

Young People Spurred on to War: the Testimony of a Former Imperial Japanese Navy *Yokaren* Trainee Pilot

戦争へと駆り立てられた若人：元日本海軍飛行予科練習生の証言

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Abstract

1943年初頭、先の12カ月間で多くの陸、海、空の兵士が戦死し、窮地に陥った日本軍は新たな隊員の補充が急務であった。政策を講ずるに当たり、軍部の影響が、社会の広範に渡っての動員、また教科書の内容や若者の思考にまで及んだ。太平洋戦争の勃発前および戦中を通しての若者の登用における陸、海軍の役割については多くの文献に著されているが、他の要因はどの程度あったのだろうか。全ての日本男児は、20歳の成人年齢に達すると軍への入隊が義務付けられていたが、一体、何が16、17歳の若者を志願兵へと駆り立てたのか。このような若年層の動員に対して異議を申し立てる者はいなかったのか。

本稿の筆者は、これらの問いへの答えを見つけようとして、元海軍予科練習生で、終戦1ヶ月前に戦闘機「秋水」の特別攻撃隊に入隊した元飛行兵の伊原昭氏90歳にインタビューを試みた。本稿はそのインタビューの抄録によって構成されている。まだ中学4年生にもかかわらずどのような道筋を経て入隊志願へと至ったのか、訓練生としてどれほど苛酷な体制下にあったのか、そして戦争は人びとと彼自身に何をもたらしたのかについて、伊原氏は真率に語った。

キーワード：1. Asian Pacific War 2. *Yokaren* training 3. Personal interview

Introduction

The rapid advances made by Japan's military in the six months after Pearl Harbor seemed to confirm the physical and spiritual superiority of a nation which had already been at war with China since 1937. Hopes of establishing a Greater East Asia Co-Prospersity Sphere were dented, however, by the defeat of Japanese Imperial Naval forces at the Battle of Midway in mid 1942 and the gradual recapture of Japanese-held Pacific territories in the following two years. While American submarines had a devastating effect on Japan's merchant shipping, preventing crude oil and other raw materials from reaching the home islands, the toll in terms of manpower from these successive defeats was particularly costly. In the years leading up to the Asian Pacific War, 300,000 men were drafted into the Japanese army annually (Yamashita, 2005),

and this figure rose after the outbreak of hostilities in December 1941. The deferment on conscription for non-science and engineering students at university was cancelled in October 1943, and the army and navy were accepting volunteers from the age of 14 towards the end of the war (Partner, 2007). This recruitment of middle school students to replace a depleted military personnel can be explained in part by the Japanese government's national spiritual mobilization program of 1937 to 1940. Designed mainly to rally patriotic support for the war in China, this program also laid emphasis on children's moral and spiritual training which, combined with military drills and exercises, would mold them into good citizens serving their country (Yamashita, 2015). The Ministry of Education provided a justification for the nation's military ventures abroad in its handbook 'The Way of Subjects' (*Shinmin no michi*) which was sent to schools in August 1941

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(Havens, 1978), and the military's increasing involvement in education led to the revising of textbooks to promote nationalist ideals and encourage service to the state. In a postscript to the 1959 edition of 'Listen to the Voices from The Sea' (*Kike Wadatsumi no Koe*), a selection of diaries written by young Japanese soldiers, sailors and airmen before their death in military service, Odagiri Hideo writes of young people

who, from grade school to the university, had literally been brought up by the military regime which mobilized everything—newspapers, magazines, the radio, the family, and even neighborhood associations. And those young men, who were thus educated and molded in the harsh light of those militaristic ideas, came to believe with a holy fervor that the war was a sacred one (Odagiri, 1959 in 'Listen to the Voices from The Sea', 2000:306).

If educational factors played a major part in the decision of young men to enlist in the armed forces, what other influences were there, and what opposition—if any—did they encounter to their desire to volunteer? This paper comprises translated excerpts from an interview conducted in April 2018 with Ihara Akira, a former member of the Imperial Japanese Navy's *Yokaren* (Preparatory Flight Training) program, created in 1930 as a fast track pilot course. After completing his training program, Mr. Ihara saw action in Taiwan as a fighter pilot and, in the closing months of the war, volunteered to join the *Shūsui* Special (Suicide) Attack Corps based in Ibaraki Prefecture. In the interview he describes the circumstances surrounding his decision to enlist, the brutal and demeaning punishments to which he and his fellow trainees were subjected, and the effect these two years in the military had on him in later life.

Background and military service

Ihara Akira was born the eighth child of a family of nine children on July 3rd, 1927 in Toyooka City,

Hyogo Prefecture. In 1940 he entered Hyogo Prefectural Toyooka Middle School (under the former school system—it is now Toyooka High School) and, after enlisting in the Navy's *Yokaren* program three years later, was enrolled on October 1st, 1943 at Matsuyama Naval Air Group as a Preparatory Flight Trainee *Kō* class. He started his basic flight training as a student in Cycle 38 at Taichung Naval Air Group in Taiwan on May 1st, 1944 and took part in the aerial battles off the coast of Taiwan in September, before graduating from his fighter pilot course two months later. As American and allied forces were closing in on Okinawa in the spring of 1945, Mr. Ihara was posted to Kyushu where he was to join the pilots making attack sorties on American shipping. To avoid enemy submarines, his circuitous journey to Kyushu by ship took one week. However, the ship accompanying his was torpedoed and sunk with the loss of all on board, including his senior officer. Also lost were his pilot's flying log, information about what kind of training he had completed and important certification details. Lacking this information, his superiors hesitated to send him to the attack base in southern Kyushu and he was posted, instead, to the Isahaya Detachment of the Omura Naval Air Group in Nagasaki. His next posting, in May 1945, was to Kasumigaura Naval Air Group near Tokyo, where he was incorporated into the *Shūsui* Special Attack Corps. *Shūsui* was Japan's first rocket-powered airplane, and it was intended to be used for 'body-crashing' into American B29 bombers, a tactic, he thought at the time, that might turn defeat into victory. "There's no pain and it would be lucky to be able to die in an instant," he recalled in a talk given seventy-two years later (*神戸新聞 NEXT* 27 August 2017). This secret weapon was still in the development stage, however, and actual battle planes were not deployed, and so it was at his new posting with the Bihoro Detachment of the Chitose Naval Air Group that Mr. Ihara learnt that the war had ended and where he was demobilized on September 2nd.

The Interview

The nearly three-hour interview with Mr. Ihara was conducted in Japanese at his home in Akashi City, Hyogo Prefecture. What follows are translated excerpts from this interview, the first describing the events that led up to his determination to volunteer for the *Yokaren*.

Interviewer (Int.): Did all of your classmates at Toyooka Middle School enter the *Yokaren*?

Ihara Akira (I.A.): (*pointing at a group photograph*) Only these joined.

Int.: Roughly what percentage of the school joined?

I.A.: Middle school used to be organized into five years. It was only the 4th year students who decided to apply en masse. The whole student year applied.

Int.: Everyone? Everyone applied to join? Was that according to a law?

I.A.: No. One day the head teacher went up on the stage at the morning assembly, an assembly for the entire student body. A thousand students, 200 in the first year, 200 in the second—200 in each year up to the fifth year, with each year divided into four classes. A thousand of us standing in rows in front of the head teacher who said something like this: “On the southern front our country has suffered defeat and our forces a noble death. At such a critical time, when the very existence of Japan is at stake, not one single person from our school has volunteered for preparatory flight training—not a single one up to now. In such a time of danger for the nation, that not one young person has hastened to join up can only cast doubt on what we, as educators, have been teaching you people, and it is the reason why I feel deeply ashamed.” There were other things he said, but all in this imposing way. Hearing this, one of the boys in the same 4th year as me wrote the next day

on a sheet of calligraphy paper, ‘I am applying for the *Yokaren*’, added his name, then cut here—

Int.: A blood seal?

I.A.: That’s right, he put his thumb print in blood. “Hey, you lot,” someone said, “they say Miwa has volunteered and has written in blood. Let’s go and have a look.” Then everyone gradually went to one of our year’s four classrooms to see. “We can’t let Miwa go by himself”—this was the feeling. No one from the 3rd or 5th year volunteered. Normally, it was for middle school students from the 4th year and above, but at that time they had lowered the requirement so that 3rd year students, too, could take the *Yokaren* exams. But there were no 3rd year students wanting to apply. In spite of this, it was just the 4th year students who were caught up in this. We were all saying, “What should we do? What should we do?” and then, about three days later, a class meeting was held in each class of our year. “We have to apply for the *Yokaren*, don’t we? What shall we do?” Once we started the 4th year, half of our class were studying for the exams for a higher level school. They were preparing for the higher school entry exams. And then there were those from family businesses, those with shops like the ones now making luggage. They said things like—“I’m the oldest son and there’s no one else to take over the business. I’m the only son so I can’t go.” Others replied, “With the nation in such a dangerous situation, who knows if there are going to be any higher schools or family businesses left.”

Int.: Is that what the teachers said?

I.A.: No, no, my fellow students. Among them were those who said, “I’m applying, too,” then, “We can’t let Miwa go alone,” and then there were ten, then twenty, who came out with, “I’m going, too, I’m going, too.” There were those who couldn’t go and said they would go home and discuss it. When they *did* consult with their parents, these were very angry: for 4th year student soldiers, being a pilot

held the most danger. It was still thought at that time that being a pilot in the military was a dangerous job. "It's just throwing your life away," they said. "You idiot," they said. "I absolutely refuse to let you go." The parent's seal was needed on the application form, but those who said at the class meeting the following day, "There's no way my parents will let me go" got the reply, "What are you talking about? You're a 4th year student, you know where they've put away the seal, don't you?" That's the way it is, they said. If you tell your parents, of course they'll object, won't they? To come at last to my case, my parents said, "We won't let you."

Int.: In society there were teachers such as the one in charge of your school, but were there so many parents who thought they simply couldn't let their children go because of the danger?

I.A.: Taking society as a whole, there wasn't such a demand [to enroll young men in the military].

Int.: When it comes to your own child, I suppose, although you can't say it openly outside, at home you would say, "Don't do it."

I.A.: You couldn't say it aloud. But if it was someone else's child going. Anyway, there was a lot of arguing at home over a period of four or five days. Eventually, I said that if everybody was going, if they were applying, I would go, too. I was falling out of step with everyone else, and for just me to be the odd man out, it was, of course, impossible at that age. At home I would think, *Oh, I'll give up the idea*, but when I went to school, my mind changed again completely. It's a strange but significant thing, isn't it? It felt more serious to break an oath given to a companion than to disregard what your parents tell you.

Int.: You've said elsewhere that education can be scary, but that head teacher—

I.A.: But there's something I found out later. About

this student mobilization order, concerning applicants to the *Yokaren*, a directive went out from the Ministry of Education to the head teachers of every school, encouraging them to do their utmost to get applicants. That's why everyone at Matsue Middle School applied to join. There were also mass applications at the First and Second Tottori Middle Schools, and at First Aichi Middle School. There were schools such as these. Under these circumstances, there were of course a lot of classmates from these schools who knew each other when I enlisted. Even though there were cases where mass applications didn't occur, taking the country as a whole, a large number of young people were mobilized for the *Yokaren* in that year.

Initial training in Matsuyama

Mr. Ihara then spoke about the immediate consequences of his successful entry into the *Yokaren* and of his first impressions of the disciplinary regime at Matsuyama Naval Air Group.

I.A.: When I left to join up, it felt good. "Banzai!" (Bravo) they shouted. I was also in the newspaper—something about the noble undertaking of this middle school student. How splendid it was. To the sound of bells and drums I was praised extravagantly. I cut a fine figure standing on a platform in the grounds of the elementary school and calling out, "I'm off!" They sang the song 'Defeat them and return bravely' [*Katte kuruzo isamashiku*] and someone played a trumpet as I was paraded through the streets to the station. Once gone, though, I was in a really harsh place, the military. What an awful place I've come to, I thought. What am I going to do?

Int.: After you entered the *Yokaren*, what kind of training did you have?

I.A.: It was severe. To put it another way, people aren't idiots, they can understand what's happening. Without exception, corporal punishment was given, corporal punishment. When you are a child, you

have all kinds of quarrels with your parents, and when you are hit in these fights, it's with the palm of the hand, isn't it? In the military, it was with a clenched fist—wham—while you gritted your teeth. They'd say, "Take off your cap, grit your teeth, spread your legs," then pow, pow.

Int.: Was that because you made a mistake following instructions? Was that when they punished you physically?

I.A.: The reason didn't matter. They punished you for anything. To give you an example—all correspondence was censored. Now, I had a lot of siblings, including five older sisters, a lot. So, one of them had married. I had two brothers—no, three, two older and one younger. So altogether there were nine of us. Anyway, I got a postcard from that older sister who'd married, so her surname was different. In great detail I was questioned—"Who's this?" "Big Sister" [*neesan*], I replied. "This?" "Yes, it's Big Sister." "Say it again," I was told. I repeated, "Big Sister. I've got five Big Sisters." "Say it again," and I repeated the same thing. I was starting to think he was suspicious of something. "Say it once again." Then, "You wretch," he said, "referring to your own elder sister as Big Sister. Take off your cap, clench your teeth and cheeks." Next—bash, bash. "Say it again," and I repeated, "Big Sister. She's married and has a different surname." Again—bash, bash. I didn't understand why I was being hit, so I turned to the superior officer and asked. He said, "What's this about Big Sister? You should say 'My elder sister' " [*ane*]. This was the first time in the navy that I learned something positive from being punished. Later, I was invariably beaten for reasons I didn't understand.

Basic flight training, Taiwan

After graduating from the preparatory course in Matsuyama, Mr. Ihara's cohort of trainees was sent to the front to undergo basic flight training, half of them to the Philippines and half to Taiwan. Mr.

Ihara was to discover that his harsh introduction to military life was only a taste of things to come.

I.A.: (*Referring to a photograph of trainees at a mealtime*) We usually ate sitting down, but when your backside is in such a state, you can't sit down to eat. You eat half-standing, half-sitting.

Int.: Why is that?

I.A.: Because your backside is sore. They beat you with a bat or rod like this, just over a meter long. I was beaten in my time during preparatory training, of course, but, compared to Taiwan, that place was just like a kindergarten, like living in a kindergarten. When I was learning to fly a plane, my beatings were tripled. That's why my backside was purple. Mind you, if it was purple, it was still in good shape; it could also turn black [with beatings]. In that case, you could only sleep face down, on your front.... As for our instructors, they were only about two years older than us. They had crawled up from the bottom ranks but they were still about the same rank as us. They were rough instructors. They would say, "This training is boring. You're moving like syrup, where's your fighting spirit?" Then, with the command "Fall in!" we would all be formed into a long line. The instructor had this oak pole and would hold it like this at the top. He would say, "Run up here one at a time and smash your head onto this pole. Starting from the right!" Someone would run up to the instructor and bang their head against the pole. Ow! it hurt. Of course, if you held back at all, he soon knew from the reaction he felt in his hand, he knew the way you hit it. "You! Do it again!" he would say. So that person would come running up again—whack! "That's still not good enough. Do it again." You had to really thump it with your head. He wouldn't let you learn your lesson just once. Saying "Next one, next one"—that's just violence. Making us all run around the airfield was a frequent occurrence, especially if, that day, a plane's undercarriage had been broken or bent, or if a landing had been poorly carried out. If a plane

landed roughly—RRRRRrrrrrr—donk—donk—like a triple jumper, if a guy did that, a cross was added to the chalkboard. That meant staying behind. While all the others got into trucks and were rushed back to barracks, our squad remained behind on the airfield and had to take its punishment. “Press-ups!” the instructor would bark. Then we would suffer his remonstrating: “You lot, you can’t do press-ups at all,” and he would give us a whack. It was exhausting—hands facing inwards, then outwards, then with your backside raised, then flat. “You! What sort of posture do you call that?” he would say hitting us, and we would have to do it again. The airfield in Taiwan was boiling hot, so, with this punishment, we would be awash in sweat, and tears, too. Why did we have to suffer this sweaty punishment day after day?

Int.: When you received a punishment, was it, for example, as a group?

I.A.: It was collective responsibility. We were collectively responsible for an individual’s mistake. All the same, these troublemaker instructors had enlisted as 4th year middle school students and so were like juvenile delinquents, even when they were in the *Yokaren*. For the fellow who couldn’t do press-ups satisfactorily, there was another punishment. At the command post there was a much-needed tent, and under this were the instructor and the timekeeper who timed the duration of our flights. The instructor would call out—“Be a dog!”—and then just the twenty of us would have to crawl on all fours around that area going “Bow-wow, bow-wow” to complete our punishment. Then he would shout, “You’re too quiet! Make your ‘bow-wows’ in a loud voice.” He would ride around on a bicycle saying, “Dogs run faster than that,” and would hit us with a bamboo cane. “Now be a pig!” he would shout, and we’d go “Oink-oink.” You know, it’s not easy for a human being to run fast on all fours. It’s difficult enough normally running 10,000 meters, which we often did, but running fast while crawling on all fours, that’s

enough to make you collapse with exhaustion. Is this the way to treat young people who nobly rush to the defence of their country in a time of crisis?

Int.: Did everyone share this opinion?

I.A.: I think so, but you couldn’t protest. If you showed defiance, you’d get into trouble.

Int.: In the end, then, it was a question of total submission, first through making you lose your self-respect and then by saying, “You lot are the same as animals.”

I.A.: The instructors who were foulmouthed would say, “You lot are worse than dogs. Shall I tell you why? If you shout out Hey! to a dog and chase after it, it runs away. You lot don’t run away, do you? You don’t escape, that’s why you lot are more stupid than dogs.” That’s the sort of thing they would say. Just looking at the face of that kind of instructor was frightening. You wished he was dead. Actually, they *did* soon die, one after another.

Int.: So did they soon return to the front, these instructors?

I.A.: During the war they became flight training instructors for a short time, maybe for two or three months, and there they had a bit of a rest, if I can put it like that, before their job rotation. They soon returned to combat or to where their unit was.

Int.: So, for a brief moment they had some fun.

I.A.: That’s right. They would roar with laughter as they shouted, “Be a dog!” As they put on a record of ‘Air on the G String’, for them it was just like the plains of Mongolia with the shepherds herding their sheep.

Psychological aftermath of war

The trauma that can result from military combat or involvement in war has been well

documented—see, for example, Murthy and Lakshminarayana (2006). In the interview, Mr. Ihara also testified to the psychological consequences for him of his wartime experiences.

Int.: I suppose those two to three years as a trainee pilot must have been intense and have left a lasting impression.

I.A.: They were too intense. You tell yourself to forget them, but you find they have stuck to you. It's only been about ten years since I've been able to talk about my war experiences. Before that, I didn't like to remember them. I didn't talk about them at all. I hadn't spoken of them ever, but, at night, with this person [*indicates wife*] lying next to me in bed, I would make noises while having a nightmare. I don't know what kind, but you simply can't bear it. Something terrifying comes slowly towards you, hunting you down. You don't know for sure what it is but, anyway, that black, pitch-black cloud comes up to you and seems to be pressing you down till you want to shout out, "Aah, help me!" She would wake me up: "Dad, what's that you're saying?" "Oh, thank God, I'm safe," I would reply. In my sleep I wanted to cry out, "Help!" but I couldn't speak. All I could say was "Ah, ah." This would happen once or twice a year without fail. Then, about ten years ago, I began to be able to talk about my war experiences and my nightmares stopped at once. Just recently. It's strange, isn't it?

The admonitory lecture from the head teacher of Toyooka Middle School that sparked Mr. Ihara's decision to volunteer for the *Yokaren* had a profound effect on his early life. The brutal treatment, described above, that he was subjected to during his training might have led him to bear a grudge against the man initially responsible. In this regard, however, Mr. Ihara displayed a noticeable degree of understanding, magnanimity, even compassion, during the interview.

Int.: Did you meet your head teacher again after the

war?

I.A.: Yes, I did. I met him on the platform of Akashi Station. I was surprised to see him in such a place. "Hey, headmaster!" I called out. It was after I had moved to Akashi, so several decades had passed since we last met. "You aren't by any chance one of those who entered the *Yokaren* from Toyooka, are you?" he asked. "Yes, that's right. You have a good memory," I replied. "I'm sorry," he said frowning and making no attempt to defend his former actions. Now, I think that, for many years after the war, this head teacher had had to bear a large, heavy cross. Remember, an official directive had been sent to middle and high school head teachers throughout the country. And, like the other teachers, he couldn't say, "Don't go." If any teacher did, he'd be denounced as unpatriotic and removed. But you can't have your livelihood taken away from you, can you? It was a period when you could be thrown out of your post, so, at a time like that, most people couldn't show dissent.

Perspectives on war and constitutional reform

At times in the interview there was a reflective tone to Mr. Ihara's discourse, particularly when he offered, unprompted, his interpretation of what war means for the individual who is caught up in it. Through his public talks he was eager to remind people that the Japanese were not the only ones to suffer from the devastating effects of war, despite the overwhelming and enduring impact of the atomic bombings. He also gave his view on the present Japanese government's desire to reform the Constitution and to have Japan take a more active part militarily on the world stage.

I.A.: The aim of the military is to kill off the individual's personality and ability to make wise and mature judgments, and then to slot in an iron template so that if they say to you, "Die!" you say, "Yes, sir." That's the type of person the military likes to use.... Basically, that's what war is, isn't it? A world in which the more people you kill, the better,

and you can get a medal for it. Now, there might be instances where it can't be helped, but where the Japanese army stepped in—here I digress a little—in the Fifteen Year War, which started with the Manchurian Incident and finished with the end of the war in Shōwa 20 [1945], in those fifteen years there were ten million Chinese war victims. How many Japanese victims were there? 3,210,000, which is one third. This includes civilians, not just soldiers. Among the Vietnamese there were two million victims, and in the Philippines one and a half million. In India, too, which was a British colony, there were one and a half million victims. There were also many in South East Asia and other places. Throughout the whole region of Asia, that war produced twenty million victims. It was Japan's one-sided attack on others that caused most of these twenty million victims. Did China drop a single bomb on Japan? No, it didn't. And in talking of victims, it's not just those who died; the people around them were also seriously injured. Behind the scenes there were millions who were disabled by the war for the rest of their lives and lie buried. On top of that, there was social disruption with houses burnt down, bridges and roads destroyed. The war caused enormous damage... When I talk about my war experiences and the damage that was sustained, it's not so much about referring to the bitter experience Japan went through. The reason for talking is that I want to clearly bring to people's attention the damage we inflicted on others. Looking to the immediate future, now that Japan has at last been able to earn the world's trust because of its peace constitution over the past seventy-two years, how can we say now—'We're finished with that, we've shown enough remorse over the last war, that's enough, it's time to revise the constitution'? That's why I want to speak out, not just about my experiences of war, but also about Japanese people's way of thinking these days. Why do we have to go abroad to fight wars alongside America, the Self-Defense Force like an underling of the American army? If we were told, "You lot, go there," we would have to go. By the way, have a look

at this book. These are secret photographs obtained from the Imperial Japanese forces. There are parts blacked out, censored. This book came out after the war. They talk today about the [Specially Designated] Secrets Act, but that book is the same sort of thing. Citizens aren't informed of things that are inconvenient to the State.

Concluding remarks

Mr. Ihara concluded the interview with a reflection on his feelings after being incorporated into the *Shūsui* Unit of the Special Attack Corps in July 1945.

I.A.: I wasn't really so eager to die. It's for the sake of the Japanese nation, they said, but if, somehow or other, there was a way to prolong my life, I wanted to do it. That's what I really thought, however many iron templates the military tried to encase us in, even though they said to you "Die!" In those days, you know, it wasn't a question of individual happiness but of the country's happiness. What was the [Meiji era] slogan? 'Rich country, strong country' [*Fukoku kyouhei*]. This was due to the influence of British and American culture, well, not American, but former western culture. From the Meiji era on, Japan rapidly became wealthy, too, and developed its military power. Actually, a country is supposed to flourish *after* its citizens become affluent, but it was the opposite way round with Japan. It was abundant in people, so they could use up as many lives as they liked. That was their formula, but it was a complete mistake going to war.

Ihara Shizuko: Just as my husband says, now is a very important time. People who don't know what war is like say various things about the Constitution, but to protect this peace we enjoy—as my husband says—they have to draw lessons from the past and ask themselves in what direction we are being led.

Final thoughts

As we approach the end of the second decade of

the twenty-first century, we are witnessing a resurgence of nationalism in various parts of Europe—prompted to some degree by concerns over the flow of migrants fleeing conflict and poverty—and rising tensions in East Asia, with China flexing its military muscles and North Korea intent on using its nascent nuclear program as a bargaining chip in international diplomacy. Selden (2008) believes that nationalism is “the dominant ideology of our era”, while Huffman (2008) argues, in the same issue of *Japan Focus*, that “the tendency to accept national myths uncritically continues, largely unabated, as does the willingness of leaders to send young men and women into crusades guaranteed to end in large numbers of deaths, both military and civilian.” In order for Japan to avoid being drawn into unwise military alliances, it is essential, as Mrs. Ihara advocates, for its postwar generation of leaders to learn from the past. In the immediate aftermath of the Asian Pacific War, the American Occupation forces, anxious to root out militaristic tendencies, decided to impose “a moratorium on the teaching of recent Japanese history” (Gibney, 1995: xv), and in succeeding decades there have been attempts by government officials to excuse or even deny some of the more extreme behaviour of the Imperial Japanese Army in East and South East Asia, part of an “official disinclination to face an unpleasant past squarely” (*ibid*: xvi). Young people in Japan deserve an education that does not shirk or gloss over ‘inconvenient truths’ from the recent past, one that avoids the “deft, ideological sleight of hand [that teaches them] that Japan’s fundamental experience in the conflict was one of pitiable victimization, not of suffering the logical consequences of ill-advised action” (Sheftall, 2005: 446). Such an education must surely involve listening and paying heed to the diminishing number of people who were firsthand witnesses to the horrific realities of the Asian Pacific War. Writing nearly sixty years ago with what seems uncanny insight, Odagiri Hideo warned, in his postscript to ‘Listen to the Voices from The Sea’, that there would be dangerous consequences, should Japan decide,

with U. S. compliance, to enlarge its military defences. There would follow

a negative revision of the Constitution, the introduction of a conscription system, and the choking off of democratic rights by a secrecy protection law and a new Security Police Administration (Odagiri, 1959 in ‘Listen to the Voices from The Sea’, 2000:304).

We would appear to be well on the path towards Odagiri’s depressing prophecy and his words should serve to sound a note of warning.

To close let us return to the testimony with which Mr. Ihara ended the interview, a description of how he pays his respects to the many young people who were his contemporaries and who, like him, were spurred on to become part of the machinery of war.

I.A.: (*referring to a photograph*) This is Kashihara Shrine and the monument to those who died for their country. This is where the war dead who were our classmates are enshrined. Of course, they are also enshrined in Yasukuni Shrine. There are 1,005 of my comrades-in-arms here. A third of these, as you might expect, died in Special Attacks. The other two thirds died in enemy air-aids or for other reasons. Kashihara Shrine is where His Majesty the Emperor’s first ancestor, Emperor Jimmu, is enshrined. In one corner of the grounds of the shrine, the names of those 1,005 people are engraved. Among them is one who more or less sacrificed himself for me, and each time I go there, I stroke the characters of his name on the stone and say aloud, “Hey, I’ve come.”

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