

YANK

THE ARMY



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MANILA The headline, in type so big that the words ran together across the top of the page, said: "NIPS QUIT." The Japanese prisoners of war crowded around the superior private who held the paper. They stood in the sun-baked courtyard of the new Bilibid Prison south of Manila, where some 8,000 former soldiers of the emperor are confined.

An elderly Japanese civilian interpreter lifted his eyebrows, adjusted his spectacles and translated.

"*Nippon.*" he said. "*Nippon kofuku.*"

The superior private glanced sidelong at the older man and laughed at him. The civilian thumped the paper with his forefinger and repeated the translation.

The superior private frowned and stared at the page that said that the war was ending and that his country was offering to surrender. The Japs behind him chattered and stuck their heads over his shoulder to see for themselves. The superior private left the paper with them and walked into the long concrete building where he lived.

I followed with the interpreter.

The room, which was part of the processing center for incoming prisoners, was about the size of a Stateside Army barracks. The windows were barred, but the door was unlocked and open. About 30 Japs, most of them newly arrived at the prison, lay or sat on blankets spread on the concrete floor. On one side of the room were the day's crop of newcomers. Most of them were just skin and bones, and the GI shorts they wore hung loosely on their flanks as they lay with their thin arms clasped behind their heads, their dead eyes staring at nothing.

On the other side of the room were healthier specimens waiting to be assigned to work companies. It was easy to tell how long they had been prisoners by the amount of meat on their bones.

When the visitors were seated around the superior private's cot (he has a cot because he's a trusty and in charge of this part of the processing center), the interpreter asked him how he felt about the news of Japan's capitulation.

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The soldier rubbed his eyes with the palm of his hand and figured out just what he wanted to say.

"I'm not sorry," he told the interpreter. "I'm in a happy mood." He smiled cheerfully to show how happy the mood was. There was a murmur in the room as the word passed from pallet to pallet, and some of those who had been lying down sat up and watched.

He was asked if he wanted to go home now. This was a ticklish one. He wanted to go home, and he didn't want to go home. His relatives and his friends at the aluminum plant where he worked in Tokyo might point at him, he said, and he didn't want to be pointed at. The Japs who had edged into the group all looked at the floor. Nobody said anything for a moment. The superior private looked up and smiled again—his happy mood smile. He was happy that the war had ended and that the world could know peace again, he said.

The others, watching him, all smiled, too. They put on their happy-mood smiles, and there was the sound of polite hissing.

A muscle-jawed Jap sergeant joined the group. He'd been a prisoner for about a month and was in pretty fair condition. He, too, had been aware of what what was going on.

"I'm much relieved," he told the interpreter. "All my friends [he indicated the Japs along the wall], all my friends have such a mood of mind." The Japs along the wall stared impassively. The sergeant gave his name and said he had no objection to having it published in an American magazine. He was a medical sergeant about 40 years old, and he had an abscess on one leg. He had given up after four months hiding in the hills.

After he told the interpreter about his surrender, he spoke rapidly for a moment and the interpreter laughed.

"He wants to go to America," the interpreter said.

"Houseboy!" yelled the sergeant in clear English, the first he had spoken.

—Sgt. ROBERT MacMILLAN