



Title	Book Review of Ulrich Straus 'The Anguish of Surrender : Japanese POWs of World War II'
Author(s)	Eldridge, Robert D.
Citation	国際公共政策研究. 2006, 10(2), p. 181-183
Version Type	VoR
URL	https://hdl.handle.net/11094/10856
rights	
Note	

The University of Osaka Institutional Knowledge Archive : OUKA

<https://ir.library.osaka-u.ac.jp/>

The University of Osaka

<Book Review>

Ulrich Straus, *The Anguish of Surrender: Japanese POWs of World War II*
(Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004), \$27.50

Robert D. ELDRIDGE*

Every August, people on both sides of the Pacific remember the end of World War II and reflect on the greatest conflict of the 20th century. Two-thousand five was particularly important in this regard, being the 60th anniversary of the end of the War. A poignant book entitled *The Anguish of Surrender: Japanese POWs of World War II*, released last year, will assist these reflections and bring our understanding of this history to an entirely new, deeper, and more personal level.

The author, Ulrich Straus, provides a fascinating discussion of Japanese soldiers and sailors taken into Allied custody as POWs. But it is more than a book about the little known story of these POWs. It is a comprehensive discussion of the war and wartime in both Japan and the United States, how the people of each country prepared for the war, how both sides viewed one another and their respective societies.

Straus, a German-born former U.S. Foreign Service Officer who spent much of his childhood in prewar Japan, emigrated to the U.S. in 1940 with his family and eventually entered the Army's Military Intelligence Service Language School at the University of Michigan after finishing high school in 1944. He was scheduled to deploy to the Pacific to interrogate some of these POWs when the Pacific War ended in August 1945. After serving in Japan in General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters during the Occupation years (1945-1952) and pursuing graduate study in the United States and Japan, the author later joined the State Department but maintained an "abiding curiosity" (p. xii) about what became of the Japanese POWs.

* Associate Professor, School of International Public Policy, Osaka University

Several years ago, the author began his quest to answer his long-held question. Writing a letter to a Japanese newspaper, he asked former POWs to contact him and developed "an extensive correspondence" with them (p. xiv). In the meantime, he traveled to the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, before coming to Japan again on several occasions to conduct interviews with the individuals with whom he exchanged letters. The result is a thoroughly researched, detailed, well-written, and readable study.

As has since become well known, the Japanese government forbade its forces to become POWs "for any reason whatsoever" going into World War II (p. 17). As a result Japanese soldiers, feeling or fearing shame in being captured for themselves and family, in most cases, literally fought to the death, causing Japan to suffer more than two million military casualties and drawing out the bloody battles for weeks and months, most famously Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Japan's official dismissal of the legal conventions was a tragedy not only in that it deprived its citizen-soldiers the knowledge of their internationally protected rights, but it also led to the profound abuses of Allied POWs, most notorious during the Bataan Death March and the building of the Railway of Death in Burma and bridge over River Kwai in Thailand.

Despite these tragedies, Straus highlights the stories of individuals who for a variety of reasons chose to surrender or at least be captured. He explores their stories before and after the experience of contact with the enemy following their imprisonment, and the entire process of their transition from anxiety, depression, and "anguish" to confusion and eventual appreciation for the generosity shown by their American captors.

Not all of it was good. Chapter 8 looks at uprisings in the stockades in the U.S. and Allied countries that held Japanese POWs. While there were many who cooperated with their captors, believing that they no longer existed as people or that they would never be able to return to Japan since they had let themselves be captured and thus defied one of the principle decrees of the *Senjinkun*, the Imperial Army's Field Service Code, there were others, made up of hardliners and criminal elements, who sought to cause trouble within the POW camps.

Despite these problems and the frictions that would emerge, "these were not,"

according to Straus, "what defined normal life for Japanese POWs" (p. 196). Most of the POWs "adopted a stance between the two extremes...Members of this group mainly wanted to stay out of trouble, to remain alive to see what would develop, and to avoid anything that might be criticized as traitorous conduct" (p. 175).

There was of course contact, however. Straus introduces the story of American military officers trained in Japanese language study and interrogation techniques who interviewed the Japanese POWs during the different stages of their imprisonment. The chapter on their background is fittingly titled "America's Secret Weapons: The Language Schools." While Japan forbade the study of English during the war, America actively pursued the mastery of its enemy's tongue. Sadly, however, as Straus describes, the U.S. government questioned the loyalty of not only Japanese immigrants residing on the West Coast, but also their American-born children, many of whom volunteered to fight or to teach in the language schools.

In summary, this book is not simply a study of the unknown story and fate of Japanese POWs, but also represents a lens from which to see this period in our two countries' history. Fortunately a Japanese language version of the book is planned, which will allow this powerful story to be known and shared by a wider audience. It is perhaps finally time to bestow upon the author, who abandoned a promising academic career for the Foreign Service, a doctorate for his work.