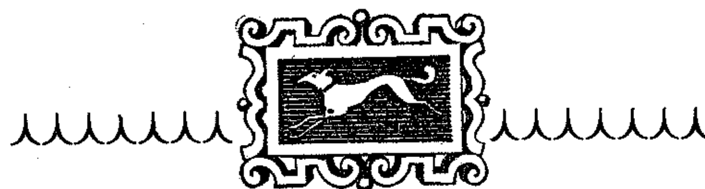
THE LOST WAR

A Japanese Reporter's

Inside Story

By Masuo Kato



ALFRED · A · KNOPF · NEW YORK

1946

I

Empire in Ashes

THE thunderous arrival of the first atomic bomb at Hiroshima, Japan, on August 6, 1945, was only a *coup de grâce* for an empire already struggling in particularly agonizing death throes. The world's newest and most devastating of weapons had floated out of the summer sky to destroy a city at a stroke, but its arrival had small effect on the outcome of the war between Japan and the United Nations.

At the moment the bomb struck, Japan's war was irrevocably lost, along with her fantastic dream of empire, her adolescent longing for world recognition, and her militarists' inflamed lust for power. However fateful that moment may have been for all the world, whatever strange paths atomic force may have carved for the future history of mankind, it was for Japan and the Japanese a kind of euthanasia—a merciful release.

There were few who knew how completely the bitter issues of this interracial war had already been decided. Japan's leaders, floundering in dissension and indecision, knew the truth. Japan's enemies did not know it. Japan's people, deprived of even the simplest truth, did not know it. One could "feel in one's skin," they said, that all was not well, but they clung stubbornly to their world of myths until the last. Even on the final day of war, when they learned that their Emperor would

address them by radio for the first time in history, they took it for granted that only more war-words—a declaration of war against Russia—would be forthcoming. " 'Die with me,' His Majesty will ask. We must obey."

Before the next sunrise a confused, bewildered, and beaten people were waiting, as though in a trance, for the arrival of their conquerors.

To the Japanese at war's end, the entrance of Soviet Russia into the struggle was far more sensational than the bombing of Hiroshima. Although both events were straws at which drowning Japan clutched as a way out of a destructive maelstrom, the man in the street was much better informed about Russia's participation than about the bombing.

The Hiroshima bombing was followed in Japan by more than twenty-four hours of absolute silence, while the rest of the world heard with wonder and excitement the first torrent of news about the development. Not until the afternoon following the bombing did the Japanese Government issue a communiqué. Its announcement said only that "the enemy seems to have used a new type of bomb" and reported that "details are under investigation."

Restless curiosity stirred among the people of Japan, and strange tales of horror filtered out of Hiroshima by word of mouth, but there were no further details for two more days. On August 9 President Truman broadcast a warning to Japan that the Allies were prepared to wage full-scale atomic warfare if necessary, and his speech was reported without comment. The Japanese heard the words "atomic bomb" for the first time, but there was no explanation. When the second bomb fell, on Nagasaki, the Army hastily planted rumors that America had only two such bombs and that no more would fall. The ordinary Japanese knew no more details nor the true significance of the atomic bombings until after the war.

Many of the facts of Japan's already accomplished defeat, however, had long been exposed for any shrewd Japanese to

see. On the eve of surrender the Empire was in literal ruin.

About eighty of Japan's cities had been completely destroyed or damaged to the point where they could scarcely be regarded as cities. Tokyo, spurned by Allied airmen late in the war as an unworthy target, was a grotesque exhibit of modern war's destructive power, pre-atomic style. Before the war a city rivaling New York, London, and Paris, Tokyo had become a collection of small villages from which almost every vestige of metropolitan life had disappeared. The population of this remnant-city was estimated at 2,400,000, compared with 6,800,000 in 1940. About half of the city's area of 230 square miles had been wiped out by fire.

Even to her own people, Tokyo's once beautiful face had become unrecognizable and misshapen. Endlessly there stretched blocks and blocks of ash heap, from which jutted an occasional chimney and now and then the shell of a gutted building. Ironically, it was the Western portion of Japan's mixed civilization that withstood best the ravages of attack by the West. Where buildings of Western style were clustered, there were small islands in the sea of destruction, but elsewhere there were ruin and death. Debris clogged many of the streets. The scale of destruction was so immense that it had been impossible to set it right. Even had there been labor or machinery for the purpose, no more than a beginning would have been possible. The people of Tokyo had fought the fires courageously, desperately at first, but there had been no turning back the swelling flood of incendiaries that poured from the dark sky from the fall of 1944 until the summer of 1945.

By night the remaining residents of Tokyo huddled in terror in inadequate bomb shelters, in a few overcrowded homes, or in jerry-built shacks of wood or rusty, corrugated metal roofing. By day most of these fear-ridden survivors worked in the scattering of war industries left by the bombs. A few found time to push away some of the jumble of bricks, ashes, and twisted metal to build temporary shelters or to

plant victory gardens against the ominous threat of one more hunger-haunted winter.

The limitless acres of ruin seemed to spread everywhere, like a desert, in a drab and monotonous panorama of hopelessness. The fires had swept away trees and flowers, schools and monuments and parks, along with munitions works and factories, so there was little to relieve the drabness. Unsightly, reddish-orange rust had painted lavishly the tangled metal that lay here and there—automobile bodies, printing presses, metal lathes, iron safes, plumbing, roofing and the other scattered bits of metal left over from a city that had been mostly wood. On top of all this disordered vista had begun to grow a new man-made ugliness, a typical aftermath of war—strewn papers, stinking garbage and human excrement, rubbish thrown indiscriminately into the midst of the wasteland.

Many a Tokyo landmark was gone forever. The Tokyo station, a venerable brick building known to travelers from the West, was half destroyed. The Foreign Office was wiped out, a heap of rubble through which the persistent weeds had already poked their way. The Department of Justice Building had become an empty space on the city's horizon. Parts of the Imperial Hotel were gutted. Much of the Meiji shrine, dedicated to the most progressive of Japan's emperors, was in ruins, and a large part of the Imperial Palace, to the Japanese like Mecca and Medina to the Moslem world, had been destroyed by flames. Honjo and Fukagawa Wards were as nearly as possible one hundred per cent gone, and the famed Honganji temple in Asakusa was a disordered pile of ashes.

The Tokyo shopping district was a wreck, but no matter; the stores had long since been bare for lack of goods to sell. Japanese with wartime yen in their pockets wandered through the wreckage, but found nothing to buy. The Ginza, Tokyo's Fifth Avenue, was a hollow shell—only here and there were there doors open to the shopper, whatever the size of his purse.

Most of Tokyo's fire-fighting equipment was wrecked or

badly damaged, and no one thought any longer of fighting the incessant fires. Householders tried only to save what they could—a pet dog, a wedding kimono, an art object, any trifle that might some day be a link with the past. Even if they had retained the will to fight back against the incessant cascade of fire, the waterworks had been badly damaged, and there were days at a time when large sections of the city's water supply were cut off completely. Many districts were forced to revert to wells after having been accustomed for many years to a modern water supply.

The cowering residents of Tokyo dreaded their nights as might men afflicted with nightmares. Clocks were adjusted to make the most of daylight hours, when the bombers usually attacked military targets only, with high-explosive bombs, killing only a few here and there. At night an entire population crouched in dread behind the strictest of total blackouts. No one knew whether the B-29's would strike that night, or where. Would it be fire bombs again, or high explosive, or both? Night after night, thousands learned the answer as the last fact of their mortal lives. An anticipated wartime death toll of 100,000 for all Japan, carefully forecast by some Japanese on the basis of London's experience, was reached or surpassed in the first big fire raid alone, the great fire of Tokyo on March 9, 1945.

Only a few Tokyo residents had adequate air-raid protection. Public shelters could accommodate only a fraction of even the remaining population, and frequently these were turned into death traps by waves of oxygen-destroying flame, carbon monoxide, panic-born stampede, or a combination of them all. The average householder at first relied fatalistically on a simply dug pit in his garden, which was often worse than no protection. Yorozu Oda, who had been Japan's representative on the Hague Court, for example, was killed when he took refuge in a private shelter that had been considered one of the best in Tokyo. Other bodies pulled from the ruins included several Diet members and notables such as Viscount

Kikujiro Ishii, who attained fame in Japan as the diplomat who signed the Lansing-Ishii agreement. There was not one family in all Tokyo, in all Japan, that had not lost one or more members, relatives, or close friends as a result of the raids. And still they went on and on.

Rumor, born of fear and sometimes sired by Allied propaganda, stirred panic like a stick poking among glowing charcoal on a frosty morning. "Advance-notice dropping" had become the latest weapon of the Allies. Before the bombs fell, the bombers roared overhead, dropping leaflets that told where and when the next strike would be made. Flee for your lives, the leaflets said, the B-29's are coming. At first the people believed their leaders, who told them these leaflets meant nothing. "The Allies," they said, "only wish to frighten you. Remain calm and stay at your posts." The B-29's came with the airy nonchalance of Babe Ruth pointing to the exact spot in right field where his game-winning home run was to be delivered, and those who had believed their leaders died by the thousands. In Kofu they chose to believe the leaflets, and there were few casualties when the raiders struck. The rumors grew. "I heard," people said, "that there are leaflets promising Yokohama will not be bombed." Then they heard: "There are leaflets saying the next strike will be in Hokkaido." More strongly came the persistent story, over and over: "Yokohama will not be bombed. The Allies intended to use its port as a landing-place." Day after day long lines of Tokyo refugees crowded the bomb-scarred highway to Yokohama. On May 29, 1945 much of the city was destroyed by flames, and the refugees fled no farther. Many were dead, and for the rest there was nowhere to go.

In Tokyo the raiders had struck most heavily where the human congestion was greatest and where there also was the greatest concentration of Japan's "phantom industry," where the piece work that fed the aircraft and other war industries was carried on. This was the section of small shops, of machine tools in homes, where families toiled endlessly to make

small parts that went with their neighbors' daily product to produce the machinery of war. This was the root of the Japanese war effort, and the Allies struck savagely at that root. In the heart of the ordinary Japanese there was hatred and bitterness against the American raiders who left an indiscriminate trail of the blackened corpses of babies and grandmothers interspersed with the wreckage of war machinery and the bodies of war workers and soldiers.

The end of the war found the average Japanese living on a hand-to-mouth basis that was a mockery of the modern industrial civilization he had believed he was establishing. He was at best shabby, and usually he was ragged. Nearly always he was personally unclean—one sign of the social corruption that had set in. The public bathhouses, a product of the Japanese tradition of cleanliness, had for the most part been destroyed. Those that remained were confronted with a lack of fuel, so that the custom of a daily hot bath was out of the question. Even in private homes the national ideal of cleanliness had suffered; soap was a rarity and it had become hardly worth while to try to keep up appearances.

Merely to subsist had become the goal of each Japanese. When men gathered in groups, there was seldom the smiling affability once characteristic of the Japanese. There was one topic of conversation only—food. Politics and the war were matters of secondary interest in August 1945. People stood in long lines to obtain the simplest articles of a simple diet. Otherwise they spent hours in the country, searching for luxuries, once considered necessities, at exorbitant prices.

Much of the ordinary street conversation consisted in complaint about the failure of the rationing system and the difficulty of obtaining food. This was one of the few topics about which anyone could express himself more or less freely in public. Most other critical observations, made on pain of imprisonment or even death, were confined to guarded conversation between not more than two intimates. Those overhearing such conversations were supposed to, and often did, re-

port them to the Kempei Tai, the military police, which took prompt action to dispose of "dangerous thoughts."

Another common source of complaint was the disappearance from Japanese skies of fighter-plane protection. "Our planes come out after the B-29's have gone," was a standard comment in intimate conversation. Many were bitter in criticism of what they believed to be inaccurate and fruitless anti-aircraft fire. "The anti-aircraft guns do more damage than the American bombers," ran the comment.

Although the food situation was critical throughout the latter part of the war and was becoming desperate at the end, there was little, perhaps no, outright starvation. The malnutrition problem, however, had a very practical effect on the nation's war potential, because many war workers could not obtain enough food to sustain heavy labor, and human efficiency was declining everywhere.

It was evident, too, that the worst was yet to come. It had been unseasonably cool throughout the summer of 1945, and rice requires hot weather for a satisfactory crop. The food situation had caught the Japanese leadership flat-footed and with no long-range food plan. The country entered the war smugly complacent about the food supply. It was generally believed that whatever other shortages might develop, Japan would have plenty of food. Months before the end of the war, imports from China and Manchuria had dwindled alarmingly, and by August 1945 they had virtually disappeared.

The average Japanese was forced to content himself with one small bowl of watered soup for breakfast and some pickles, with less than two bowls of rice instead of the three he had expected before the war. Often his rice, which usually was mixed with other grains, was made into a watery porridge to make it go farther. If a man could get two bowls of rice for every meal, he was supposed to be a happy man. For lunch a Japanese war worker carried a miniscule piece of frozen, odoriferous fish and a few vegetables. His supper was mostly a repetition of breakfast.

The food situation was vastly complicated by the black market, which had got completely out of hand long before the end of the war and was largely responsible for the day-to-day living conditions of most Japanese. It is safe to say that there was no Japanese who did not patronize the black market to supplement the meager and often nonexistent official ration. This, of course, benefited the well-to-do and worked a serious hardship on those with fixed incomes.

There was a story going the rounds in Tokyo about a man who was determined to set a patriotic example for his neighbors by refusing to patronize the black market. With Spartan courage he limited himself strictly to the official ration. As a result he soon starved to death, despite the importunities of his relatives and neighbors, who urged him to compromise with principle and save his life. After his death his bereaved family searched diligently but could find no coffin except in the black market; and in such a coffin he was finally buried.

The black market drew much of its patronage from the large war industries, which were able to do pretty much as they pleased in the name of national defense. To add to the scanty food allowances of their employees it was common practice for these industries to send agents into the country districts to buy supplies at black-market prices. This resulted in competitive bidding, with further inflation of prices and further scarcities in the legitimate markets.

Scarcely less acute was the clothing situation. The colorful kimono and obi, traditional garb of the Japanese woman, had disappeared from the scene, not to return until after the war. In their place appeared the *monpei*, a pantaloon and shirt combination adapted from the type of clothing worn by farmers in the northern districts of Japan. Women war workers wore this national costume as a patriotic symbol, but the blow to the age-old femininity of Japan's women went deep. Nearly every man wore some type of uniform; there was a national uniform, which had risen steadily in price along with other commodities. Clothing that a man once could have purchased

for 60 yen now cost 1,000, and even at that price was often unobtainable. New shoes, even geta (wooden clogs), were virtually unobtainable, and there were almost none remaining from prewar days that were not thoroughly worn out. The Government was making plans to return the old-fashioned straw sandal to popular use, and to that end school children were being taught to fashion them.

Many other aspects of Japanese life had been sharply altered. There was little public entertainment or sports, partly because of air raids, partly because of lack of manpower, and in part due to Government prohibition of most Western-style sports and entertainment. Moving-picture theaters continued to operate, but they offered old pictures. Programs were given during the day only, the last finishing at about seven p.m. Despite this, people stood in long lines before the ticket windows. It was an incongruity that there were queues in front of moving-picture box offices at a time when every able Japanese was supposed to be in the armed forces or toiling long hours in war production, but many war plants had idle workers on their large payrolls because necessary material was unobtainable.

Geisha houses, traditionally an important part of the Japanese entertainment world, were closed by the Government. *Joros*, Japanese prostitutes, were put to work in war plants.

Even the well-to-do Japanese housewife found her mode of living drastically changed. Where once she might have had at least one servant, such a luxury now was out of the question, partly because it meant another mouth to feed in the household. "Can we not find a maid who doesn't eat?" was an ironical saying of the day. Women who had never in their lives done manual labor were doing their own household chores, standing for hours in food lines, and carrying heavy burdens on their backs.

Everywhere there was a feeling of dismay at the thought of another winter with insufficient fuel. Still vivid was the recollection of two previous winters when the already severe

fuel shortage had resulted in chilly, cheerless homes and equally uncomfortable shops, offices, and factories.

The Japanese school system was thoroughly disrupted. In the cities the children were evacuated to the country, where the educational facilities could not absorb the additional burden. Those who were old enough to do so were working in war plants. The middle schools remained open for first-year classes only, but the curriculum dealt almost exclusively with the proper construction of air-raid shelters, the cleaning up of air-raid debris, or some type of military training.

Sharpshooting Allied air forces had pushed the Japanese transportation system to the teetering edge of collapse, although main railroad lines continued to operate until the end. Heavy losses in rolling stock and in motor transport, combined with repeated temporary tie-ups resulting from bombing of rails, highways, and bridges, caused unbelievable overcrowding of passenger trains and irregular movement of freight. Lines knocked out by bombing, however, were as a rule speedily restored so that traffic interruptions, while a persistent annoyance, did not ordinarily last more than half a day or a day at a time. Even so, the individual Japanese often was forced to carry heavy loads on his back for considerable distances. Evacuees frequently moved all their worldly goods in this way. Evacuations contributed heavily to the general traffic congestion. For a week or ten days after a new section of a large city had been burned out, the outgoing traffic would be extremely heavy, because all those whose homes had been destroyed would be given free tickets to any part of the country where they could find shelter.

Japan's productive machinery was approaching paralysis as a result of a shortage or complete lack of almost everything. Air raids and blockade had compressed steel fingers around the economic throat of the nation. Production of aircraft, for example, had been more than halved by 1945; late in 1944 it had fallen below the rate of losses, so that in cold mathematics alone there could be only one outcome so far as the war in

the air was concerned. From a peak production of 2,857 planes for the month of June 1944, the rate had fallen to 1,000 planes of all types, some not fully equipped to fly, by July 1945.

Japan's once proud fleet had been wiped out in the Philippine Sea and Leyte Gulf battles of 1944 and by subsequent air attacks in the Inland Sea. The "silent Navy" had long been a Japanese tradition, and the admirals now were saying less than ever. By 1945, however, intelligent newspaper readers could guess a part of the truth, because there was open discussion of subordinating the remainder of the fleet to the Army in a single defense department. In its public utterances the Navy said nothing about its fleet—it spoke only of air squadrons. There were few, however, who realized the true extent of Japan's naval fiasco until official figures were published after the war.

Japan was like a beautiful fruit shining in the summer sun, with a skin strong and healthy to the eye, but with its inner portion rotten, worm-infested and inedible. Because of the skin, the form was there, but the substance had disappeared. An entire nation had been molded into a pattern of thought and action, had been forced into a totalitarian goosestep. As though in a trance, the Japanese people clung to their ancient belief that so long as they remained within the accepted patterns, they could not be wrong. All the while, the gap between what the people knew of the status of the war and what their leaders knew was growing wider; the chasm between the actual thoughts and actions of the leaders and what they told their followers was immense.

The Japanese are a people of paradoxes. That is why they could cling to the idea of victory in the midst of the fact of defeat. Even though some had come to accept defeat as likely, a companion conclusion was that it would come only after Japan had gone down gloriously fighting to the last man. Most of the Japanese people could not abandon their ingrained belief in the "God land," a belief that Japan was a

product and part and parcel of a divinity, and therefore as invincible as infinity itself, all physical evidence to the contrary. So it was that the people of Nippon listened eagerly to frantic reassurances of their leaders that the "decisive battle" was soon to be fought on their homeland.

The day before the war ended, the newspaper *Asahi*, Tokyo's largest daily, carried an appeal from Prince Morimasa Nashimoto, president of the war veterans' organization, who was later apprehended on war-crime charges, to members of his organization to be leaders in encouraging the national will to victory. Other stories spoke of the coming decisive battle for the homeland and gave assurance that every preparation was being made in accordance with the firm determination of all to win a victory.

Actually Japan had started looking for a way out of her already hopeless predicament when a new Cabinet was formed in April 1945, with Kantaro Suzuki as Prime Minister. Suzuki was very close to Emperor Hirohito, having been the Emperor's Grand Chamberlain and chairman of the Privy Council. It is probable that no man in Japan was better informed as to the real wishes of the Emperor. Since such matters could not be discussed openly at that time even in a Cabinet meeting because of the stubborn opposition of the ruling Army clique, the nation knew nothing of the true role intended for the Suzuki Cabinet.

On May 25, 1945 there was held at the Geihinkan, a beautiful mansion ordinarily reserved for the reception of national guests, a remarkable dinner party. The host was Suzuki's military secretary, Colonel Makoto Matsutani, and guests were some half a dozen Japanese who had lived in the United States and were presumed to be familiar with that country. Their opinions were sought for the benefit of the Prime Minister. I was one of the group, and I gave the opinion I had long held that there could be no hope for a turn in the tide and that the thing to do was to seek peace as early as possible. There could be no disgrace in military defeat, but to commit national sui-

cide by fighting to the end was certainly both foolish and disgraceful, I told Matsutani. Some of the others agreed.

After the meeting broke up, at about nine o'clock in the evening, the air-raid sirens began sounding. We had discussed holding frequent meetings at the same place to discuss the same subject, but by morning the plan had to be amended—the raiders had burned the building to the ground.

During the following month I called on an old friend, Tsuneo Matsudaira, Minister of the Imperial Household, who resigned from that post shortly afterward. He was looked upon by the military as a "dangerous" person to hold a position so close to the throne, because it was thought he might attempt to influence the Emperor toward peace. Matsudaira's house had only recently been destroyed by air raid, but it would have been unsafe to call on him at his home in any event. I went to his office, in case the gendarmerie might be watching.

I outlined to him what I believed the war situation to be, how fruitless it seemed to fight on. "The situation is fully understood," he told me, "but how to approach a solution is the question. How to persuade the people." I replied that something must be done in a month or two or the Emperor himself might be overthrown by the people because the worsening food situation would become acute enough to end the apparent docility of the people.

This was a dangerous remark to make, even between old friends in private conversation, and Matsudaira's answer was enigmatically worded. There could be no question, however, that its meaning was that the Emperor was at a loss as to how to control the Army and Navy die-hards.

Meanwhile the Government continued to show a united front to the nation and to the world and went on exhorting the people to further effort. Preparation for the anticipated invasion went feverishly ahead in the summer of 1945. The people of each prefecture facing the sea had selected one or more sites on their coastline where the Allies were certain to

strike first. Troops were withdrawn from Manchuria, despite the threat of Soviet attack, to reinforce Kyushu, where the danger seemed greatest. Defense lines were built along the home islands beginning in October 1944, but for the most part they were primitive and toylike compared with the steel and concrete fortifications that the Allied armies smashed in Europe, and they were still incomplete by midsummer of 1945. Those that I inspected were hand-made and crude. No materials existed for modern fortifications; there was even a lack of concrete so far as I could discover on a trip to the Chiba Peninsula, near Tokyo. The fortifications were mainly the work of farmers of the area who were drafted into labor battalions. Barbed wire had been strung along the beaches, and the open fields were dotted with tank traps about six yards square. The hills were studded with pillboxes of earth and heavy timbers connected with a network of dirt trenches laid out to provide interlocking fields of fire. Foxholes were scattered throughout the terrain. Here and there were concrete gun emplacements, but otherwise little steel or concrete was to be seen. To an amateur, at least, there was a question whether the Army intended making a serious defense of the homeland at all or would merely offer a face-saving token defense. It seemed obvious that no successful resistance could be made. Perhaps Japan was fighting on only from habit and because she did not know how to stop.

Earlier in the war there had been a popular jingle sung by children in the streets and even broadcast on the radio:

> Come out,
> Nimitz and MacArthur!
> Then we will send you
> Tumbling down to hell.

Now Nimitz and MacArthur had arrived at Japan's door, and the song was no longer to be heard.