

Captain Uemura, Japanese

I KNOW what it is to be beaten and kicked without apparent cause. Yet I shall never forget a Japanese army officer whose given name, in English, meant "Charity First." His sympathy for the wretched Americans who in April, 1942, made the torturous ten-day Death March of Bataan (I among them), and his personal distaste for the brutality of our captors probably saved my life. But I believe it cost him his own.

I met Kazuhito Uemura at Camp O'Donnell, terminus of our hellish hike under the broiling tropical sun of Southern Luzon. Uemura was a second lieutenant in the Japanese Imperial Army. I was a U.S. infantry major, ironically taken prisoner while a member of the staff of the 71st Division, Philippine Army, headquarters at O'Donnell just before the war.

It was shortly before the fall of Corregidor. I had been at Manila and Uemura sent for me, ostensibly to obtain information about The Rock. But, using perfect English, he passed over the Corregidor subject without pressure and—more startling—said he had been hunting me for several days.

He had been told, he said, of the fair treatment accorded Japanese civilians interned by Americans at Manila. As he knew I had commanded one of the concentration areas, Camp Muntinlupa, near the Philippine capital, after Japan entered the war, he expressed the "appreciation of the Japanese people." Wryly I recalled how I told the 300 Japanese internees at Muntinlupa that I meant to treat them as I would want to be treated if our positions were reversed.

Uemura, about forty, tall and well built for a Japanese, explained his command of English. As a professor, he said, he had taught the language for many years in Japanese schools. He surveyed me—a sorry sight in rags and filth after that man-killing seventy-five-mile struggle from Merivales to San Fernando, site of O'Donnell—and I thought I detected some pity in his eyes.

"I have tired of seeing men die," Uemura exclaimed. "I would like to help you if I can. How it can be done I do not know yet, but I will try."

Somewhat cheered, I returned to

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the cramped, insect-ridden little grass hut which I shared with fifteen other American officers, subsisting on a little rice and water shoved at us three times a day.

Soon I decided something must be done to better our condition. I would see if this Japanese lieutenant were sincere. So I barged in on Uemura; spoke quickly and as boldly as the circumstances would allow.

Uemura promised to do what he could and I left. A few days later I was summoned to his quarters. When I got there, he was alone. He



peered cautiously about to make sure no one else was within hearing. Then, in the simulated tone of a gruff order, he said:

"See that box in the corner? Take it and get out of here."

I picked up the cardboard container and hurried back to my companions. As I walked across the compound, I heard startled squawks and felt frantic rustling inside the carton. Back at our hovel there was a spirited scramble for my animated burden. Tearing open the treasure chest, we found a live chicken, fifteen eggs, onions, and canned vegetables.

It was the most magnificent sight I have ever seen!

Secretly, that night when the Japanese guards were away from the cookhouse, we made a sort of stew of that chicken, a nutritious windfall. We feasted with one big meal of the exquisite delicacies and on following nights with less pretentious ones, until it was all gone.

I saw Uemura occasionally after that. We had been at O'Donnell some three weeks when a rumor reached us that all American POW's of the rank of full colonel and general were to be moved to another camp. I went to see Uemura and asked him about this. I told him I'd like to know where the officers were to be sent.

"I cannot announce that to you," he answered. But he confirmed that there was to be a transfer, adding—much to my amazement since I, a major, was ineligible for the move: "And you are going with them."

Uemura knew whereof he spoke. Undoubtedly he planned to see that I was spared, as payment for what he considered my humane treatment of his people in the Manila concentration camp, further debilitating tenure in death-laden Camp O'Donnell. My name was on the roll of American officers ultimately transferred to Camp Tarlac, ten miles away. I was identified as "American adjutant"! As we

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marched to waiting trucks, I saw Uemura. He saw me, too, and smiled. I swear, though he wore glasses, that he winked at me.

I firmly believe the transfer saved my life. Our situation at Tarlac was considerably more tenable than at O'Donnell.

The war over, I returned to my home in San Diego. But I couldn't forget Uemura. Finally I wrote the American Military Government in Japan and asked for aid in tracing the Japanese army officer so that I might express my gratitude. Not long ago I had an answer.

Uemura reportedly was killed late in June, 1945, in the Philippines. The Japanese version of Uemura's death was that he died as "American troops pounded severely at Arakan." But I have my own idea—that Kazuhito (Charity First) Uemura, the schoolteacher called to war, died at the hands of his superiors because he revealed the kindness in his heart.

—DEAN SHERRY

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