

Narashino prisoner-of-war camp 1915-1920

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A Bottle-ship from Narashino camp

In the opera, “The Magic Flute,” by W. A. Mozart, its leading character, Tamino, appears on the stage in a beautiful Japanese “hunting suit.” At the time, Japan was only a Far East Fairyland. Its doors opened in 1853. Germany and Austria were the forerunners of modernization and pioneers in the fields of law, medicine, education, engineering and the military.

Takamori Saigo, who contributed to the Meiji-Reform, to the irony of fate, became the ringleader of Seinan-no-eki rebellion in 1877, and died for its defeat. The Emperor Meiji was anxious about his son’s future. In 1885 the Emperor appointed his son, Torataro, to the German Army Official Academy in Potsdam.

In 1881, Dr. J. Scriba came to Japan. He and internist, Dr. Baelz, founded the medical facility at the University of Tokyo. Dr. Scriba married a Japanese lady and had three sons.

In 1893 an Austrian, Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand, boarded the Austrian warship “Kaiserin Elisabeth,” and sailed to Japan for a friendly visit.

Fritz Rumpf, who came to Tokyo in 1909, joined a group of young Japanese artists. They formed a group called the “Pan no Kai” (Group Pan). In 1911 Dr. Johannes Ueberschaar came to Japan. He was deeply interested in this small Far East nation, that modeled their constitution after Germany. His interest eventually led him to become a lecturer at Osaka Medical College.

In 1912 a young German, Heinrich Hamm, engaged himself in wine-growing at Tomi-mura, Yamanashi Ken. He succeeded in sending his Japan-made wine (vintage 1913) to his home town, Rhein-Hessen.

Following the assassination of Austrian Crown Prince Ferdinand in 1914, the relationship between Japan, Germany and Austria suddenly disintegrated. During World War I, Japan entered the war on the side of England and France. Thus, the German colony in Tsingtau, China, became the focus of the war between Japan and Germany.

Upon an urgent message from its homeland, the cruiser “Kaiserin Elisabeth,” which was again on the way to a friendship visit to Japan, was turned toward Tsingtau.



“Fortress of Kiautschou Bay is about to surrender” ◆

After the declaration of war by Japan, German youths became part of the volunteer corps to Tsingtau under Governor Meyer-Waldeck. They fought bravely in isolation, and against violent assaults from the Japanese troops. The crews of the Austrian cruiser “Kaiserin Elisabeth,” together with the German gunboat “Jaguar,” made a suicidal explosion on November 2. The beautiful ship, the symbol of friendship, disappeared into the depth of the night sea of Tsingtau.

On November 6, Governor Meyer-Waldeck recognized that the Japanese troops had passed over the line of defense, and surrendered. Negotiations with the Japanese were held during the surrender. A volunteer, Private Ueberschaar, served as the interpreter. Ironically, Lieutenant Emil Scriba became a captive in Japan, the same country where he and his mother were born.

The captives in Tsingtau had been sent to Japan, and were confined to 12 different camps for prisoners of war, i.e. in Tokyo, Shizuoka, Oita, Matsuyama/Ehime-ken, Marugame/Kagawa-Ken, Tokushima, Kurume/Fukuoka-Ken, Kumamoto, Osaka, Himeji/Hyogo-Ken, Nagoya/Aichi-Ken, and Fukuoka. These 12 places were later integrated into six places, namely in Narashino/Chiba-Ken, Bando/Tokushima-Ken, Kurume, Ninosima/Hiroshima-Ken, Aonogahara/Hyogo-Ken and Nagoya.

The 125 captives on the gunboat “Jaguar,” and Lieutenant Colonel Kuhlo, with 120 men of East Asian Marine Detachment, were at the Shinagawa Station. Here they received a great welcome applause by the citizens of Tokyo. A woman came forth from the crowd and presented a handful of flowers to every soldier. She returned the act of kindness that had been shown to her by a German married couple. The captives were brought by streetcars to Asakusa-Honganji Temple, and were saluted warmly by Director Torataro Saigo.



Torataro Saigo, Commander of the Captives' Camp ◇

After that, the Temple became a new sightseeing spot in Tokyo. Many people gathered there to see the German soldiers. But as the soldiers were obliged to endure such observations, they became irritated. They played football in the court-yard, surrounded by a bamboo fence, a fence that was too narrow. Thus, a plan to erect a new facility took place, and a new captive's depot with barracks



Inside of Captives' barrack

was built in a corner of the vast military practice field in Narashino, Chiba.

On September 7, 1915, the soldiers left the temple, and boarded a train at Ryogoku station and arrived at Tsudanuma station later that day. The German soldiers marched, and sang German songs at

Okubo and Mimomi. A boy wearing a military cap and a toy saber greeted them. The officers and soldiers rejoiced at the new wide and spacious accommodations, unlike the ones in Asakusa. Now they could enjoy sports more freely.

Later, the officers and soldiers had been transferred from Oita, Shizuoka and Fukuoka to Narashino. At the peak period almost 1000 people lived in Narashino. Fritz Rumpf (Oita), Emil Scriba (Kurume), Fukuoka Governor Meyer-Waldeck and Dr. Friedrich Hack all met in Narashino.

In the middle of the Narashino German prisoner camp there existed five barracks, one canteen, a slaughter house, back house, football field and a tennis court. The camp's 95,000 square meter grounds were surrounded by ditches and wire entanglement. In 1918, seven barracks were erected to accommodate the officers and soldiers from Oita, Shizuoka and Fukuoka. There was also a music hall, theater hall and one printing house. The war prisoners had built all of these facilities. Their laborious works were examples of their efforts put into building the shooting range for the Narashino troop's drill field, and the cultivation of farms, plus the caring for the livestock within the camp. Food preparations were made by the Germans, Beer was allowed to drink. But they were not isolated from the nearby villagers by the barbed wire fence. By the secret sale of alcoholic drinks, haircutting, cleaning, arbor making, etc., the villagers went into the camp, and often developed friendships between the captives and the villagers, even though they could not communicate in the same language. All of this fraternizing was made possible through the administration policy of Commander Saigo.



Laube and Barracks



Vegetable garden between the living barracks ◇



*Seaman Christian Vogelfänger and his dog,
"Strolch" ◇*



Beer party by the crews of "Jaguar" ◇

In 1918, the secret production of various sausages was instructed by Karl Jahn and four other masters of the meat processing art. It was presented to the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce. The techniques were shared through a course at the Stock Raising Research Institutes, and transferred widely to the meat processing traders of Japan. This is the reason why Narashino Captive's Camp is known for the origin of sausages today in Japan.

Further recorded, are those who went to stock farms of Boso to teach the manufacturing method of condensed milk. Others went to textile mills in Tokyo to teach dyeing technology, and still others went to Café in Ginza, Tokyo, to instruct how to bake European cakes.

In the Camp was a Captive's College. Various cultural activities, i.e., the orchestra, theater, etc., were organized. Sports activities and matches were organized by the Tournen Association. Coarsely-made mimeographed programs vividly showed their activities in detail.



Narashino Captives Orchestra

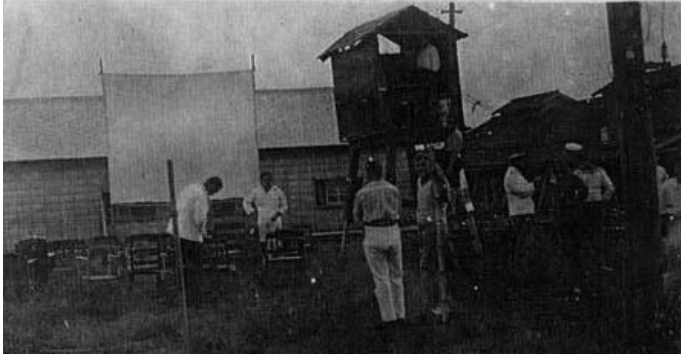


"Beautiful blue Danube" performed on the concert of June 22, 1919 ◇



A stage scene of theatrical troupe of Narashino ◇

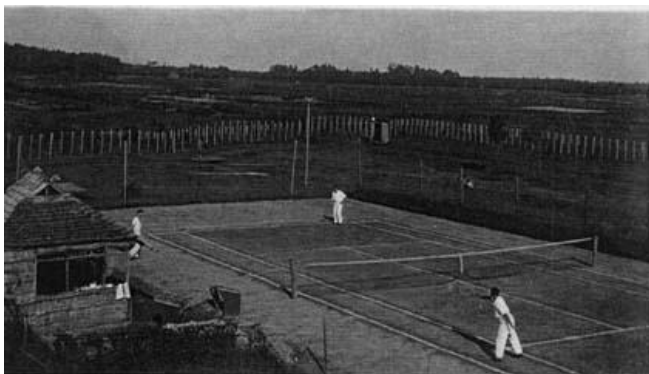
"Ghost" of Henrik Ibsen ◇



Narashino movie theater ◇



Football ◇



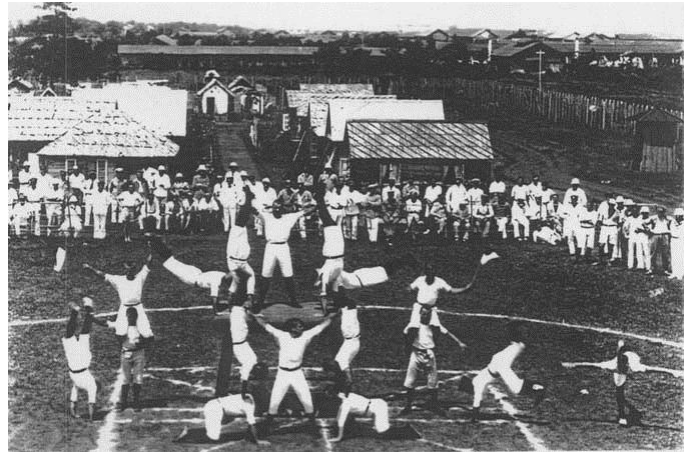
Tennis ◇



Pole jump ◇



Post card of Sport festival in May 1919



Human Pyramid at Sport festival on July 23, 1919 ◆



“Fisherman’s daughter in Inage” by Fritz Rumpf ◆

Fritz Rumpf made hand-made post cards expressing Japanese sensibilities, and supplied them to his comrades who wanted to write to their country. The pictures show his excellent understanding of Japanese culture and his affection for it. Among them is a painting of the beach of Inage in Chiba City, when he took part in an excursion there. The posts were subject to censorship, and the numbers were controlled. But the dispatched postcards and letters which are still kept on register exhibits their keen homesickness.

The captives who calmly and patiently waited for their day of release, were stricken with grief at the news of Germany’s surrender in November of 1918.

In the autumn of 1918, the Spanish flu overwhelmed the world over, and furiously assaulted the population of Narashino. Twenty-five German soldiers died from this dreaded disease, and Director Saigo himself eventually became a victim. On New Year’s Day, 1919, Director Saigo came down with a high fever. Against his doctor’s orders, he stood on a platform intending to make an address to the captives, and to announce that this would be the year to mark

their return home, thus giving the captives encouragement and hope. The strain was too much for him. Although Saigo and the captives met for their release on Christmas Day of that year, many German soldiers did not live to return home. They were buried in Narashino. The Spanish flu had taken its toll..



Funeral ceremony on June 5, 1916 ◇

In June 1919, the Treaty of Versailles was concluded, and in Narashino the preparations for returning home was started under the succeeding director, Colonel Yamazaki. Also, there were those who preferred to stay in Japan rather than return to Germany, a country said to have been in chaos. The repatriation problem was complicated because the German Navy and all marine transportation had been destroyed. Finally, the decision of repatriation was made, involving the use of ships arranged by Japan, with the costs reimbursed by the German Government.

Fritz Rumpf had finished his translation of Japanese folk stories in Narashino, and he was sending the manuscript to Ogai Mori asking for the revision.



*Rumpf, Scriba, and v. Weegmann (l. to r.) relaxing at the arbor.
Ukiyoe picture is on the back wall*

On Christmas morning of 1919, the first troop of 71 soldiers departed Narashino Camp. They took the train from Tsudanuma, arrived at Kobe the next day, and boarded the repatriation ship, "Hofuku-maru." On February 24 of the following year, the Hofuku-maru arrived safely at Wilhelmshaven, Germany.

The Austrian soldiers of the cruiser, "Kaiserin Elisabeth," were repatriated by the same ship with German soldiers. They were welcomed in Germany, but when the military train went into Austria, the flags of the Imperial Regime were ignored under the cool glances of the people.



Christmas

Governor Meyer-Waldeck remained in Narashino until January 26, 1920. After seeing off the last of his subordinates, he shook hands with Colonel Yamazaki, and departed the Lager gate together with Captain Saxer.



*Farewell greeting between Gouv. Meyer-Waldeck(l.) and General Yamazaki(r.)
Narashino, am 26. Jan. 1920*

The life of the German captives who had been actively working since before the war, were subject to the ironical destiny caused by the war. Friedrich Wex, the director of the pharmaceutical department of Bayer Company, was informed by the Japanese employee who came to Narashino to meet him, stated that their long business relationship had been vainly destroyed. But after his release and return to Germany, he again came to Japan as the general manager of the Tokyo Branch of Bayer, and started the activities again.

When he returned home, Dr. Johannes Ueberschaar also returned to his former post at Osaka Medical College, and stayed until 1937. He then erected the Japanese Cultural Research Institute at his alma mater, Leipzig University. He stood against the Nazi regime as long as he could, but returned to Japan again in 1937, and never returned to his homeland. While teaching at Konan and Osaka Universities, he did an excellent job of translating the Haiku poetry of Basho Matsuo. After World War II, he grieved that his home country of Germany had been divided, and that his beloved country Japan was in a state of lethargy. When he addressed his students he would exclaim, "Japan's good property is never lost! Esteem it and follow the Nobel prize winner, Dr. Hideki Yukawa, and the swimmer Hironoshin Furuhashi!" That was his

favorite phrase in his later years. Dr. Ueberschaar died in January 1965 at Kobe.

Dr. Carl von Weegmann taught at Matsuyama High School, Military Academy, Military Staff College, and after World War II, at Nihon Medical College, Seikei University. He exhorted great efforts to restore the traditional OAG as its director. In 1955 when the memorial gravestone was erected in the cemetery at Narashino Reien, he made a memorial speech there. Dr. von Weegmann died at the OAG office while in service in May 1960.



Fritz Rumpf actively worked in Berlin for the research and introduction of Japanese culture. His study in Ukiyoe (pictures of old Japan's life) is important, and he found a steadfast base for this field of research.

Dr. Carl von Weegmann with his seminar students

Karl Buettinghaus, a master butcher, married a Japanese lady in Chiba, and founded a sausage factory in Meguro, Tokyo. Josef van Hauten served as a technical adviser for producing sausage at Meijiya, Tokyo. Helmuth Ketel opened a German restaurant in Ginza, Tokyo. He put forth a tremendous effort to cultivate German tastes, which was very different from the Japanese culinary traditions.

Among the soldiers left in Narashino was Heinrich Hamm, the wine brewer. He came home with his hopes and dreams broken, where he met his own brewed wine. In 1913, he produced his wine throughout Japan. The flavor of the wine was not favorable with most people. His vineyard in Yamanashi has become the existing Suntory Winery.

It was Dr. Friedrich Hack who felt a grave impact on the destiny of Japan and

Germany. As a non-professional diplomat, he undertook to create a cooperative relationship between Nazi Germany and Japan. He succeeded in concluding the Germany-Japan Anti-Communism Pact in 1936. Since he was being watched by the Nazi regime, he emigrated to Switzerland, and disappeared again from public record. In April 1945, when Nazi Germany came to an end, he tried to mediate the work of the peace movement between America's Dulles organization and the Japanese Navy. The negotiations proved unsuccessful, and the atomic bombs were dropped.

The tombs of the German soldiers who died at Narashino before the repatriation, had collapsed with the passage of time. One of the teachers at the Narashino Military School, Mr. Ishizaki, felt mental anguish about the status of the tombs, and after the war ended, he stayed on as a colonial farmer, and strove to turn the wasteland into a farm. At this time, it was the tombs of the German soldiers that occupied his mind, and he did not spare any efforts to clean the graveyard.

In 1947 GHQ(General Headquarters of U.S. Military Force) issued the so called "German Deportation Order," and the diplomatic relationship between Japan and Germany was totally terminated. In 1955 the Japanese greeted Dr. Hans Kroll as the first German Ambassador to Japan after the war. Ambassador Kroll heard about the German graveyard soon after his arrival, and resolved to renovate the graveyard in Narashino. The German Embassy sought information about the location of this German graveyard to the Narashino Post of Land Self Defense Force. The Self Defense Force was perplexed, but it just so happened that Mr. Suekichi Tanihara lived on the base. Mr. Tanihara's mother had taken in laundry at the captive's camp, and the graveyard was the playground of his childhood.



German Embassy members at the desolate cemetery of German soldiers. 1955

The graveyard, and the long-time effort of Mr. Ishizaki, was made known to Ambassador Kroll. The decayed wooden crosses were removed, and the new, granite grave memorial was erected. At the unveiling ceremony of the memorial, Dr. Carl von Weegmann, Helmuth Ketel and other officials were present. The memorial service speeches moved those in attendance, to tears.



The existing Graveyards of the German captives



Every year in November, the memorial service is performed under presence of German Military attaché

In the course of many years, the number of those who remember the Narashino captive's camp have been reduced, and the graveyard is shrouded in silence. But in November of every year, on visits here, and the graveyard is covered with a gay atmosphere.

The history of the Narashino Captive's Camp gives us an opportunity to think about the meanings of the themes of nationality and friendship, hatred and reconciliation, war and peace.

In retrospect, it was Meyer-Waldeck and his 5,000 officers and soldiers who were scattered over different places in Japan, even in captivity in the enemy country, living under extreme hardships. They served as "peace warriors" to cultivate the fertile soil of friendly relationships between both nations for the future?