

PRISONER OF WAR CAMPS IN JAPAN and JAPANESE CONTROLLED AREAS
AS TAKEN FROM REPORTS OF INTERNED AMERICAN PRISONERS

LIAISON and RESEARCH BRANCH AMERICAN PRISONER OF WAR INFORMATION BUREAU
by JOHN M. GIBBS 31 July 1946

HIROHATA CAMP DIVISIONAL CAMP OF OSAKA 12-B; JAPAN

1. LOCATION: About two miles from north coast of Inland Sea on the Island of Honshu 40 miles west by north of Hobe, five miles southeast of Himeji, practically in the town of Hirchata and close to the railroad passing through Hirohata to Osaka. The coordinates are 34°48'N. 134°38'E. Himeji contained one of the major Japanese army garrisons on Honshu. The prison compound was 200' X 400' and was surrounded by a wood fence topped by pointed bamboo staves and barbwire.

2. PRISONER PERSONNEL: In Aug. 1943 the first prisoners to reach this camp was a detail of 80 American Navy men and Marines from Guam. No officers were in this group. On 5 Oct. 1943 a detail of 406 soldiers, sailors and marines arrived from the Philippines. Capt. Sidney E. Seid, Army Med. Corps was the only officer in this group. He became not only the Sr. Officer of the prisoners but also the camp medical officer. The total prisoner personnel was 486, divided by services as follows: Army 306; Navy 80; Marines 100. Four U.S.N. enlisted men were chosen to serve as medical corpsmen.

3. GUARD PERSONNEL: Soon after the arrival of the American prisoners, Lt. Takenaka the camp commandant was transferred and was succeeded by Lt. Muto. Interpreters were Tahara and Uchinaka. Cpl. Fujita was deputy to the commandant. In charge of quartermaster office was Motoyaskia and Ishida in charge of subsistence. Cpl. Sujina was medical corpsman.

4. GENERAL CONDITIONS:

(a) Housing: Two buildings of wood construction 50' x 100' each constituted the barracks. The roofs were of tile and the floors of wood. The buildings were not insulated. For sleeping, upper and lower platforms were provided with straw mats, the lower platform having an elevation of 16" from the floor. Windows with glass panes were numerous, and skylights were added in the roof. Tables and benches for eating were placed in the aisles. The structures were not heated. The buildings were of substantial construction.

The barracks were infested with lice and fleas to such an extent that sleeping was almost impossible. Each barracks housed 240 men.

Barracks #1 was flanked on all sides by other installations such as latrines (2), wash rack (1), shoe shop (1), warehouse (1), and galley (1). The second barracks was placed cross-wise to the compound and at the opposite end from the Japanese headquarters.

An air raid shelter had been provided at the end of the compound adjacent to the Japanese headquarters. Tubs with water for fire fighting were at the four corners of each barracks.

(b) Latrines: Two latrines in detached buildings were so placed that each of them was looked upon as being private to the men in the nearby barracks. Each latrine had 16 stalls, the usual squatting type with holes cut in the floors over cess-pools which were cleaned by Japanese farmers who used the offal as fertilizer. These facilities 25' x 50' in size also had urinal troughs in the center.

(c) Bathing: The bath in a separate building 20' x 30' was a public or communal affair with one concrete tub about 15' square, the water in which was heated in a coal fire unit built into one side of the tub. Hot baths were available three times per week from Nov. to March. Four cold water showers were in the same building.

(d) Galley: This facility in a separate frame building 20' x 40' was equipped with 13 cauldrons for cooking. Ten prisoners were detailed as cooks. Food was drawn from the galley in buckets and carried to the barracks by mess-men in charge of a non-commissioned officer. The men were divided into messes of 20 men each. One dish locker was provided for each mess.

(e) Food: The Japanese did no better than to provide a starvation diet at this camp and had it not been for supplemental food purloined from Japanese ships, it is estimated that the death rate from starvation would have been very high. The staple ration varied from 575 to 750 grams per man per day which included all rice, flour, bread, potatoes, etc. supplemented by soup from greens seaweed and silkworms. Occasionally decomposed fish and meat were sparingly served. An oven for making bread and broiling fish was made and installed by prisoners. The rice was invariably full of weevil. A typical menu was for breakfast: one small bowl of rice and a soup made from greens. Lunch: Cold rice and one spoon of seaweed. Supper: small bowl of hot rice and thin soup. The steel mill gave the workers some extra rice at the noon meal. Sick men were detailed to catch frogs, snakes and grasshoppers which were cooked in the galley for all the men. Soybeans were issued in fair amount during last three months of war. The sick men received no ration but those

who worked prorated their food. By so doing all the prisoners fared alike.

(f) Medical Facilities: Capt. Sidney E. Seid, U.S.A.M.C. supervised and rendered all medical services, assisted by 4 four navy corpsmen and one Nip enlisted man. The steel mill detailed one civilian employee to supervise the issue of their medical supplies.

The camp hospital accommodated 20 bed patients. The dressing station was fairly complete, although small. Operations were performed at the hospital of the steel mill. Prisoners in this hospital were accorded the same attention as Japanese civilians. If required ambulance service was obtainable for the benefit of sick prisoners. Serious dental cases also received treatment at the hospital. Minor fillings and simple extractions performed at the camp. In some special cases the sick were transferred to the Kobe POW hospital for treatment.

The most serious detriment to the convalescence of the sick was the attitude of the Japanese enlisted med. corpsman. He had the power to counteract the orders of the American Med. Officer. He frequently changed diagnoses, would refuse to issue medicine and would force the men with high temperature to work. At times he would beat, or cause to be beaten the prisoners who answered sick call.

Capt. Seid was untiring in his efforts to obtain proper consideration and care of sick prisoners. Frequently he was physically punished for such intercession.

(g) Supplies: (1) Red Cross – YMCA – Other relief: Red Cross food parcels were distributed as follows: one parcel per man in Nov. 1942; about 1/5 of a parcel per man in Dec. 1942; one per man in 1943; 32 parcels for 486 men in Dec. 1943; three each from Nov. 1944 to May 1945 but doled out one item at a time. No Red Cross clothing was issued. (2) Japanese Issue: Upon arrival some of the prisoners were issued one work uniform and another for rest days or to wear in camp. Many of the men received nothing better than worn out Japanese army leather shoes. Clothing was replaced when unable to be worn. In Sept. 1944 a complete suit and underwear were issued.

(h) Mail: (1) Incoming: Very irregular and frequently held in the camp for months. Frequently the mail at periods would only be given out to the prisoners who were physically able to do more than their share of hard work. (2) Outgoing: The prisoners were allowed to mail the propaganda card about once every six months. It was hard to get a harmless letter through Japanese camp censorship.

(i) Work: There was only one American officer in the camp and professional duties required all of his time. The work project was the operation of the Setetsu Steel Mill. The prisoners were made to unload iron ore with shovel and cargo nets. Details were assigned to firing furnaces, unloading and breaking up slag, and laying spur railroad tracks. The civilian employees of the steel mill served as guards. These guards were empowered to punish the prisoners physically which they did apparently without reason. Hours of work were from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with 3 to 5 miles to walk to and from work. The prisoners worked in rain or snow. About 400 men worked daily at hard labor. Thirty men were detailed to camp and usually 50 or more of the prisoners were in the sick bay suffering from illness or injury.

(j) Treatment: The treatment at this camp can be summed up very briefly as follows: The men were cruelly beaten, they were forced to maintain a back-breaking pace at heavy work while too sick to work, they were given a starvation diet, and medicines and medical supplies were denied.

(k) Pay: Officers: Same as Japanese officers of comparable rank, but all pay in excess of 50 yen per month was retained and placed in a Japanese Postal Savings Account. Enlisted men: NCOs 15 sen per day; Privates 10 sen per day.

(l) Recreation: None.

(m) Religious Activities: Protestant and Catholic services monthly. A form of prayer service was conducted weekly by the men. Catholic and Protestant services conducted by Japanese ministers once during 2½ years of imprisonment.

(n) Morale: Excellent.

5. MOVEMENTS: Camp was liberated on 9 Sept. 1945. En route to Yokohama, the port of exit, the prisoners passed through Kobe, Osaka, and Nagoya. The citizens along the route were bewildered but friendly.