

# OLD JAPAN

**The only big city in Japan that doesn't bear the scars of U.S. air raids still looks far from homey to the GIs who occupy it.**

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**K**YOTO, JAPAN—This is the one big city in Japan which hasn't been bombed out. The Japanese say that Kyoto is "old Japan." To them, it is a city of temples and universities, the ancient capital, and center of Jap culture.

It isn't that way to GIs. They see huge, gray slums and masses of hungry people, and spacious, well-preserved shrines rising conspicuously in the midst of crowded poverty.

The city overflows through ravines and valleys. Its million and a quarter people live in two-story wood and paper houses; most of its streets would be called alleys in America.

No one has yet given an official statement as to why Kyoto was not bombed but among the many theories offered the most logical is that there are no heavy industries in the city. Most of the factories produce lacquerware, silk, wood-block prints, and other "objects of art." Some of the world's most beautiful lacquerwork is done in Kyoto, and kimonos and *hourii*, short house-coats of silk, made here are famous as the finest in Japan. But many of the city's shops and factories have been lying idle for several years, because they weren't allowed to produce luxury goods during the war.

The people of the city are hungry; that is the first thing that the visitor discovers. Even if there were food enough to go around, the city's economy has been so disrupted that the average citizen couldn't afford to buy in sufficient quantity to keep his stomach full. Kyoto was a tourist city before the war; not only did foreign visitors come here but people from all over Japan visited the shrines and temples.

There are a lot of GIs in the city now. The headquarters of the Sixth Army is here and a few units of the Sixth such as the 6th Rangers have their CPs on the outskirts of the town. The people appear to welcome the Americans, and go out of their way to be friendly and courteous. Small children swarm around the GI shoppers, shouting "Hello, hello" and Jap traffic cops salute all the Allied troops, officers and men alike, who pass them in vehicles.

GIs in the city spend much of their time sight-seeing and buying souvenirs. Sightseeing tours, arranged by the Sixth Army, take several hundred American tourists, ranking from private to brigadier general, through the city each week. There are over a thousand Buddhist temples and *shinto* shrines in Kyoto, some brand new, others several hundred years old. Most of them are enormous gaudy affairs and Americans get the impression that the Japs through centuries have spent more dough on these religious buildings than they have on their own homes.

would like to, because they are afraid it will break before they can get it home. But the silk and silk products won't break and soldiers buy them like mad. The big department stores put only a few kimonos or bolts of silk on display daily, in order to make them last.

The most crowded street in Kyoto, and also the most popular with souvenir hunters, is known by the natives simply as "Theater Street." It's a wide alley a third of a mile long. No vehicles are allowed on it, and, if they were, they wouldn't be able to move. All day long the street is packed with people moving slowly up and down, and from shop to shop, from the movie-house to the slot-machine section.

There are eight movie theaters on the street, some with stage shows. Tickets cost from 80 *sen* (about five and one-third cents) to nine *yen* (about 60 cents). There are shooting galleries which offer air-rifles and bows and arrows to customers. Knock a doll off the shelf and it's yours. There's a row of 25 slot machines outdoors against the wall of souvenir shops. It costs one *sen* (one-fifteenth of a cent) to play these ma-



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chines. There are fortune tellers, freaks, snake-charmers, toy stores and second-hand book stores.

The advertising signs, written in would-be English, are worth going out of your way to see. The shooting gallery sign tells you that you must pay "40 sen per three shoots." A souvenir shop announces that "your longing for exoticism is now satisfied here." And damned if it isn't if you have the longing.

Kyoto boasts nine separate red-light districts. Two of these districts are huge, the largest covering almost one square mile. The girls in the district call themselves "geishas," but are not. The real geishas are entertainers who sing and dance, and are not prostitutes.

These districts are the most crowded areas in Kyoto. Many of the streets which zigzag



through them are too narrow for a jeep. The houses, brightly-lighted, gaudy, neoned affairs, stand side by side for block after countless block. Employees and houses are strictly inspected every five days by Jap doctors, and licensed by the government. In the heart of each district is a U. S. Army PRO station.

In each house the madame and perhaps one or two of the girls stand in the open front door, beckoning passing joes. In the hallways of the houses are illuminated placards with photographs and signatures of the girls who work there.

One house greets GIs with a large white sign: "Welcome, American heroes—one touch 30 yen—no lower price for the second—no crowding—line forms to the left."

These prostitutes are the highest-paid workers in the city. Each house has its price list posted conspicuously. And all the prices are the same—two bucks for a short visit (one hour) or eight to 10 dollars for all night.—Yet the barber gets five cents for a shave, ten cents for a haircut.

**K**YOTO is governed, nominally, by a mayor. Actually the mayor is a figurehead, and the city administration has little power. The mayor claims to have been elected by the people, but in reality was appointed by the governor of the state of Kyoto. He is a dapper, gray, well-fed businessman who does his damndest to look like an important executive. Most of the functions which come under the city in America are state functions here: the police and fire departments, schools, the garbage disposal system. The city may not even have its own laws; all regulations are handed down from the state, which interprets them for the national government.

The president of the chamber of commerce seems to be the most liberal and progressive man in Kyoto. He appears sincere in his desire for free enterprise. That is logical enough, because with free enterprise the merchants and manufacturers of this city would be much more prosperous, and in the long run, he, as head of the chamber, would be better off.

Both the mayor and the president of the chamber say that the first step in the rebuilding of Kyoto's lost commerce is to produce souvenirs for the GIs to take stateside with them. The city to date has done a damn good job of that.

The sacred city of Japan stands here today, with gaudy rich temples, wealthy prostitutes, and hungry laborers, the only spot on the island that hasn't been destroyed.

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