

Newsweek

September 24, 1945: p. 45

Yanks Start Kimono Hunt, Learn What Geisha Doesn't

Robert Shaplen, NEWSWEEK correspondent, sends this account of how the GI's have reacted to the strangest country they ever encountered:



How you say it? - an 18-year-old charmer cope with GI Japanese

Three weeks of occupation have gone by and the American soldier is already at home in Japan. Actually, it is just another country to him and he regards it with the same bemused, momentary curiosity that he displayed in Australia, the Pacific islands, and the Philippines. No matter where he is, nothing is as good as the States, and nothing ever will be.

But, looking at the Japanese, the average GI wonders how they ever managed to prosecute a war in the first place. Everything in Japan, even broken and blasted cities and factories, has a miniature toylike appearance. Automobiles, the ones that are left, don't work; trains bear little resemblance to the Twentieth Century Limited or a fast freight back home. The short, slight people are dressed poorly and drabbly.

So the GI shakes his head and shrugs but does not let it bother him for long. His attitude quickly becomes one of acceptance—that it is over now anyway and he might as well get himself some souvenirs. The passion is all for kimonos and trinkets, but Tokyo has very little of anything left. The boys in other cities are doing better.

Men of Few Words: Although probably to a lesser degree than in Germany, where the people are not so strange and hard to deal with, the soldier in Japan almost from the start made a vital differentiation between Japanese leaders and Japanese men on the street. It is con-

Kimono Hunt

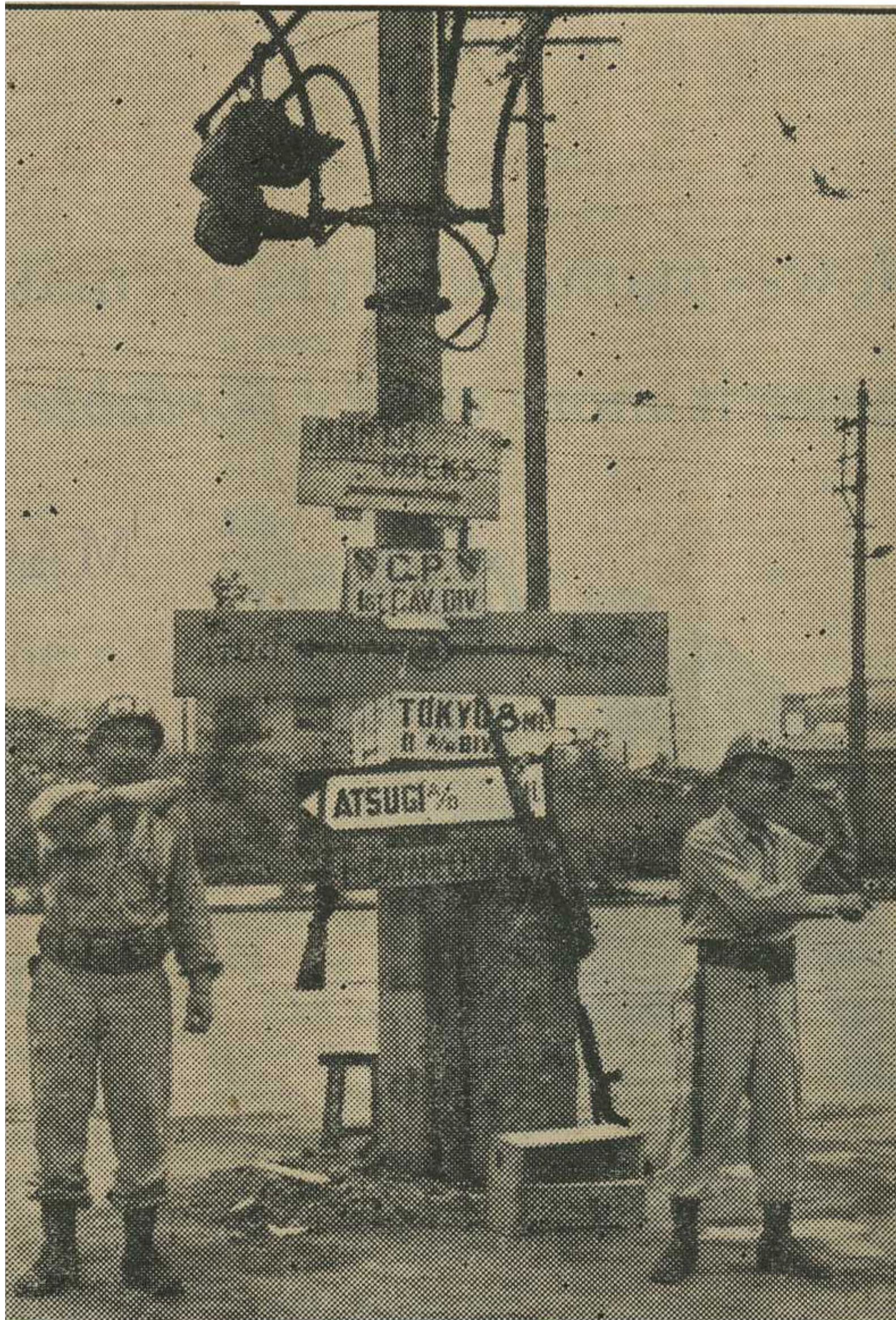
siderably harder to learn to speak Japanese than French or German, but with the help of their hands and the little orange phrase books handed out by the Army, most servicemen are managing to get around. Furthermore, there are many English-speaking Japs—especially in the cities. It is amazing the extent to which a man can reduce his foreign vocabulary if he has to: give him a few words like *mizu* for water, *kohi* for coffee, and *jodo-sha* for car, and he can get by.

The amount of actual fraternization has been slight so far. Because he likes children everywhere—and Jap youngsters are especially cute—the soldier will give candy or food to wide-eyed Jap kids, who often show far less hatred toward Americans than their war-conscious parents. But with the exception of semi-official visits to prominent Jap families, particularly intellectuals who disapproved of war from the start, there is no dropping into Jap homes the way we did in the Philippines—not yet and probably not for quite some time. Some of the boys have made their initial visits to geisha houses and a lot of them came away sadly disillusioned, having been under the false impression that a geisha would satisfy all their demands. In certain cases they can be had for what corresponds in Japan to a gift of silver-fox fur back home. But they are not prostitutes.

Reading English-language newspapers, the average soldier is getting a kick out of the number of ranking Jap generals killing or trying to kill themselves. In Tojo's case, the feeling was that this top war criminal does not deserve the easy way out. So far as most others are concerned it makes



*The U.S. Army
Occupation
Campaign
Ribbon*



MP's hang their guns on a Yokohama signpost and wave the soldiers in

Kimono Hunt

little difference to the GI how a particular army commander or navy leader drops out of the picture—so long as he drops.

Whatever sympathy the American so far has shown toward the Japanese has only appeared to concern the people who have no homes, food, or clothes. It is almost an axiom, I think, that the more suave the Jap is and the better he speaks English, the less does the American soldier like him.

On the streets of Tokyo it is still hard to get a Japanese man or woman to stop and talk, even if a soldier wants to. Girls especially have been told not to take notice of us, not even return proffered smiles. But this barrier is daily being broken down. For his part, GI Joe is improvising: He has been individually tough when he has not liked the way things are being done; the rest of the time his fundamental good nature and his desire to make friends all around have got things off to a pretty good start.