

# Hidden Horrors: Japanese War Crimes In World War II (Transitions: Asia and Asian America)

By Yuki Tanaka



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This book documents for the first time previously hidden Japanese atrocities in World War II, including cannibalism; the slaughter and starvation of prisoners of war; the rape, enforced prostitution, and murder of noncombatants; and biological warfare experiments. The author describes how desperate Japanese soldiers consumed the flesh of their own comrades killed in fighting as well as that of Australians, Pakistanis, and Indians. Another chapter traces the fate of 65 shipwrecked Australian nurses and British soldiers who were shot or stabbed to death by Japanese soldiers. Thirty-two other nurses, who landed on another island, were captured and sent to Sumatra to become "comfort women"—prostitutes for Japanese soldiers. Tanaka recounts how thousands of Australian and British POWs died in the infamous Sandakan camp in the Borneo jungle in 1945. Those who survived were forced to endure a tortuous 160-mile march on which anyone who dropped out of line was immediately shot. Only six escapees lived to tell the tale. Based on exhaustive research in previously closed archives, this book represents a landmark analysis of Japanese war crimes. The author explores individual atrocities in their broader social, psychological, and institutional milieu and places Japanese behavior during the war in the broader context of the dehumanization of men at war—without denying individual and national responsibility.



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#### **Editorial Review**

#### From Publishers Weekly

In a shocking brief that's as much an intellectual artifact as a work of scholarship, Japanese historian Tanaka challenges the idea of Japan as a victim in WWII. The core of his thesis is that in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, an "Emperor ideology" based on the "family state" came to dominate Japan. Responsibility was seen as unlimited, while rights existed only in a collective context; this set the stage for various tragedies and atrocities. Tanaka offers several case histories to prove his point. They cover the massacre of more than 2500 Australian prisoners in a Borneo camp, widespread cannibalism by Japanese troops in New Guinea, the shooting of 21 Australian nurses in cold blood and the sexual enslavement of Asian women for the pleasure of Japanese fighting men. Also surveyed are the premeditated murder of 32 civilians, including German missionaries, in 1943; Japanese plans for bacteriological warfare; and the use of prisoners as medical guinea pigs. Tanaka insists that the perpetrators of these brutalities were "ordinary" men enmeshed in a criminal system; he also asserts that people of all nationalities commit atrocities in war. He depicts this era as a definable, relatively brief period during which Japan lost its way and ran amok. This seems no more intellectually acceptable than describing the Third Reich as a historical accident. In fact, Tanaka's study resembles German efforts during the 1950s to come to terms with the immediate past. As such, it is a beginning?no less and no more. Maps and photographs not seen by PW. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

#### From Kirkus Reviews

A scholar's harrowing if pedantic briefing on largely unpunished and long-ignored atrocities committed by Japan's military during WW II. Drawing on hitherto untapped archives, Tanaka (Unmapped Territories, 1991) documents a series of appalling war crimes that, with few exceptions, have escaped notice in standard histories of the global conflict. In notably dispassionate detail, for example, he recounts the massacre of more than 2,500 Australian and British POWs in a camp called Sandakan on North Borneo, the gratuitous slaughter of 21 nurses on the Indonesian isle of Banka, and the mass murder of civilians (including German missionaries) in the Bismarck archipelago as Allied forces closed in during the spring of 1944. Covered as well is the widespread cannibalism practiced by Japanese soldiers in New Guinea and elsewhere in East Asia. In addition, Tanaka sheds new light on the infamous Unit 731, which conducted horrific medical experiments on helpless prisoners throughout the Pacific theater. He goes on to disclose that US officials unilaterally granted the responsible Japanese physician and his staff immunity from prosecution in return for the information they could provide on Dai Nihon's plans and capacity to wage bacteriological warfare, data that were never shared with other Allied powers. After reviewing the frightful particulars of his case studies, moreover, the author offers anecdotal evidence of similar behavior by other belligerents, eventually concluding, however, that Japanese barbarity was sui generis. In a concluding chapter, Tanaka attempts to explain without excusing the aberrant conduct of imperial troops on and off the front lines, citing among other factors the authoritarian basis of Japanese morality. Shocking annals that bear gruesome witness to the darker realities of what historian John W. Dower (who contributed a thoughtful foreword to the American edition) called a war without mercy. (photos, not seen; maps) -- Copyright ©1996, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

#### Review

#### Praise for the first edition:

In a shocking brief . . . Japanese historian Tanaka challenges the idea of Japan as a victim in WWII. The core of his thesis is that in the aftermath of the Russo-Japanese War of 1904–1905, an 'Emperor ideology' based

on the 'family state' came to dominate Japan. Responsibility was seen as unlimited, while rights existed only in a collective context; this set the stage for various tragedies and atrocities. (*Publishers Weekly*)

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