Chapter 6

“Yet they’re human just as we are”
Australian attitudes to the Japanese

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第6章

「しかし、彼らも同じ人間だ」
オーストラリア兵の日本兵観

マーク・ジョンストン
In December 1942, an Australian private, a veteran of recent fighting at Sanananda and of the Libyan and Greek campaigns, wrote some thoughts about the enemies he had faced:

My regard for Tony [the Italian] was always impersonal and for Fritz ... tinged with admiration, but none of us know anything but vindictive hatred for the Jap.

Australian soldiers felt an animosity towards the Japanese that they generally didn’t have towards their European enemies.

In action the hostility expressed itself in Australians’ greater enthusiasm for killing Japanese. “If an Italian or German were running away, one might let him go,” wrote Jo Gullett, “but never a Japanese.” Whereas in the Middle East Australian commanders had struggled to awaken fully a “killing instinct” in their men, the Japanese brought out that instinct.

An official wartime publication described how at Wau, fifty Japanese were “hunted down and exterminated”. The concepts of “hunting” and “exterminating” capture the mood of the time, which was not one of trying to bring an essentially like-minded foe to accept defeat by the rules of war, but one of seeking to annihilate an alien enemy. The killing of unarmed, sleeping, sick or wounded Japanese was common. Although official pressure was put on troops to take prisoners, the Australian front-line soldiers, like their American counterparts, had little desire to do so.

Japanese dead were not considered in the same light as German or Italian dead. War correspondent Frank Legg, who had been a member of the 2/48th Battalion at Alamein noted while first reporting 9th Division fighting against the Japanese that, whereas the common practice had been to bury each other’s dead in North Africa, here there was a “strange callousness”. For example, a Japanese who lay dead on a track on the Huon Peninsula had a bullet hole between his eyes and a note pinned to him which read “Don’t bury this bastard, it’s the best shot you’ll ever see.”

Japanese attitudes to the Japanese

Australian attitudes to the Japanese
Let’s examine briefly the sources of this contempt and hatred. Most obvious was that the Japanese were a far more pressing threat to Australia itself than were the European enemies. Tied to the awareness of the threat the war now posed to their homeland, was a hatred for those who menaced it. Early in 1943, General Blamey tried to stir up hatred of the Japanese in veterans of the recent campaign by emphasizing that the Australians were fighting to prevent the deaths of their families and the end of civilisation. The Japanese forces which advanced along the Kokoda Trail were described by the historian and second-in-command of the 2/14th Battalion as “cocksure hordes” seeking “to glut their lust and savagery in the blood of a conquered white nation”. If fear of invasion was one source of hatred, racial animosity was a second.

The Australians who fought in the Second World War had grown up in an era when assertions of racial superiority were far more acceptable than today. In 1941, Prime Minister Curtin had justified Australia’s entry into the war against Japan in terms of the nation’s commitment to maintaining the “principle of a White Australia”.

White superiority had been challenged by the outcome of other campaigns earlier in the year. The racism of Australians who had scoffed at the Japanese in 1941 had to be refined in the light of defeats in Malaya, Singapore, Java, Timor, Ambon and New Britain. These Japanese successes added a hysterical edge to the racial hatred against them. An image of the Japanese as a “superman” or “super soldier” grew up. This conception was fairly persistent, but not the majority view after 1942. The feeble physical condition of many Japanese encountered in campaigns after 1942 heightened racial contempt for them.

A far more common image than that of superman was that of a creature less than a man.Jo Gullett concludes from his experience in the 2/6th Battalion, “[The Japanese] were like clever animals with certain human characteristics, but no means the full range, and that is how we thought of them – as animals.” Senior officers encouraged this attitude. General Blamey told troops at Port Moresby in 1942 that the Japanese were “a subhuman beast”, and at the beginning of the following year he informed soldiers that the Japanese were “a curious race – a cross between the human being and the ape”.

This idea helped Australians to account for Japanese success in the early campaigns, because it explained Japanese adaptability to primitive conditions. It also excused murderous treatment of them. A normally very humane veteran of the desert, Private
John Butler, wrote of his first brush with the Japanese: “Out foraging this morning I came across the head of a good Jap – for he was dead – like a damned baboon he was; this is not murder killing such repulsive looking animals.”

Some of the language used by Australians is disturbingly reminiscent of Nazi race propaganda. In most respects Nazism was repugnant to Butler and his comrades. However, the same racist disdain appears in American writings of the time, and there is no doubt that on this issue many otherwise compassionate western soldiers maintained attitudes towards the Japanese which today seem insupportable. This was a racist age. The Japanese themselves also harboured racist attitudes towards whites.

Moreover, we mustn’t exaggerate the importance of racism in Australians’ hatred for the Japanese during the war. When the Australian government launched an intense hate campaign in March – April 1942, the *Sydney Morning Herald* argued that Australians needed no stimulus to fight the Japanese aggressor, and certainly not “a torrent of cheap abuse and futile efforts in emulation of ... Goebbels”. The propaganda campaign was opposed by 54 per cent of Australians surveyed in a Gallup Poll on the issue.

Moreover, the peculiar circumstances in which Australian front-line soldiers served gave them reasons to temper their racism, or at least suppress it occasionally. Realism was important. While Australian training staff did not want their soldiers to feel inferior to the Japanese – a real danger in the early years – they did want them to be level-headed about his strengths. Propagandist notions are dangerous when formulating tactics. On the battlefield, being realistic about the enemy’s capacities was a matter of life and death.

It was probably observation and experience, rather than propaganda, that heightened the hatred Australian front-line soldiers felt for the Japanese. Racist prejudices, and even the threat to Australia, did not goad Australian soldiers in the same way personal experience or reports from other front-line soldiers did. Many Australians who campaigned against the Japanese considered their opponent evil, detestable, underhanded and frightening in his methods.

At the jungle training school at Canungra, recruits were told that the Japanese was “a cunning little rat”, who was “full of little ruses and tricks”. Australians were so unwilling to take Japanese prisoners largely because of distrust born of bad experiences with Japanese offering surrender and then acting as human bombs by detonating concealed explosives. The fact that Australian wounded, and the stretcher bearers who carried

本兵の弱々しい肉体を頻繁に目撃するようになり、日本兵に対する人種差別的軽蔑感を高めていったからである。

「超人」のイメージよりもっと一般的であったのは、日本人を人間以下に扱うことをみなしすることである。「ジョー・ガレットは第26大隊…”彼の経験から、「（日本人は）人間的な諸特徴を持った賢い野獣のようなであるが、とても万全とは言い難い。そして、これが彼らについて我々が思っていることなのだ。即ち、彼らは野獣である。」と結論している。高級推移は、オーストラリア兵がこの認識を持することを奨励した。1942年、ブレーミー将軍はボートモレスリーで日本の兵士を前に、日本人は「人間以下の野獣」であると語り、翌年の初めには、兵士たちに日本人は「奇妙な種族――人間と猿の雜種」であると告げている。

オーストラリア人にとってこの考え方は、日本人が初期の作戦で勝利したことを説明するのに好都合だった。つまりこの考え方が、日本の原始的な社会環境への適応力を説明したからである。それはまた、彼らを残虐に取り扱うことへの言い訳にもなった。*

戦争の体験者であり、普段はたいへん人情味のあるジョン・パトラー二等兵は、初めて日本兵に遭遇した時を次のように書いている。「今朝、食料採集に出た時、一奴は死亡していたんだが、いまいましいヒヒのような日本の兵の首に出わした。こんなにおぞましい格好の動物を殺すのは殺人でも何もないんだ。」

オーストラリア人が使った言葉の幾つかには、驚くべきことに、ナチの人種差別宣伝を思わせる響きがある。パトラーと彼の戦友にとっては、ナチズムはほとんどどの点で嫌悪すべきものであった。しかし、同様の人種差別の軽蔑は、当時のアメリカ人を記述することもあり、特別に深い西洋の兵士もこの問題に関しては、日本人に対して今日でも容認されない態度を保っていたのである。既に述べたように、当時は人種差別の時代であり、日本人もまた白人に対して人種差別的態度を示していた。

しかし、我々は戦時における対日人種差別主義の重要性を、あまり強調してはいなけらない。1942年の3月から4月にかけて、オーストラリア政府は、排日感情を煽る運動を展開した。この時、ビクトリア・モーリングヘラルド紙は、オーストラリア人は日本の侵略者と戦うために何の刺激も必要としないし、矢絣ぎ早に出る安楽な連合国とゲッベルス…と張り合わすという無駄な努力は無論必要としない、と論説している。この問題に関するジャーナル・マッハによると54パーセントのオーストラリア人が宣伝運動に反対している。

日本兵との対決、というオーストラリア兵が直面する生死に関わる現実は、戦間の日本人に対する人種差別的意識を緩めなかったものではない。しかし、こうした現実はまた、日本人に対する憎悪的性格と激しさを決定付ける要因となった。兵士たちの間では、
them, could expect no immunity from enemy fire was a major source of criticism, as was Japanese bombing of medical facilities. Thus a medical officer wrote about a tent "ward" attacked by enemy aircraft in Papua:

When the smoke cleared the twelve [patients] were still in the tents, but each one was dead – killed by the deliberate sub-human fury of Tojo's men.

It's hard to know how much Australians in New Guinea knew of the atrocities against their compatriots in the early 1942 campaigns, but it appears that it wasn't much, and that such information did not inflame hatred as much as it might have. Stories about New Britain became widely distributed, and well-informed Australians knew of Japanese excesses against the Chinese. However, the Australian wartime government, like the British and American, was unwilling to publicise material about atrocities, for fear of worsening the conditions of prisoners.

Australians in New Guinea had the pressing relevance of the issue of brutality brought home to them by the many Japanese atrocities at Milne Bay. Here is one example of the impact of these atrocities: At the sight of Allied men who had been bayoneted to a slow death at Milne Bay, a Tobruk veteran who had been sceptical of stories of Japanese atrocities, said his "hatred rose to boiling point and I cursed those cruel, yellow cowardly curs of hell".

The atrocities continued throughout the war. In March 1945, for example, a signalman on Bougainville reported that Australian provosts caught in a jeep by Japanese had been tied to their vehicle and set alight. During the Aitape–Wewak campaign, the corpse of a member of the 2/3rd Machine Gun Battalion was found "badly mutilated, disembowelled, the left leg missing from the hip, as well as portions of the right leg, and the hips had all flesh removed". This was an atrocity of a type that horrified Australians and occurred also in the Papuan campaign: namely cannibalism.

Of course such sights created intense hostility towards the perpetrators. An officer whose battalion had suffered such casualties in the Aitape–Wewak area in 1945 argued: "The frequent evidence of Japanese atrocities had a remarkable effect on the troops. It developed a feeling of disgust that caused men to enter battle with a greater determination to eliminate the enemy." An astute regimental historian says that not propaganda stories, but the physical evidence of Japanese atrocities was crucial in making Australians hate the Japanese in a way they had not hated Italians and Germans. This is a crucial point in...
understanding Australian attitudes towards the Japanese.

The “feeling of disgust” about atrocities also explains much of the unusually murderous behaviour of Australians. As early as the Milne Bay battle, Brigadier Field wrote in his diary: “The yellow devils show no mercy and have since had none from us.”

The lack of prisoners taken by Australians owed much to resentment of atrocities. The circumstances of jungle warfare also militated against the taking of Japanese prisoners. The fact that in the Kokoda campaign both sides took virtually no prisoners partly reflects the problems of getting prisoners of war back over extraordinarily difficult terrain. Because enemies were hidden and ambush was a constant possibility in the jungle, there were few opportunities for the niceties of asking for surrender — one had to shoot first and ask questions later. This logic of jungle warfare was conducive to hatred of the enemy who, like oneself, could not afford to be chivalrous.

The mud, the decomposing vegetation, the pouring rain, the humidity and the eerie sounds of the jungle also contributed to the hatred of the enemy with whom this place was identified. It was a place where soldiers fought in small groups, in isolation. The frightening enemy, with his apparent enthusiasm for death, and the menacing environment in which he was encountered made for a personal hatred for the Japanese that was peculiar to the soldiers who faced him.

Despite the hatred, Australians were often impressed by certain martial abilities of Japanese soldiers. They respected their fieldcraft, their ability to ambush, and their resilience and tenacity. As an Australian at Sanananda put it: “He is a tough nut to crack, this so often despised little yellow chap.”

Australians frequently wrote with grudging admiration about the defensive positions created by their enemy. The 22nd Battalion history, for example, says of ground near Finschhafen:

> It was obvious that this was Jap country. Along either side of the track were many weapon pits cleverly sited and expertly dug. They were exactly circular, as if marked out by compass with the sides plumb vertical. And they were finished to perfection with clever camouflage to an extent that they were quite unnoticeable until one had come abreast of them.

The idea of the Japanese super soldier was quite prevalent in the months after Japan’s
entry into the war. Defeat of the Japanese at Milne Bay and on the Kokoda Trail damaged this image, but the super soldier conception was a resilient one. Even in 1945, the Canungra Training Syllabus laid down that, on Day 2, recruits should be told that the concept of the Japanese "super soldier" was a myth. Like all armies, the Japanese had units of varying strength, experience and ability, but the differences in quality between its soldiers were perhaps more striking than those in any other army faced by the Australians. Particularly apparent was the difference in quality between the Japanese faced by Australians in 1942, on the one hand, and those faced afterwards.

In March 1945, a lieutenant of the 2/3rd Battalion pointed out that the soldiers they were facing this time were not in the same class as the men they had faced in the Owen Stanleys — and for good reason, as this enemy was out of communication with Tokyo and had little or no food. Aspects of Japanese performance that were criticised in New Guinea included poor marksmanship, poor weapons, their tendency to be incautious, especially by chattering or laughing loudly near the front, their naivety in attack, their tactical inflexibility and their tendency towards needless self-sacrifice.

Even the do-or-die courage of the Japanese soldiers did not necessarily raise the military prowess of Japanese in Australian eyes. The Japanese willingness to die appeared
bizarre to many Australians. Let me give you one example. A Japanese prisoner near Aitape “wept with frustration and humiliation” when his Australian captors would not shoot him, even though he bared his chest to them hopefully. Instead the Australians said: “Wake up to yourself you stupid bastard, you don’t know when you’re well off!” The Japanese attitude was incomprehensible. Their bravery in action often seemed like fanaticism or madness rather than traditional military heroism.

Naturally, many veterans of the Middle East compared the Japanese with their European enemies. “As a fighter, the Jap might be a little better than the Italian,” a 9th Division infantryman conceded in October 1943, “but he can’t compare with the Jerry.” On the other hand, an Australian who had been with the 6th Division in Greece said after fighting at Kokoda and Sanananda, “I think Nip a better fighter than Fritz.” This may have been a common attitude among 6th and 7th Division veterans of the Middle East who fought the Japanese in 1942. At Canungra recruits were told that “the Jap is NOT like the German whom we have become accustomed to fighting. He is NOT as good a soldier.”

When Australians discussed their defeats at Japanese hands in 1942 they complained about numerical inferiority and lack of air support. Their defeats were explained by factors external to their soldiering ability. Paradoxically, Australians’ victories later in the war tended to be explained by their own soldiering abilities, while external factors such as their numerical preponderance, aerial superiority and the lack of supplies available to the Japanese tended to be forgotten.

Even when Australians felt contempt for the Japanese, in battle it was treated with great caution. There was a terrible grimness about the campaigns against him in New Guinea. The fear of falling, dead or alive into Japanese hands ensured this.

In March 1945 an artilleryman in action on New Britain wrote in a letter home:

When you stop to think war is a pretty rotten business, here we are throwing shells at the Japs hoping they blow them to bits and although we call them little yellow – ! yet they’re human just as we are.

It was unusual for Australians to write in such a detached manner about the Japanese, however, detachment and even sympathy were occasionally evident. Dower’s suggestion that Allied soldiers had images of Japanese as superhuman, subhuman and inhuman, but not as humans like themselves is not entirely accurate. Sometimes Australians showed

1945年3月、豪第2/3大隊のある中尉は、今回彼らが遭遇した日本兵たちは、彼らがオーストラリア兵に比べて劣っているような気がしたが、それでも彼らには、この敵は東京との通信が途絶え、ほとんどが、我々は全く食料がないのだからと指摘している。さらに、ニューギニアでの日本兵の戦い振りは、次のような点で批判された。下手な射撃を、劣った武器、前線近くで大声でしゃべったり笑ったりする不注意な性向、攻撃の単純さ、戦術における柔軟性の乏しさ、不必要な自己犠牲を払う性向などの問題点である。

しかし、オーストラリア兵の目には、日本兵の死を覚悟した勇気を、日本軍の戦力を必ずしも高めていないと映ったのである。喜んで死んでいこうとする日本兵の態度を、多くのオーストラリア人には奇妙に思えた。一つの例を挙げると、アイテバ近くで捕虜になった日本兵は、撃ってくれるように頼って胸をはだけたが、オーストラリア兵の捕虜が撃たなかったので、「悔しさと屈辱感で泣いた」という。代わりに、オーストラリア兵は、「目を覚ませ、この訳者雑。おまえがどうも恥ずかしいのかもしれないと言ったそうだ。日本人の態度は理解し難かった。彼らの戦場での勇気は、伝統的な軍人の英雄行為というよりも、しばしば盲目的な、或いは狂気と見られていた。

中東での戦局を経験した兵の多くが、自然と日本兵とヨーロッパの敵を比較した。「戦士としては日本人はイタリア人より少し優れている」と豪第9師団のある歩兵は認めるが、「ジェリー（敵指名：ドイツ人）たちは何と生物かいない」と述べている。一方、ギリアーで豪第9師団に所属したあるオーストラリア兵は、「ココダとサナナで日本軍と戦った後、「日本兵はフリッツより優れた戦士だと思う」と述べており、先に豪第6・第7師団で中東の戦争に加わった兵で、「1942年に日本軍と戦った者の共通の感想だったのかかもしれない。カヌナル訓練校では、ジャップは我々が慣れているドイツ兵とは異なる。奴らはそれほど優れた兵士ではない」と訓練兵は教わった。

1942年代の対日無の栄北を論じる時、オーストラリア人においても数多的な劣勢と航空支援の欠如を嘆いた。彼らの敗北は、自分たちの戦闘技能とは関係のない外的要因で説明された。不合理なことは、彼の戦闘の勝利は彼自身の戦闘技能によって説明される傾向があり、数多的優勢、制空権の優位、日本軍の物資の欠如といった外的要因は忘れ去られる傾向にあった。

日本人を取るに足らぬ相手と見下していた時でもある。実際の戦闘では、オーストラ
empathy with the enemy, saying they knew what it was like to have dysentery as the Japanese did, imagining his discomfort under Australian gunfire, picturing his reaction as an amphibious invading force came towards him or saying, in the Aitape–Wewak region, that living there for three years as the Japanese had done would be “pure hell”.

Moreover, the murderous treatment meted out to Japanese prisoners was not morally acceptable to all. As an example, Captain J.J. May was responsible for the loading of wounded men onto air transports from the Wau airfield during the heavy fighting there in January 1943. He was approached one day to make room for six Japanese prisoners who would soon arrive, bound together, and who were to be taken to Port Moresby for questioning, but they did not come at the expected time. Captain May wrote:

A soldier appeared with his rifle slung over his shoulder and looking at the ground told me that they would not be coming. I blew off what the bloody hell do you mean you ask us to make room for you and now don’t want it. One could sense something was wrong and it very shamefacedly came out, they had been killed, a soldier had opened up on them with a Tommy gun and shot the lot. The boys and I were pretty aghast at this and we said they had been tied up, the poor messenger was also rather stricken and tried to explain how it happened. A soldier that opened up had his mate killed alongside him during the night. It some-

...
how cast a dark shadow over us including the poor B who had to tell us.

So, some conceived of Japanese as fellow men, and believed that killing them was, at times, immoral.

Those who did the killing also had their emotions tested. An Australian who had just killed a walking Japanese skeleton at Sanananda described him as a "rather poor specimen of humanity". Even such grudging admissions did acknowledge the humanity of this enemy, and soldiers who killed Japanese tended to think more than usual about this point. Captain May reported a conversation with a wounded sergeant who had been on patrol near Wau when confronted by a Japanese wielding a sword. In a tone that made clear his regret, the sergeant told May, "I think he must have been a M.O. or something and I had to shoot the poor bastard."

Occasionally when Australians examined corpses they saw evidence of the civilian side of their enemy. Fearnside writes of an incident in New Guinea in 1945 where his platoon ambushed and killed a lone, emaciated Japanese soldier. He says that although they were immune to compunction about such homicidal acts, searching the body brought a haunting emotional impact. They found two objects. One was a rudimentary map of Australia. The other was a faded photograph of a beautiful Japanese girl. Such images brought home the fact that the enemy too had a civilian, peaceful background.

However, such fellow feeling could vanish under the pressure of events. Thus one day in January 1945 a 6th Division infantryman wrote in his diary about how his unit had fed prisoners and protected them from angry natives. The day after, and immediately after an ambush of his unit he wrote: "What little pity one had for the animal cravens we had here as prisoners yesterday has now vanished." In jungle warfare there was not much scope for compassion.

One particular story illustrates a different view. It concerns an Australian NCO, Steve Sullivan, who took some men to look around the battlefield of Slater's Knoll, Bougainville, during the fighting there in March 1945. They found a wounded Japanese, and several of the men suggested to Sullivan that they kill him. Sullivan objected. "I knew all about the Japs and their treatment of prisoners", he recalls, "but to my mind that is not good enough reason to kill a man in cold blood. We are not Japs." He couldn't do what he identified as a Japanese thing to do, that is kill a defenceless human being. Yet it was also an Australian thing to do against Japanese in this war. The fact that we were not Japs
prevented Sullivan from killing the man. For other Australians, this difference was precisely what justified killing them – they’re not like us in their behaviour and their appearance, so we can kill them. Ironically, in their brutal treatment of each other, Australians and Japanese had something in common.

As the previous anecdote suggests, it’s difficult to generalise about Australian soldiers’ attitudes. However, one can’t help but make grim conclusions as to their feelings about their Japanese counterpart. Their evaluations of his martial prowess varied, but they usually feared him and almost invariably hated him. They were passionate in their willingness to kill him.

でも、奴等の捕虜に対する待遇についても全て知っていたが、私の考えではそれは、一人の人性を冷酷に殺す十分な理由ではない。我々は日本人ではないのだからと彼は当時の事件を回顧している。サリンは、日本人のことと彼が認めている行為、即ち、無防備の人間を殺すことができなかった。しかしこの戦争では、それはオーストラリア兵が日本兵にする行為でもあった。我々は日本人ではないという事実によって、サリンはその日本兵を殺さなかった。しかし、他のオーストラリア人にとっては、この事実こそが日本兵を殺す正当な理由になったのである。奴等は行動も器用も自分たちと同じでない。だから、奴等を殺してもいいのだが。こう彼らは考えた。皮肉にも、互いに対する残虐行為において、オーストラリア人と日本人には共通点があったのである。

この逸話が示すように、オーストラリア兵の日本人観を一般化することは難しい。しかし、日本兵に対する彼らの感情については、厳しい結論を出さざるをえない。日本兵の戦闘能力については彼らの評価も様々であるが、彼らは大抵は日本兵を恐れたし、ほとんどいつも懸んでいた。その結果、彼らは日本兵を殺すことに情熱をたぎらせたのだ。

吉田晴紀訳