

Taken Captive: A Japanese POW's Story

By Ooka Shohei

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"I do not know whether I dozed off or passed out, but the next thing I remember is gradually becoming aware of a blunt object striking my body over and over. Just as I realized it was a boot kicking me in the side, I felt my arm being grabbed roughly, and I returned to full consciousness.

"One GI had hold of my right arm, and another had his rifle pointed at me, nearly touching me.


"Don't move. We're taking you prisoner,' the one with the rifle said."

On January 25, 1945, Private Ooka Shohei of the Japanese Imperial Army was captured by American forces in the Philippines. Near death from starvation and acute malaria, he was nursed back to health by his captors and shipped off to a POW camp. Taken Captive is his powerful and poignant account of life as a prisoner of war. Long regarded as a literary classic in Japan, this extraordinary memoir is appearing in English for the first time.

There are no epic battles or grand scale heroics. This is an intimate, gripping, and ultimately enlightening true story of a sophisticated, middle-aged scholar thrown into a primitive struggle for survival. It is filled with moments of sublime ordinariness--prisoners passing time by playing "20 Questions"--and heartstopping encounters--a lone soldier decides whether or not to shoot an unsuspecting enemy soldier.

The harsh conditions, the daily routines that occupy a prisoner's time, and above all, the psychological struggles and behavioral quirks of captives forced to live in close confinement are conveyed with devastating simplicity and candor. Throughout, the author constantly probes his own conscience, questioning motivations and decisions. What emerges is a multileveled portrait of an individual determined to retain his humanity in an uncivilized environment.

In Taken Captive, Ooka Shohei provides much more than an unprecedented look at the POW experience from a Japanese point of view. His stirring account offers a penetrating exploration of Japanese society, and its values, as embodied by the microcosm of his fellow POWs. Recalling his wartime experiences, Ooka Shohei has created a brilliant work of rare honesty, insight, and emotional subtlety.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

This is an extraordinary true-life POW story, told by a Japanese soldier captured by American forces during World War II. Ooka's concern with his imprisonment was not fear of brutality, but with how capture would look back home in Japan. In this endearing account, he relates how his American captors treated their prisoners as human beings, confusing the prisoners who saw themselves, through their own cultural filter, as dishonored wretches who had allowed capture rather than suicide or martyrdom. Ooka writes that this cultural dissonance prevented the Japanese POWs from "accepting the Americans' warmheartedness with simple gratitude."

From Publishers Weekly

In January 1945, Ooka (*Fires on the Plain*), a 35-year-old literary critic who would become one of Japan's leading literary figures, was captured by American forces in the Philippines. Three years later, he began a series of journals, later compiled into a book, about that experience. In this first appearance in English of the memoir, Ooka portrays himself as a reluctant combatant obsessed with the fear that he might die fighting for the imperial army. That fear nearly became a self-fulfilling prophecy when a malaria-ravaged Ooka tried to kill himself while being hunted by American troops. His suicide grenade failed to explode, however, and he was taken prisoner by the Yanks, nursed back to health and interned in a POW camp until he was repatriated to Japan at war's end. In this graceful narrative, Ooka, a translator of *Stendhal*, brings his considerable intellectual and literary powers to bear in contemplating the complexities of POW society and his own place in it. He reveals, among other matters, that he repeatedly "had to stanch the impulse to toady to my captors," whom he admired, and that he took "dark pleasure" in "adopting the manner of the enemy" by imitating the long, powerful strides of the Americans. Possessed of an ironic, challenging intelligence, this clean-hewn work can now take its place on stateside shelves with other classic memoirs of POW life.

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From Library Journal

The popular view of the war in the Pacific is that most if not all Japanese either fought to the death or committed suicide to avoid capture. This view is contradicted here by a Japanese soldier captured by the Americans in the Philippines in January 1945. Serialized in Japan between 1948 and 1951, this is the story of a private soldier who as a reservist was called to duty toward war's end. University-educated and drawn to the study of French literature, Shohei brought to this experience "reflections of a sophisticated and cosmopolitan observer thrown with his companions into a desperate, primitive struggle for life." Shohei deals effectively with the conflict between being a POW and not having died in battle. His descriptions of fellow POWs and their American captors are revealing and humorous though sometimes too drawn out. Ultimately, this military history reads more like a work of literature and as such is too long to hold the reader's interest. While valuable for its Japanese perspective, this is recommended only for comprehensive military history collections. ?Harold N. Boyer, Locust Valley Lib., N.Y.

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Linda Pillar:

Your reading sixth sense will not betray an individual, why because this Taken Captive: A Japanese POW's Story publication written by well-known writer we are excited for well how to make book that may be understand by anyone who also read the book. Written inside good manner for you, leaking every ideas and creating skill only for eliminate your own personal hunger then you still doubt Taken Captive: A Japanese POW's Story as good book not simply by the cover but also by content. This is one guide that can break don't ascertain book by its include, so do you still needing yet another sixth sense to pick this!? Oh come on your examining sixth sense already told you so why you have to listening to a different sixth sense.

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