

February 14. Japanese Government informed that United States Government may have to
reconsider its policy of extending liberal treat-
ment to Japanese if assurances are not given
by the Japanese Government that liberal prin-
ciples will be applied to Americans. Request
that Swiss representative be permitted to visit
part of Philippines occupied by the Japanese
forces.

March 3. Request that nurses and other sanitary
personnel be repatriated in accordance with
article 12 of the Geneva Red Cross Convention.

March 11. Asked for immediate report of the
names of American sick, wounded, and dead.

March 19. Made proposals with regard to the
labor of civilians, provision of food according
to national tastes, visits by friends, relatives,
doctors, etc., visits by protecting power and in-
ternational Red Cross to civilian internment
camps.

April 3. Asked for permission for the appoint-
ment of an International Red Cross representa-
tive for the Philippines.

April 11. Request for improvement in treatment
of civilians at Kobe.

May 14. Confirmation requested of message re-
ceived from International Red Cross that Japa-
nese authorities are applying Geneva Red Cross
Convention.

May 14. Asked if Swiss representatives were per-
mitted to interview prisoners of war without
witnesses in accordance with article 86 of
Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

May 19. Asked for information concerning whereabouts of Americans from Wake Island.

May 19. Requested information concerning where-
abouts of Americans in Philippine Islands.
May 20. Requested improvement of conditions under which civilian internees were held.
June 4. Repeated request for permission for Swiss and International Red Cross representatives to visit camps.
June 11. Repeated request for permission for Swiss representatives to interview prisoners of war without witnesses.
June 19. Pressed for appointment of International Red Cross delegate in the Philippines.
July 15. Repatriation of seriously sick and wounded prisoners of war on the basis of the Model Agreement attached to the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention proposed.
July 17. Requested Swiss to endeavor to have conditions in Kobe civilian camps improved.
August 7. Protest against the sentences imposed on Americans who attempted escape from Shanghai prisoner-of-war camp. These sentences were contrary to article 50, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention. Protest was made at the same time against the refusal of
the Japanese authorities to permit the Swiss representatives to visit these men.

**August 12.** Permission again requested for Swiss and International Red Cross representatives to visit all camps.

**August 27.** Again requested that visits to camps be permitted.

**September 11.** Additional request for the transmission of names of prisoners of war. Asked if prisoners might mail cards immediately after their arrival at camp in accordance with article 36, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

**September 22.** Lists of the camps, their location, and population requested.

**September 26.** Japanese asked to accept mail addressed to persons not reported as interned because Japanese authorities had not properly reported names of persons held.

**September 29.** Requested ranks of officers who unsuccessfully attempted to escape be restored. Protection of Geneva Prisoners of War Convention for American aviators reportedly being held incommunicado demanded.

**September 29.** Requested reporting of names of 400 American civilians known to have been on Wake Island and whose names have not yet been reported as prisoners or internees.

**October 6.** Pressed for reply concerning proposals for repatriation of seriously sick and wounded.

**November 12.** Pressed Japanese to provide at their expense medical care for internees in accordance with article 14, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention, when adapted to the treatment of civilian internees.
November 17. Protest against six cases of atrocities perpetrated by Japanese authorities.

November 17. Requested additional food at Negishi camp.

November 17. Weekly transmission of names of American prisoners of war and civilian internees requested in accordance with article 77, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

December 7. Names of captured aviators and permission to visit them requested.

December 7. Requested that (1) internees at Sunmire be allowed to have visitors, (2) visitors may speak languages other than Japanese, (3) Swiss representatives be allowed to speak to internees without witnesses.

December 12. Extended protest regarding torture, neglect, physical violence, solitary confinement, illegal prison sentences, mistreatment, and abuse that led to deaths of some Americans; failure to permit visits to camps by Swiss and International Red Cross representatives; and other violations of the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention and the laws of humanity.

December 17. Protest against Japanese decision to apply Geneva Convention only to extent that its provisions do not change the effect of Japanese laws in force.

December 19. Protests against failure of Japanese to afford facilities to permit the receipt and distribution of relief supplies in accordance with article 37 of the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.
January 2. Requested that names of Americans held in an internment camp in Java be provided in accordance with article 77, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention, that Swiss representatives visit the camp in accordance with article 86, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention, and that International Red Cross representatives be permitted to visit the camp in accordance with general international usage.

January 4. Protest concerning conditions at Shinigawa prisoner-of-war camp. Protest covers insufficient diet (article 11, Geneva Prisoner of War Convention) and request that Japanese grant Americans reciprocal treatment with respect to mail privileges and wages for labor.

February 4. Requested a liberalization of maximum canteen purchases permitted in any month be granted on the basis of reciprocity.

February 5. Protest against Japanese failure to provide canteens in accordance with article 12, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention, failure to permit free exercise of religion in accordance with article 16, requirement that non-commissioned officers perform other than supervisory labor contrary to the provisions of article 27, limitation on correspondence with the protecting power contrary to article 44. Increased facilities with regard to mail requested on a basis of reciprocity.

February 12. Protest against failure of Japanese to provide heat at Urawa camp in accordance with article 10, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.
February 15. Protest against Japanese refusal to permit Swiss representatives to interview internees without witnesses in accordance with article 86, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

February 16. Protest against the Japanese failure to provide proper medical attention to prisoners of war in accordance with article 14, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

February 18. Protest against program of general internment of American nationals in the Far East.

February 20. Protest against refusal of Japanese authorities to permit American internees to receive foodstuffs sent from the outside in accordance with article 37, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention. Japanese Government requested reciprocally to permit Americans to receive visitors.

February 25. Request that Japanese supply the names of Americans held in the Sham-Sui-Po prisoner-of-war camp, Kowloon, in accordance with article 77, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

March 1. Further protest with regard to failure of Japanese authorities to permit interviews without witnesses being present. Request that the Japanese authorities reciprocally provide underwear for American internees.


March 6. Protest against refusal of Japanese Government to permit representatives of protecting
power to visit and to communicate with American civilian internees at Singapore in accordance with articles 44 and 86, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

March 8. Request for permission for Swiss representatives to visit American prisoners of war in labor detachments.


March 12. Japanese Government pressed to restore military rank of American officers who, as a penalty for trying to escape, were deprived of their rank contrary to article 49, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

March 15. Additional protest against failure of Japanese authorities to transmit the names of prisoners of war and civilian internees in accordance with article 77, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

March 16. Protest against refusal of Japanese authorities to install canteens where foodstuffs may be purchased in accordance with article 12, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention, and to permit interviews between internees and Swiss delegate without witnesses.

March 18. Protest against another instance when Japanese did not permit Swiss representative to interview internees without witnesses.

March 26. Reciprocal treatment again requested with regard to mail forwarded by civilian internees and prisoners of war.
March 30. Protest against failure of Japanese Government to report names of all American civilians who were taken into custody at Wake Island.

April 3. Further protest against Japanese failure to provide clothing in accordance with article 12, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

April 8. Reciprocal treatment requested for interned persons to live together as family units.

April 12. Protest against the Japanese action in sentencing to death American airmen for acts committed during military operations. Protest made at the same time against Japanese refusal to grant these men the safeguards with respect to judicial proceedings set up in articles 60, 61, 62, 65, and 66, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

May 22. Protest against refusal of the Japanese Government to permit representatives of the protecting power to act in behalf of American interests in Hong Kong.

May 25. Protest against Japanese refusal to permit visits to camps near Shanghai by representatives of the Swiss Consulate General.

May 25. Protest against continued Japanese refusal to permit conversations between prisoners of war and Swiss representatives without witnesses.

May 25. Protest against refusal of Japanese Government to permit advances of official United States Government funds to needy American nationals detained by Japan.

May 25. Further protest with regard to the failure of the Japanese Government to report
names of all civilians last known to have been on Wake Island.

**May 27.** General protest against the Japanese failure to provide standards of housing, diet, clothing, medical care, etc., for Americans, that are in accordance with the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

**May 31.** Request that Swiss visit civilians interned in Philippines and prisoners of war held at Mukden, Manchuria.

**June 5.** Protest against failure of Japanese to permit visits by representatives of the protecting power to internment camps in and near Canton, Weihsien, and Wuhu, all in China.

**June 9.** Protest against failure of Japanese Government to permit Swiss to visit prisoner-of-war camp at Hakodate in accordance with article 86, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

**July 3.** Further protest with regard to failure of Japanese authorities to permit Swiss representatives to visit camps.

**July 6.** Extended protest against the Japanese Government’s refusal to permit Swiss representatives to visit all prisoner-of-war and civilian internment camps in Japan and Japanese-occupied territory.

**July 17.** Protest against Japanese Government’s action in locating camps in an unhealthy location, in failing to communicate orders to prisoners of war in a language which they understand, in failing to permit the camp spokesmen to correspond with the protecting power, in failing to provide clothing, and in requiring excessive hours of labor by prisoners of war.
These acts were contrary to articles 10, 20, 44, 12, and 30, respectively, of the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention. Reciprocal treatment with regard to mail again requested.

July 20. Protest against failure of Japanese authorities to (1) supply adequate food, lodging, and clothing (2) to permit representatives of protecting power to interview internees without witnesses (3) establish canteens at civilian internment camps.

August 5. Protest against failure of Japanese Government to report names of Americans being held in Burma as required by article 77, Geneva Prisoners of War Convention.

October 7. Protest against failure of Japanese authorities to permit visits to prisoner-of-war camp at Fukuoka.

October 13. Reciprocal treatment requested with respect to the privilege of dating letters and postcards mailed by prisoners of war and civilian internees.

November 19. Additional protest with respect to the failure of the Japanese Government to report the names of American civilians interned at Wake Island.

November 22. Protest against Japanese failure to permit the Swiss representatives to visit American prisoners of war held by the Japanese in Thailand.

December 1. Additional representations with respect to reciprocal privileges for prisoners of war and civilian internees to forward mail.

December 2. Additional protest with respect to the failure of the Japanese Government to report
the names of all civilians held in internment camps as well as the release or transfer of persons previously reported in accordance with article 77 of the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention when it is adapted to the treatment of civilian internees.

December 11. Protest against Japanese refusal to permit representatives of the protecting power to visit sick Americans held in hospital in Shanghai.

1944

January 27. Extended protest to Japanese Government with respect to:

(1) Failure to permit representatives of Swiss Government and of the International Red Cross Committee to visit all places where Americans are held

(2) failure to forward complaints to the appropriate authorities and to representatives of the protecting power

(3) punishment of American nationals for complaining concerning the conditions of captivity

(4) failure to furnish needed clothing to American nationals

(5) confiscation of personal effects from American civilian internees and prisoners of war.

(6) subjection of Americans to insults and to public curiosity

(7) failure and refusal to provide health-sustaining food

(8) improper use of the profits of the sale of goods in camp canteens
(9) forcing civilians to perform labor other than that connected with the administration, maintenance, and management of internment camps

(10) forcing officer prisoners of war to perform labor and non-commissioned officers to do other than supervisory work

(11) requiring prisoners of war to perform labor that has a direct relation with war operations

(12) failure to provide proper medical care

(13) failure to report the names of all prisoners of war and civilian internees in their hands and of American combatants found dead on the field of battle

(14) failure to permit prisoners of war freely to exercise their religion

(15) failure to post copies of Geneva Prisoners of War Convention in English translation in the camps

(16) failure to provide adequate equipment and accommodations in the camps

(17) failure to apply the provisions of the Geneva Prisoners of War Convention with respect to the trial and punishment of prisoners of war

(18) inflicting corporal punishment and torture upon American nationals.

January 27. Comprehensive statement detailing specific instances of failure of the Japanese Government to abide by its commitments as charged above.