

General News

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SECTION

Japanese casualty on Attu was pacifist who loved America

The battle for Attu was over. It was May, 1943.

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Who was the man who had kept the diary and died on Attu?

There was no name. But the dead man left a clue in a terse summary of his education on the

ALASKA



STANTON H. PATTY
Times staff reporter

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An American-trained physician serving with Japanese forces on Attu? Was it possible?

Jerry Oaksmith, a Seattle boat dealer, provided us with a tattered copy of the diary which he had received in 1943 from a friend who served on a tug at Attu.

It is a haunting document. Maybe, we hoped, Pacific Union College could identify the author.

"The Japanese Army physician about whom you inquire is Paul Nobuo Tatsuguchi," said Howard O. Hardcastle, associate academic dean, in a return letter.

Paul Nobuo Tatsuguchi's story is one of those tragedies of war that makes fiction seem tame. A story of a good man who loved both his country and his supposed enemy.

"There is a low fog," Tatsuguchi wrote in his diary that day. "...20 (American) boats landed at Massacre Bay."

Tatsuguchi was a noncombatant. He had been trained as a medical missionary for the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

The diary continues, all the way to the end of the battle on May 29.

May 14 — "Continuous flow of wounded in the field hospital..."

May 15 — "Just lay down from fatigue in the barracks..."

May 19 — "Went into Attu

village church — felt like someone's home."

May 21 — "Nervousness of our C.O. is severe and he has said his last word to his officers and NCOs — that he will die tomorrow — gave all his articles away. Hasty chap this fellow."

May 25 — "Am suffering from diarrhea and feel dizzy."

May 28 — "Continuous cases of suicide. Heard that they gave 400 shots of morphine to seriously wounded and killed them..."

There were orders to destroy documents and destroy the medi-

cal patients.

Did Tatsuguchi do this? We never will know.

Those who knew Paul Tatsuguchi believe that he did not kill his patients, that he died without violating his human and religious beliefs.

May 29 — "The last assault is to be carried out," Tatsuguchi wrote.

"All the patients in the hospitals were made to commit suicide."

"Only 33 years of living and I am to die here," he wrote. "I have no regrets. Banzai to Emperor."

Why "Banzai to Emperor"?

Perhaps, Watkins said, it was meant in irony. Maybe he had "no regrets" because he had done nothing against God and man.

"I am grateful that I have kept the peace of my soul which Christ bestowed upon me," Tatsuguchi continued in his last entry.

"Goodbye Taeko, my beloved wife, who loved me to the last. Until we meet again, grant you Godspeed..."

How did Tatsuguchi die?

An investigator told B.P. Hoffman, an elder of the Adventist Church, that the doctor was killed

when he rushed out of a field-hospital cave. He was waving a Bible and speaking English, but the Yank who shot him could not hear because of the roaring Aleutian wind.

"Don't shoot! I am a Christian!" were his words, according to one eyewitness.

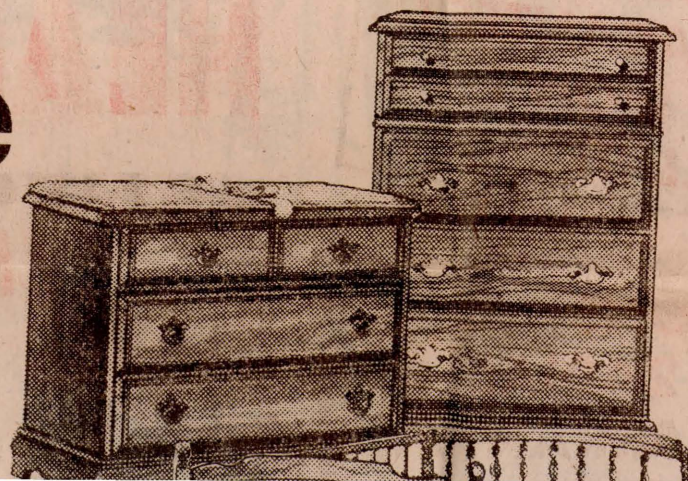
Mrs. Tatsuguchi moved to Los Angeles in 1954. Misako is the wife of a Japanese Adventist missionary in Japan. Mutsuko, also a nurse, is an American citizen.

Paul Tatsuguchi's family still lives between two cultures.

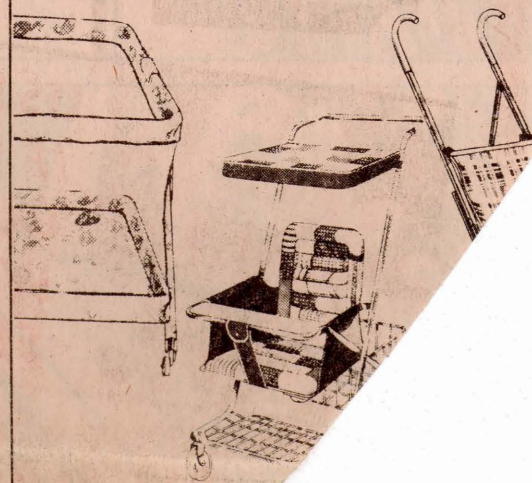
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We learned about Tatsuguchi through Pacific Union and Floyd C. Watkins of Emory University in Georgia. Watkins has made a thorough study of Tatsuguchi and his family.

Tatsuguchi came to Pacific Union College from Hiroshima. His mother was the organist for the Adventist church there. His father was a dentist.

He completed his medical studies at the College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University) in California. He also fell in love with Taeko Miyake, a Japanese girl who was studying in the United States.

They married and returned to Japan, where Paul became an Adventist medical missionary.

Then, early in 1941, Tatsuguchi was drafted into the Japanese army.

He was, in Watkins' words, "trapped in an impossible situation."

Tatsuguchi did not believe in war. He was a pacifist. He was loyal to his native country, but so fond of America that he planned to return here to live.

"Since the time of the American Civil War probably no lover of America has been assigned to such burdensome military service," Watkins said. "He was loyal to two peoples and two cultures who were warring against each other."

There were other difficulties as well.

Because of his "American ways," Tatsuguchi was not trusted by the Japanese military. He was refused a commission and pressed into service as a physician with the rank of private.

When Paul went to Attu to die he left his wife, Taeko, and 3-year-old daughter, Misako, in Tokyo. Another daughter, Mutsuko, would be born soon after his departure.

In the dreary barracks of Attu, Tatsuguchi wrote letters home by candlelight. The mail was censored heavily, and Taeko could learn little about his life in the Aleutian Islands.

Paul, a lover of nature, climbed the mountains on Attu, fished and played in the snow. Taeko mailed him cookies and paper balloons.

Then — May 12, 1943, United States forces landed to recapture Attu.