

Part I

Nakamura Tempu was born in the ninth year of the Meiji emperor's rule, 1876, in the rural outskirts of a city only recently made over from the castle town of Edo into the new national capital of Tokyo. His father gave him the name Shungo at birth but later changed it to Saburo, the name Nakamura would carry through his formative years.

Saburo's father, Sukeoki, having been born into the Yanagawa clan in what is now Fukuoka Province in northern Kyushu, was of *bushi* or warrior lineage. He also belonged to the modern, Meiji elite then engineering Japan's transformation from feudal agrarian to monarchical industrial society, and when the newly consolidated national treasury undertook for the first time to mint and print a national currency, they requisitioned Sukeoki with the task of developing a paper for this purpose. While Japan had an old and sophisticated paper industry from which to work, what was called for was a paper stock made from fibers such as mulberry, cotton and silk that could withstand wear and tear yet also carry watermarks. This required knowledge from overseas, so Nakamura brought in a technical advisor from England.

The Englishman and his wife occupied a house next door to the Nakamuras. The couple, who spoke almost no Japanese, took an immediate liking to Shungo, still a toddler, and his older brother, and the Nakamura children spent hours every day inside the Englishman's home, thus acquiring an exposure to the sounds and syntax of English from the time that Shungo was just beginning to talk.

School-aged Saburo quickly made a neighborhood name for himself as *enfant terrible*. After either witnessing or suffering first hand young Saburo's penchant for the breaking of fingers and tearing of earlobes, the other children learned to stay out of his way, and the paths from the Nakamura residence to those of their neighbors were well worn by Saburo's mother's sandals as she came and went with offerings of sweets and humble apologies for her son's actions.

Nakamura Tempu biographer Ooi Mitsuru, in his book *Senjo to Meiso* ("The Battlefield and Meditation"), tells the story of how Tempu, in his sixties, was approached one evening following one of his talks by a man of similar age. His name, the man said, was Kuroda, and his parents had owned the house and vegetable near the Nakamura residence in Honjo. You may not remember me but I remember

you, he said with a wide smile. See? Whereupon he turned his head to the right to expose an ear that was missing its earlobe.

Kuroda, Ooi reports, had lost his entire family in the wartime devastation of Tokyo, and when Tempu learned this he took him into the Nakamura household and looked after him for the remainder of his life.

Young Saburo, by the time that he graduated from primary school, had become such a monster that his parents were at a loss as to what to do with him. His father called upon connections back in Fukuoka for help, and the boy was sent off to board with someone he believed could affect some discipline on their son.

The man was Toyama Mitsuru, and he would become one of only two men—the Indian yogi Kaliappa being the other—for whom Nakamura Tempu would reserve the title of *sensei* or teacher for the rest of his life. A colorful and enigmatic personality, Toyama was just thirty-four when Saburo went to live with him but already championing human rights and the national cause. He would become a grand old man of Japanese politics. Never elected to any office nor appointed to any post, Toyama exercised inordinate influence on domestic and international Japanese policy from behind the scenes, purely on the strength of his character and impeccability of his reputation. In the aftermath of World War II, the Allied Command and the American occupation were to label him a member of the radical right, an assessment that was neither accurate nor fair.

Toyama was the unofficial but recognized leader of a political association called the Genyosha, or Black Ocean Society, named after the Black Sea separating Kyushu from the Korean peninsula. The Genyosha had no formal charter, organization, or declaration of beliefs other than the simple motto “Revere the Emperor, honor the nation, and protect the rights of the people.” Passionate advocates of humanist ideals, Toyama and his Genyosha associates unabashedly championed democratic causes, whether at home in Japan or on the Asian continent.

Toyama was a nationalist at a time when nation building was the single task most essential to Japan's survival. Western imperialism had swept over most of Asia, and the Western powers, especially England and Russia, were covertly and even overtly coveting the Japanese archipelago. Unless Japan was amply prepared to resist foreign invasion, Toyama understood, any attempt to guarantee the rights of the common man at home was useless.

His concern for national dignity stretched beyond that of Japan, however. He was an untiring champion of independence movements on the continent, and as well as moral and spiritual support, the Genyosha contributed funding, which they secured from Japan's rising class of industrial elites, to a number of these causes. These movements invariably ended in failure, and when their leaders sought

asylum, Toyama and the Genyosha would take them in. The Chinese republican Sun Yat-sen, the Indian independence advocate Rash Behari Bose, and the Korean republican Kim Ok-kiun all spent time in Japan hiding under Genyosha protection.

Toyama led a Spartan existence on meager means. He had no interest in the accumulation of wealth or possessions, and in stark contrast with the times, never adopted Western habits, dressing always in a plain kimono and wearing only straw sandals under his bare feet even when visiting the snow-covered northern provinces. He judged men not by appearances but by what they were made of, and he expected others to do the same of him.

Toyama lived until the ripe old age of ninety, dying peacefully in 1944, just as the Pacific War was entering its final year. Tempu remained close to Toyama right up to this end. It was Toyama who, in Nakamura's forties, bestowed upon him the name by which he was to become best known and to carry into posterity; "Tempu" translates literally as "heaven's wind" and was taken from two of the characters used to write *amatsukaze*, the name for one of the forms or *kata* practiced in *dzuihenryu-battojutsu*, a classical style of swordsmanship at which Nakamura was adept and which he would sometimes demonstrate at his summer camps. Toyama was to remark in his later years that he had lived to see many surprises but none so great as to see Nakamura become a teacher of men.

Initially, as his own house was small, Toyama sent young Saburo to board with a neighbor, but this arrangement was short-lived, lasting only until Saburo threw the neighbor's cat down a well. Toyama brought the boy back to live in his own household, and Toyama's wife, already looking after three children of their own, quickly took him under her wing.

Saburo was thirteen. He was placed in a middle school called the Shuyukan, one of only two middle schools in Fukuoka. Due in no small measure to the influence exerted by Toyama and the Genyosha, the Shuyukan was also among the more progressive educational institutions of its day. That it was disciplined like a military academy was hardly unusual; but the fact that most of the classes, other than those in the Japanese and Chinese classics, were taught in English was. And here, Nakamura's almost native English elocution ability, cultivated in the household of his father's advisor, out-shined that of most of his instructors.

Three years into his schooling at the Shuyukan, Saburo became the center of an incident of Fukuoka historical record. One early spring day, a regiment from an army garrison just down the road from the school was marching by when a shard of roofing tile came sailing over the high schoolyard wall and struck one of the soldiers. The students, engrossed in play in the sunlit yard, first failed to notice when a

brash young sergeant appeared at the gate. Livid with rage, the sergeant bellowed a demand into the schoolyard for the boy who had perpetrated this outrage to come forward.

Whatever had happened, in all probability, had not been done with mischievous intent; the wall blocked the view of the street outside and the children could not have heard the sound of the marching regiment over their own voices. The hard-packed dirt grounds were kept meticulously clean and a shard of tile would have been seen as a hazard; one of the boys would most likely have lobbed it over the wall just to get it out of the way. But whoever that boy was, he was not about to give himself up to this terrifying band of soldiers.

Saburo's homeroom teacher came running out to the gate, and after apologizing profusely to no avail, lead the young sergeant into the school building. The chief instructor and the school headmaster both joined, but the sergeant was unyielding. Ignoring the chair offered to him, he stood stiffly at attention and demanded that the school deliver up the young man who had committed this travesty against his Imperial Majesty's army. Short of this, no one was to leave the school grounds.

The situation was at an impossible impasse. The soldiers, who had taken up position at each of the school gates, would not leave, and whoever had thrown the tile was clearly too terrified to come forward. As day wore into evening and the scents from neighboring kitchens wafted into the schoolyard, the students began to feel faint from hunger. Unless someone owns up and takes the rap, Saburo thought to himself, none of us will go home. He marched into the room where the standoff between the sergeant and the headmaster and teachers was still underway and declared himself the culprit.

The situation, however, was not anywhere nearly as simple to resolve as he had imagined it. The siege continued while he was lead away to the garrison for questioning. Saburo had grossly overestimated his ability to play the part, for guilt and remorse, especially for a crime not committed, were not part of his repertoire. His interrogators saw immediately that things did not add up and intensified their questioning: Where did you find the tile? Where were you standing? In what direction did you throw it?

The inquisition was joined by a lieutenant. You are covering for your classmates, aren't you? he asked in a quiet voice. But having come this far, Saburo was not about to quit. It was me who threw that piece of tile, he said again.

Can you prove it?

No.

Well if you can't prove it then we can't charge you, the lieutenant said with a wry smile.

By now, Saburo was sufficiently incensed. If you need me to do something to make myself guilty, that is easily fixed. He reached for the ashtray on top of the desk and threw it at the lieutenant, covering his neatly pressed uniform with ashes.

Nakamura was summarily thrown in the brig, while the stand-off escalated from that between a sergeant and a schoolhouse to one between the army and the prefectural administration. The army has no right to interfere with the education of our youth, the officials maintained; but the army has every right to protect its honor and dignity the lieutenant retorted. In the end, behind-the-scene negotiations won the day and an accommodation was reached. The headmaster took the fall for the school and resigned, while the regiment commander was reassigned to another garrison far away from Fukuoka.

The students spent one night inside the schoolhouse and Saburo spent two nights in the brig before being released. The townspeople divided over whether Nakamura's conduct demonstrated guts or insolence, but either way, the name Nakamura Saburo gained notoriety.

That notoriety, however, was small in measure compared to the notoriety soon to follow.

The Genyosha supported a local judo training hall, or dojo, called the Meidokan. A Fukuoka institution, the Meidokan was a source of local color and legend. Unlike most dojos of the time, which operated under an elitist veil of secrecy and were extremely circumspect as to who they accepted into their fold, the Meidokan reflected the Genyosha's egalitarian ideals. Its doors were open to the community at large, and Saburo and his classmates went directly from school to the Meidokan to train every afternoon.

While the dojo had a chief instructor, Saburo and his friends received most of their instruction from their seniors; in this respect the Meidokan was not dissimilar from other dojos, where as part of their own training, the senior students sought to uphold the reputation of the dojo by seeing to it that the junior students received the full benefit everything they themselves had learned.

A note is in order with regard to the meaning of the term "judo." Modern judo is largely a product of the efforts of Kano Jigoro to keep the discipline of judo training alive within Japan's evolving educational system. Since Kano's time, it has gained the status of a sport and even become part of the Olympic Games. And like other sports, it operates according to rules enforced by referees and under the scrutiny of judges. Not to belittle modern judo, which has its own place and purpose, the judo of rural Japan in the late nineteenth century was an entirely different animal. The techniques came directly from the jujitsu fighting arts, and judo itself was meant to be effective. Judo training was intended to teach its practitioners how to defend themselves, and matches, therefore, were serious affairs; genuine tests of

strength and power, they were based on the principle of “let the better man win”. A match was considered over when one of the two contestants acknowledged defeat; otherwise, there were few rules.

Needless to say, at the Meidokan, Nakamura was in his element. Small in stature, Saburo was also agile and had a fighter’s intuition, and he was uninhibited by the larger size of most of his opponents. The senior students focused much of their attention on his training—which in the judo world means pulling out all the stops when they went to throw him—while his classmates held him in awe.

Following practice, students senior and junior would often sit around, talking women and politics, until evening. One afternoon, about a year after the schoolyard incident, the seniors proposed that a tournament be held between the middle school and a similar group at a dojo in neighboring Kumamoto Prefecture. Nakamura jumped at the opportunity; this was a chance not only to test themselves against practitioners of another style but also to travel. The arrangements were made, the date set, and the band of middle-schoolers set off for Kumamoto with Saburo as their captain.

The Meidokan team handily defeated the opposition and returned to the country inn where they were to spend the night. Nakamura took a bath, changed back into his school uniform, and was looking forward to an evening stroll through town following dinner, when a maid came up to the room to announce that someone was at the door wishing to see him. A puzzled Nakamura descended the stairs to find one of the boys from the defeated team standing in the entrance. Our captain, the boy said, wants to meet with you to talk about scheduling another match. Nakamura followed the boy out into the street. Dusk had fallen as they walked quickly through town, the boy saying not a word as they walked.

When they crossed a wooden bridge over the river marking the town limits, Nakamura began to sense that something was awry. Soon they were in open land obscured by tall reeds. The road widened slightly at one point, and here the boy stopped. The captain of the opposing team and his teammates appeared out of the shadows from all directions.

Before Nakamura could respond, the boys rushed him. He managed to throw the first to reach him but was quickly overwhelmed by the others; they brought him to the ground and proceeded to beat and kick him. A wooden clog came down sharply on his temple, knocking him senseless.

When Saburo came to, he was lying in a ditch, his hair matted with dried blood and his mouth filled with dirt. He had no sense of how long he had been out until a bugle from a nearby army post sounded morning taps.

The maids were already up and about when he returned to the inn. He aroused the others, washed off most of the blood and dirt, and devoured an early breakfast before setting out again. His teammates wanted to go with him but he insisted on going alone; don’t make a coward of me, he said.

One of the maids had recognized the boy at the door the previous evening and gave Nakamura directions to his house. Still early morning, the household was asleep when Saburo arrived. He threw open the front door and without bothering to remove his clogs, stepped up into the house and marched down the hallway, throwing open doors and waking the figures inside as he did so until he had found who he was looking for. He lifted the sleeping boy off the floor by the scruff of his neck and threw him into the hall; then he dragged him into the back yard and thrashed him until he had divulged the names and addresses of the other boys.

From there Nakamura went house to house, dealing with each of the perpetrators in turn. The fifth house was that of the team captain. Feeling by now adequately revenged, Saburo had already made up his mind that this would be his last stop; but first he would give the chief instigator of the night before his rightful due.

He entered the house as he had the others and discovered the team captain almost immediately. He was awake and sitting upright when Saburo entered the room. I have a score to settle with you, Saburo said; follow me into the yard.

Nakamura stepped back into the hallway, expecting his adversary to accept the challenge and to follow; instead the boy dashed into an adjacent room. Enraged by this open display of cowardice, Saburo pursued. The boys raced from room to room until they reached the kitchen. Here the boy turned around to face Nakamura holding a large kitchen knife.

Put that thing down and fight me fairly, Nakamura yelled. Instead, the boy lunged. Saburo's subsequent memory of this incident would remain forever blurred; he recalled averting the thrust but not what followed. What he did next remembered was that the boy had succumbed to the kitchen floor and was bleeding profusely from the gut.

Receiving hastily delivered instructions from the boy's mother, Saburo ran to fetch the police and a doctor. The doctor could do little; the boy had lost too much blood and expired within the hour. Nakamura was escorted by the police to the city jail.

As it was to turn out, Nakamura was released after only a brief investigation. Disputes leading to bloodshed were not uncommon in Kumamoto, a region that had seen more than its fair share of blood during the civil wars of only a little over ten years earlier, and moreover the local police could not help but take an interest in the story of how this young man had overcome an armed assailant with his bare hands. Furthermore, the dead boy's mother, who had observed the entire incident from start to finish, gave the police an accurate account of just what had occurred. Nakamura had acted in self-defense, it was ruled; he was free to go.

Back in Fukuoka, however, he was not to get off so easily. Saburo was expelled immediately from both the Shuyukan and the Meidokan. Cut off from his friends and the dojo, he began passing long, slow days napping and reading in his room.

Just about the time that he began to wonder if he could possibly stand another hour of this tedium, Saburo was called into Toyama's study. A month had passed since the Kumamoto incident. It was a warm spring evening.

Saburo entered the room to find Toyama, a mischievous grin on his face, seated across from another man. The visitor, dressed immaculately in *haori* and *hakama*, looked Saburo up and down through squinted eyes much the way that a horse buyer looks over a horse. Nakamura glared back.

He will do, the man said.

Saburo, irritated to find himself made the odd man out in this conversation, turned toward Toyama and asked him what it was that he wanted of him. Toyama was still sporting the same mischievous grin. How would you like to go where you can pick fights and not be punished? A place where you may even need to kill people? he asked.

At seventeen years of age, Saburo was being pushed from local notoriety out onto a larger stage. Several days later, following the man he had met in Toyama's study, Nakamura boarded a steamship in Shimonoseki bound for Tienjin, China. To outward appearances the two travelers appeared to be merchants; in fact, Saburo's new mentor, Kono Kinichi, was an intelligence officer traveling under orders from Imperial Army general headquarters in Tokyo to conduct military reconnaissance up the Liaotung Peninsula and along the Manchurian border with Korea.

The year was 1894, one year before the outbreak of the Sino-Japan War, and most of Japan's political and military leaders had already concluded that war with China was inevitable. The issue was Korea. The German military strategist Jacob Meckel, employed by the Japanese as an advisor, appropriately described the geography of Korea as a dagger pointed at Japan's heart. But what was of greater concern than the dagger was whose hand it was in. Toyama was not alone in recognizing that a strong and independent Korea was of highest priority to Japanese national interest; in fact however, the Korea of the day, under the sunset rule of an ineffective and despotic imperial dynasty, was on the brink of implosion due to popular revolt.

The Western powers, especially Russia, were watching the Korean situation like vultures, and the prospect of a Russian neighbor situated just across the Tsushima Straights was, to say the least, sobering. But first in line to fill the power-vacuum in Korea was China. Korea had operated as a tributary vassal to

China for centuries; China had every right, the Chinese asserted, to act as self-appointed protectors of the failing Korean regime.

The Chinese Chin dynasty, itself in its twilight years, had prolonged its own demise by making concessions to the Western powers, all of whom by now had well established enclaves and garrisons on Chinese soil. Something of a dinosaur in a modernizing world, what China under the Chin had going for it was size; its geography, population, and military might were too great for any one of the Western powers to take on alone—especially in as much as the Chin rulers had themselves made a good show of modernizing by dipping deeply into their diminished coffers and outfitting their navy with battleships and their army with guns and artillery.

Japan, by comparison, was a fledgling state of moderate means. In terms of military resources, they were a David to the Chinese Goliath. But what they did excel at was intelligence and strategic planning.

The mission to which Saburo unwittingly found himself party was an essential part of this intelligence. For the following months, through summer and autumn, up until the Manchurian autumn ran into winter, Saburo served as the lieutenant's attendant and bodyguard as, all the while in disguise, they surveyed the landscape and documented its contours, its accesses and exits, from the perspective of how these features lent themselves to troop movement.

And when war did break out in August of 1995, Japanese troop movement was quick and decisive. Nine months later, under the Treaty of Shimonoseki, Korea became a constitutional monarchy and Japan became its protector. The treaty also gave the Japanese control of the island of Formosa, today's Taiwan. This early first stage of Japanese imperial expansion established Japan in both Asian and Western eyes as a force with which to be reckoned.

Saburo came home with a new maturity, as well as a newfound sense of pride for having served, even if in ever so minor a role, the national cause. Returned to his native Tokyo, he was accepted, on the basis of both his national service and his father's reputation, into Gakushuin, a prestigious college attended almost exclusively by aristocratic youth. His parents' delight was short lived, however; for after only a few months a dispute with one of his teachers led to his summary expulsion. Instead he entered a technical school with military ties, this time completing the course of studies without further incident.

With the outbreak of the Sino-Japan War, this school put in place an accelerated Chinese language program; Nakamura, with his natural aptitude for learning second languages, had acquired conversational proficiency in Chinese during his time in Manchuria and these studies on top of that foundation helped to establish a competency that would be invaluable to him later.

Six years after the Sino-Japan War, Japan was preparing to take on an even more formidable enemy. Russia was brazenly expanding into East Asia. Having been granted, by China, the right to lay miles of track across the Mongolian steppes and northern Manchuria as the last leg of the Trans-Siberian Railway connecting Moscow with Vladivostok, they had then used this rail line to build up a daunting military presence. Russian rhetoric regarding the value of opening the region for trade, most of the world believed, was no more than a thin disguise for plans of annexation.

With ominous talk of war circulating on the street, Nakamura responded to a secretively delivered invitation to join the army's intelligence corps. He was told that he would first need to pass admissions before entering training, and on the appointed morning joined some thirty other applicants in the main classroom of a classified facility in Tokyo; like Nakamura, these men all had martial arts backgrounds and had been recommended to the corps by either officers or politicians close to the military.

The welcoming address was conducted by a man named Terauchi, the same Terauchi who would later serve as defense minister for an unprecedented nine years and then as prime minister for a short term. He opened with a brief acknowledgement of the willingness of the men in the room to serve their country but wasted no time on formalities: Less there be any misunderstanding, he said, if you are accepted into this school there will be no turning back. You will belong to us for the time it takes you to complete this course. Do not expect to be released for any excuse, even if it is your father's funeral. Furthermore, upon completion of this training, you will be immediately dispatched on assignment to Manchuria, from where the chances of your returning home alive are close to nil. If you think that you are signing up to become a hero, you are badly mistaken; we are offering you a one-way ticket to hell. Please think about it overnight, and if you still wish to join, come back in the morning.

This, in effect, was the entrance examination. When Nakamura came back the following morning he has joined by only a handful of the original applicants.

But if showing up was all that it took to be accepted, graduation was far more difficult. Nakamura's group was one of numerous similar handfuls of men that made up an entire class of about three thousand. Contrary to Terauchi's admonitions, the door was always open to anyone who decided they could not take any more—the philosophy being that a man who needed to be kept against his will would never hold up under fire in the field. And in fact the numbers soon began to dwindle. At the conclusion of training one year later, of the original three thousand entrants, only 113 remained.

As promised, these men shipped out following completion of their training. Saburo's mother was under no illusions with regard to the nature of her son's mission or the likelihood that he would ever

return, but while not from a bushi family herself, she nevertheless saw him off with all the resolve of a bushi woman.

His parents also first saw to it that he was properly married, as was befitting of a young man going overseas. A match was made with a nineteen year old lady from Fukuoka named Yoshi and the ceremony hastily executed. Yoshi would act as the ship's keel in the Nakamura household, keeping it upright during all the storms that were to follow. Their marriage bore them a daughter and endured until Tempu's death sixty-five years later.

Nakamura was assigned to the Japanese legation in Peking in January of 1903, just one year before the outbreak of the Russo-Japan War.

Now a largely forgotten footnote to history, if only because it was followed by such greater horrors, the Russo-Japan War of 1904~1905 was the first major contest between nations of the twentieth century and a proving ground for many of the weapons and tactics of modern warfare. The use of heavy artillery and armored battleships, and the practice of trench warfare—all features of the First World War—were first used in the Russian-Japanese encounter.

It was also the most closely watched and accurately reported war up until its time. As well as Japan and Russia, the English, the Germans, the Italians, and the Americans all had their own interests in China as represented and managed by their own legations and expatriate communities. The nature of the rivalry between the Western powers was such that Russia garnered little sympathy for its ambitions in Manchuria, but it also elicited no opposition; the other nations maintained neutrality on the question of the conflict. At the same time, the British especially were clandestinely delighted to see someone else step in to check the Russian expansion at no expense to themselves.

Furthermore the spectacle of this upstart Asian power taking on the Russian empire captured international public interest. Thus the war was scrutinized by foreign observers for both news value and military intelligence. Regardless of this scrutiny, however, most of the mistakes committed on either side were quickly forgotten, only to be repeated almost to the letter ten years later on European soil during World War I.

Russian incursion into Manchuria had begun following the Sino-Japan War. As one of the spoils of this earlier conflict, the Japanese had gained a militarily and commercially strategic foothold on the Kwantung Peninsula, the jewel of which was Ryojun (Port Arthur), an ice-free natural harbor that was close to ideal for naval operations. But within less than two years, a Western coalition led by the Russians sued the Japanese under threat of force to return this territory to China, and feigning magnanimity, the

Emperor Meiji in fact had little choice but to acquiesce. Then, while the bitterness of this pill was still recent memory, the Russians sailed their own navy into Ryojun and took up harbor.

From the town of Harbin, the Russians had built a spur of the China Eastern Railway that extended due south through central Manchuria down the Liaotung and Kwantung Peninsulas to Ryojun. They posted army garrisons along the length of the railway and a command headquarters in Mukden. Finally, when peasant revolt threatened the railway, they used this as an excuse to effectively put Manchuria under martial law.

The issue at stake for Japan was, just as it had been in the Sino-Japan War, the Korean question and national security. The Trans-Siberian Railway, its northern line cutting straight across Northern Manchuria to Vladivostok and its southern spur extending to Ryojun, effectively held the Korean Peninsula in its grip like a walnut in a nutcracker. While the Russians promoted the railway as an economic improvement that would benefit both Russia and the Manchurian people, all observers agreed that the expense of the project far exceeded any possible economic benefits, and furthermore, the immediate use to which the railway was put was the transport of troops and military equipment. The contention that Russia had designs for the Korean Peninsula was even given explicit credence by statements made in Moscow. And this was unacceptable to Japan.

The disparity between the two sides had persuaded the Russians that war was unlikely. At the time, Russia commanded the largest standing army in the world and its navy likewise dwarfed that of Japan. In no one's eyes—neither the Russians nor the Japanese, nor the English or Germans—was the match even remotely equitable. Three decades later, Japan's army would blunder into war under delusions of invincibility, but such was not the state of affairs in the military at the beginning of the century; it was, rather, a diligent and informed student of Western military science.

On the other hand, the threat that the Russian menace posed to Japanese national security was so genuine that the Japanese military could not, in good conscience to their Emperor and their people, stand by and do nothing.

Against this backdrop, Nakamura and two subordinates, Hashitsune Wataru and Kondo Nobutaka, assigned to him in Peking, headed northeast from Peking in early March by train. Hashitsune was especially valuable to the group, as he had been born and spent part of his childhood in Manchuria and consequently was familiar with its dialects and customs.

The party entered Manchuria on the North China Railway disguised as common laborers and smuggled in with other laborers between cargo on open, flat-bed rail cars; each of the three men traveled on a separate freight car so as not to draw suspicion. The train took them to the head of its line, the town

of Hsinmint'un, which was also a Russian army supply depot. Here they spent ten days surveying Russian installations, depositing their reports at prearranged drop-offs from where they were relayed back to Peking. Then they set out for Mukden.

Mukden (modern Shenyang) was located some fifty kilometers due East from Hsinmint'un. And while the Chinese railway did connect, if circuitously, with the Russian-laid Eastern China Railway, traffic along that route was almost exclusively military in nature; consequently the party travelled overland. After securing horses in a village outside of Hsinmint'un, they set off on horseback across the frozen, snow-covered Manchurian countryside.

Rural Manchuria was far too remote for the central Chinese administration to rule effectively, and as a result, de-facto governance occurred at the hands of a complex collage of warlords and local power brokers, sometimes with overlapping domains. Bandits operated along the byways with relative impunity. Almost predictably, the party's first hostile encounter was not with Russian soldiers but with bandits.

The bandits were also on horseback and three in number. They appeared out of nowhere as the party passed through an aspen grove. Recognizing immediately that it was futile to try to out-ride their opponents, Nakamura commanded his men to dismount. The bandits likewise dismounted and took up position directly in front of them.

They were dressed in typical Manchurian scarlet colored gowns. The largest of the three stepped forward. In his hand he held a broadsword, and this he began swinging around his head at arm's length until he had assumed the appearance of a human windmill, the whistle of his sword cutting the stillness.

This is a job for Kondo, Hashitsune said from behind. Nakamura nodded and stepped aside. Kondo was a swordsman of no small accomplishment; he carried the highest rank then awarded in *jikishinkage-ryu* sword arts and was recognized nationally within Japanese kendo circles. During moments of down-time during their travels, Kondo would armed the other men with sticks and insist that they spar with him; both men were nursing welts and bruises to show for this practice.

The carrying sticks, typical of Chinese laborers, on which, slung over their shoulders, the men carried their belongings, had each been fitted to sheath a Japanese short sword; these were the only weapons that they carried.

As Kondo unsheathed his blade and stepped forward, the disparity between the two opponents became painfully apparent. Not only was the bandit a head taller and broader at the shoulders than Kondo, but the sword he brandished dwarfed the Japanese blade in Kondo's hands.

Kondo assumed a *seigan* stance. The bandit began to close the distance between them, one step at a time.

But something, Nakamura noticed, was not quite right. He had seen Kondo stand in *seigan* any number of times before, but his stance today was oddly unbalanced. Kondo, he realized, was frozen with fear.

No good, Nakamura said. He drew his own sword and stepped forward. The bandit, broadsword still circling, adjusted his stance away from Kondo and toward Nakamura. Now the point man, Nakamura sympathized with Kondo, still paralyzed by terror; despite the cold, beads of sweat formed on his brow.

But the tempo of his opponents circling sword, Nakamura realized, had slowed slightly. As large as the man was, he was beginning to tire.

Then something quite extraordinary happened. Despite the urgency of the situation, Nakamura's mind called up a memory from another time and place; for a split second he saw the face and heard the voice of an old man who had been part of his early childhood. The man was a distant relative, and Saburo's mother, in deference to family ties, would visit him from time to time to prepare a meal. Four year old Saburo would be taken along.

A veteran of the civil wars, the man had seen hand-to-hand combat in some of the bloodiest campaigns of this chapter of history, and nothing pleased him more in his old age than to be provided with a captive audience to whom he could recount his exploits. That captive audience, while his mother was busy in the kitchen, was Saburo.

The man would insist that Saburo sit beside him under his arm while he sipped his sake and held forth. The stories were always the same and were told in a predictable order—at the end of which the man would swell up with pride and say, I wasn't the most skilled man in the field. But what I lacked in skill, I made up for with guts!

Young Saburo cared little about either skill or guts but was always happy to hear these words because he knew they meant that the old man would soon finish his meal and retire, and not until then would Saburo himself be fed.

Over twenty years had passed since Saburo had last visited the old man and these memories had not once occurred to him during the years in between. Now facing an enemy in armed combat himself for the first time, the old man's face appeared in front of his eyes almost as if it was real, and he heard the man's voice say again, Not skill but guts!

Nakamura's demeanor changed. From *seigan* he raised his sword to *jodan*. With an ear-splitting yell, or *kiai*, he entered directly into his opponent between revolutions of the broad-sword and cut straight down on his opponent's head.

Much later, Nakamura Tempu would tell this story to illustrate the power of memory and the subconscious mind. In the immediate aftermath of the incident, however, the realization that he was still standing and that his opponent lay toppled over at his feet took a moment to register. Meanwhile, the other two bandits jumped back on their horses and fled; to witness the blood of a comrade, according to local superstition, was an especially bad omen.

Saburo thought to clean the blood off of his blade but found that his hands remained closed around the sword's handle and would not respond. Hashitsune stepped in and helped pry his fingers loose, one by one. Then together they coaxed Kondo, still standing like a stone statue, back to the world of the living. Not to worry, said Hashitsune, who had seen action before during a previous assignment. It happens to everybody the first time.

From Mukden, the party traveled again by rail to the north-central city of Harbin. Once a simple country village, Harbin had been made over by the Russians into one of the largest and most vibrant cities in Manchuria. Harbin's Russian legacy is evident in the architecture of the older buildings still standing in the city today.

Harbin owed its newfound status entirely to the railroad. It had figured prominently in the construction of the east-bound line to Vladivostok, and now it also stood at the head of the southern spur bound for Mukden, Dairen, and Ryojun. The work that the railroad provided attracted all manner of laborers, merchants, and entrepreneurs to Harbin. Among its population were to be found not only Russians and Manchurians but also Cossacks, Mongolians, Koreans, and Han Chinese. There was even a Japanese community of about three hundred; however Nakamura and his party were under strict orders to avoid contact with the Japanese in residence so as not to put them unnecessarily at risk.

If the variety of the city's milieu made it an easy place to hide, it also made it a treacherous place to operate; this because so many interests were operating on the same turf that it was almost impossible to know who to trust. Even though Manchuria was the Chin ancestral homeland, the police in Harbin kowtowed first to the Russian army and second to the political administrators—while the law of the street was often administered by gang-leaders representing local warlords. Information was a valuable commodity often sold to the highest bidder, and the Russians were known to pay handsomely for information on informants and spies.

Japan severed diplomatic ties with Russia in February of 1904, by which time Nakamura's party had been in Manchuria for a year and had become thoroughly familiar with both the lay of the land and the habits and movements of the Russian army. Nakamura had even picked up a smattering of Russian. Nevertheless, with Japan and Russia now declared enemies, the support network for their espionage activities was greatly reduced. Nakamura, Hashitsune, and Kondo would separate for weeks at a time, only to meet for a few brief moments in the slums behind the Harbin railway station to exchange information before heading out once again.

With the fate of the Japanese nation at stake, a higher sense of mission escalated among the entire Japanese community in China. Dangerous circumstances sometimes call for bold actions, and the annals of the period are filled with acts of heroism by not only the likes of Nakamura Saburo and his cohorts, for whom espionage was a chosen vocation, but also merchants and entrepreneurs—ordinary Japanese citizens for whom residence on the continent was a means to their livelihoods.

Not to be outdone, one February evening Nakamura stole into the Second Siberian Army general headquarters in Harbin. The army offices were housed in an imposing, two-story edifice in the busiest part of the city, next to the railway station, but with the lack of caution that Saburo had observed to be typical of the Russians, it was lightly guarded. Under cover of darkness, he climbed to the second story and picked the lock on one of the windows.

The art of lock picking had been part of his espionage training in Tokyo, and among lock pickers, Nakamura was especially talented. It was also a skill that he never lost; late in life he used to boast that the lock he could not pick had yet to be invented and would delight Tempukai summer camp participants with his demonstrations.

Thus, once inside the building he was also able to open locked doors and make his way from room to room with relative ease. Noises from below told him that the first floor was occupied, but the second floor, given to offices, was vacant. Nakamura had done his homework and knew where he was going: Days before, he had befriended a Chinese craftsman hired by the Russians to repair some of their office furniture, and from what this man had told him he had pieced together a floor plan. True to expectations, one of the doors off of the main hallway opened, after he had picked the lock, into a conference room.

The room was as the craftsman had described it. In the center of the room was a large, round table surrounded by about thirty chairs. Most importantly, it was covered with a tablecloth that hung down on all sides to less than an inch from the floor. Nakamura slid under the table and went to sleep.

Two years earlier, near the end of the training program in Tokyo and as part of what could be called final examinations, one of his instructors handed Nakamura a hand towel one day and pointed to a

barracks. Go hide in the ceiling and don't come down for a week, he had said. You are not to be discovered, and you are to give us a full report on everything that goes on and all that is said in the room below after you come down.

Period Japanese ceilings were made of pine boards not designed to bear weight, so Saburo spread his weight as evenly as possible. The slightest movement would cause the boards to creak.

The purpose of the hand towel soon became clear. Let alone any kind of food rations, Nakamura was not carrying a canteen of any kind. His sole source of liquid during this period was his own urine; he would urinate into the towel and then squeeze its contents into his mouth.

Saburo distinguished himself by successfully passing this test, one of only two or three members of his class to do so. Compared to that ordeal, then, his current place of hiding was relatively comfortable.

In the morning, someone came in to stoke the smoldering fire in the heating oven. Then, sharply at ten o'clock, a group of officers stomped into the room and seated themselves around the table. Nakamura, of course, could see only the toes of their boots pushing under the tablecloth, but he was able to recognize several of the men from their voices.

The meeting lasted for two hours, after which the men left and the room became quiet again. In the afternoon they returned, and they returned again the following morning. Under darkness of the third night, Nakamura slipped back out through the window, locking it again behind him, and climbed back down to the street.

The Russians never learned of this invasion of the inner sanctum of their command. While Nakamura's understanding of Russian was not sufficient for him to garner much of strategic value from the officers' dialogue, it gave him great personal satisfaction and boosted the morale of his comrades. Furthermore, the story of this exploit became a source of inspiration within the intelligence community.

The break-in escapade only days behind him, Nakamura, together with his two companions, embarked on reconnaissance disguised as a party of soybean merchants on a buying mission to a village one hundred kilometers west of Harbin. They travelled on horseback, following a set of carriage tracks laid by previous travelers over terrain that in summer was gently rolling grassland but in winter was a glistening white expanse stretching to the horizon.

The pathway was the closest thing to an actual road; so when a carriage followed by two men on horses, local farmers by all appearances, approached them from the distance along the same pathway, the band saw nothing unusual. Nakamura and his men steered their horses off of the path to let the carriage

pass. But when it drew along side of them, the driver reined in his horses, the carriage doors flew open, and the men found themselves half surrounded by five bandits bearing sickles and broadswords.

Unlike the incident of a year ago, the Japanese were outnumbered; Nakamura assessed the situation and determined that this was no time for fool-hearted bravery. Break for it, he yelled. The three men swung their horses away from the path and spurred them into directions that angled away from each other, the intention being to disperse; with only two horses at their disposal the bandits could not possibly pursue all three of them.

At this moment however a voice reached them from inside the carriage. Wait! Japanese?! The words were spoken in their native language by a female voice. Curiosity superseding caution, Nakamura reined in his horse and turned to face the carriage.

The woman, they were to learn, was named Oharu. She was one of two renowned Japanese women commanding bandit militias in Manchuria; these women were not related nor even associated in any way and they operated in distantly separate territories, yet they had each become living legends among the local populace. Through quirks of fortune, each of these women had married a village leader and then succeeded her husband to power upon his untimely death.

Leadership in the villages was decided not by simple inheritance but rather by council of the village elders, so presumably Oharu had already amply demonstrated her competence prior to her husband's demise. She commanded a force of about two hundred men.

The word bandit denotes lawlessness; but in fact, in the absence of any strong central authority, these bandit militias constituted the law of the land. During the growing season the men were ordinary farmers; during the winter months, however, they scoured the countryside—and especially the carriage paths that served as highways—for supplemental income. Occasionally one of these groups would clash with another when the fringes of their respective territories overlapped; but in general, honor among thieves made for peaceful coexistence. When a leader of sufficient charisma and ability came to the fore, a number of village groups might unite under the one warlord, and part of the Japanese party's mission was not only to observe the movements of the Russians but also to gain intelligence concerning these local militias. During the hostilities that were to commence to the south in the following days, the Japanese would recruit—for just reward of course—some of the most powerful of these militias to the cause of expelling the Russians from Manchurian territory.

Thus Nakamura and his comrades were delighted on several levels when Oharu, herself quite overcome by the serendipity of meeting fellow countrymen in this most unlikely of places, invited them

back to her village. The men were provided with a house to use as they wished, and impressed upon that they were honored guests and welcome to stay for as long as they desired.

Little is known about Oharu's background, and she remained quiet on the subject in the presence of her guests. Nakamura guessed her to be several years older than his own twenty-seven years. She was also, according to him, quite attractive. Ooi Mitsuru reports that Tempu-sensei was decidedly circumspect when the subject of Oharu came up, and he speculates that the nature of the relationship between them became romantic over the next several days.

One evening, as the men were returning to their house after a day in the surrounding countryside, they were met by a wizened old guard with a toothless smile. I have brought you a gift, he said. From the back of two horses he hoisted down two sacks; the sacks were obviously heavy and by the movement that they displayed the men could see that their content was animate. Please enjoy yourselves this evening, the old man said with the same toothless smile. The men carted the sacks inside and opened them to find that they each contained a young girl.

One of the girls appeared to be in her teens; the other was perhaps several years older. From the way that they were dressed and the way that they interacted, the men also discerned that the younger girl was probably from a reasonably well-to-do household and the older girl a servant. The girls sat in a corner of the room huddled together on top of the sacks they had come in, hugging their knees and trembling with fear. The men tried to discover who they were and where they had come from; but they were too terrified to speak.

The girls had obviously been brought back as part of the spoils from a recent raid. We've got to get them home, Nakamura said. The day was late, so the men fed them and allowed them to sleep.

In the morning, they called the wizened guard. He listened incredulously as the men explained what they wanted to do. But the women, he admitted, now belonged to them; they were free to do with them as they wished. His demeanor changed when Nakamura pressed a reasonable sum of coins into his hands. Overcome by this unexpected generosity, he bowed low and vowed to do anything in his power to repay Nakamura's kindness.

In that case, Nakamura said, you can lead us to where you found these young ladies. But that alone, the man said, he could not do; the villagers would recognize him from the day before and quickly put him to death. However the carriage driver knows the way. I will have him take you there, he said.

Nakamura mounted the carriage beside the driver, while Hashitsune, Kondo, and the two girls piled inside. They traveled for close to four hours before coming to a temple to Guan Yu, patron god of military

prowess, on the outskirts of a village; evidently the girls had been making an offering at the temple when they were captured.

Nakamura asked the girls if they could find their way home from here; they nodded affirmatively, eyes filled with tears. But when the men encouraged them to leave they would not move.

First tell us your name, the younger girl said to Nakamura. Reasoning that a Japanese name would mean nothing to her, Nakamura explained that they were Japanese, that the Japanese and the Russians were about to go to war in their land, but that the Japanese had no quarrel and meant no harm to her people. The girl was not satisfied. If you can't tell me your name, then give me something to remember you by.

This was a difficult request. Nakamura felt his pockets but came up with nothing; his principle belongings were all back in the house in the village. Thinking for a moment he reached into his shirt and pulled out a sheathed dagger. Take this, he said.

Nakamura's companions protested, as they were sparsely armed as it was, but he assured them that his short-sword, back at the house, was all that he needed. The girl thanked him and clutched the dagger to her breast. Even so she refused to leave. The men turned the carriage around and set off for home; looking back from time to time over his shoulder, Nakamura could see that the girls were still standing with their eyes fixed on the carriage until it disappeared from view.

War was declared on February 11th. Hostilities began on the high seas, followed by a fierce but indecisive naval attack on Ryojun; the first Japanese infantry divisions would not enter Manchuria until early May after first defeating superior Russian forces at the Yalu River separating Manchuria from Korea.

At first, life in Harbin, far removed as it was from the Russian lines of defense, seemed little affected by the war. But if Nakamura's party was removed from the main theater of the war, they were also now operating deep behind enemy lines; furthermore, the opening of hostilities only increased the urgency, let alone the danger, of their operations.

The East China Railway was the life-line of the Russian army, and with so much riding on this thin ribbon of rail, the Russians tightened security. The problem was the sheer length of track that needed to be protected; no army could possibly guard the entire railway all of the time.

Nakamura and his party had discovered that the first station to the east of Harbin, at a distance of about thirty kilometers, afforded them an excellent observation point. The station existed not because it served a sizable population center but because it controlled a siding that allowed trains from opposite directions to pass each other, and it occurred in a small village that had been largely confiscated by the

Cossack soldiers assigned to guarding the stretch of track in either direction. The decision to put in a station at this particular location when there were a number of larger cities and towns in this same fertile farming region where the railway did not stop was further evidence that local demand did not enter into Russian planning.

A small hill with a wooded summit overlooked the station, and the Japanese spies spent long hours in the winter air taking inventories of rolling stock and its cargo through binoculars. As the surrounding farms and their households went largely into hibernation during the winter, the party was able to go about their business undisturbed.

One mid-February afternoon, Nakamura and Hashitsune were making their way up this hill when they came upon three bodies in the snow. They were women, and from their clothing the men recognized them immediately to be Japanese.

The Japanese population of Harbin was predominantly male, made up as it was of merchants, traders, entrepreneurs, and criminals on the run from Japanese law. But there were also prostitutes. Houses of prostitution were ubiquitous to Japanese settlements in not only Manchuria but also China and Southeast Asia, and the women in these establishments, like many of the victims of the same sort of sex trade that occurs in many underdeveloped countries today, were predominantly daughters of starving farming families sold into servitude to put food on the table for the rest of their households. Enslaved to underworld bosses, thousands of these uneducated and hapless women ended up in the entertainment districts of Japan's urban centers, but thousands more were shipped directly overseas.

Nakamura and his party had faithfully observed the ban on contact with the Japanese community, but they could not help noting that since the beginning of the year most of this community had chosen to pack up and leave while leaving was still an option. On the other hand, many of the women—investments that, in the eyes of their masters, had already paid for themselves and that would otherwise make for excess baggage on the way home—were left behind.

The women in the snow were obviously part of this forsaken lot; furthermore the story of their gruesome demise was painted in broad strokes by the scene at hand. The snow had been trampled by Cossack army boots, and empty vodka bottles lay strewn around the remains of a campfire. The first woman had been disemboweled; the second had a long, straight Cossack sword still sticking straight up through her crotch; the third, stripped naked from the waist, had been buried head first in the snow, her flailing legs evidently having served to entertain the soldiers while they drank.

Nakamura and Hashitsune borrowed some farm implements to serve as shovels from a farmhouse at the bottom of the hill and dug a single grave in the snow for the three bodies—the most they could do as the ground was rock hard. They placed a stone on top of the mound and bowed.

By now it was dusk. They returned the borrowed tools and mounted their horses. Nakamura was still carrying the Cossack sword that he had retrieved from the one woman's body.

The men were under strict orders to avoid all unnecessary confrontations with the enemy. But in this instance, Nakamura's indignity and outrage over this unwarranted act of cruelty exceeded even fidelity to his mission; he wanted revenge.

They rode to the outskirts of the village behind the station and found an empty shed large enough to accommodate both riders and horses until the night had become completely still. Then they remounted and rode into the village.

One of the houses caught Nakamura's eye. The two riders dismounted and circled to the rear; sure enough, outside of the stable a Cossack saddle had been left carelessly propped against the door. After tethering the horses to a sapling, they made their way to the back door of the house. It was unlocked and slid open easily.

Inside the house, the darkness was even thicker than out. Gingerly placing one foot in front of the other, hands extended in front of them to feel for obstacles, the men made their way until, rounding a corner, they could see at the end of a short hallway a doorway outlined by the flickering light from a lamp on the other side. Nakamura gently tried the door but it was latched. He put his shoulder to it and shoved; the door came crashing down on the first try.

The room, lit by a single lamp, had two beds, the occupants of which were most probably still under the affect of liquor evidenced by empty bottles on the floor. Startled by the crash, one of the men rolled over and looked up with eyes like saucers. Nakamura raised the Cossack sword and without hesitation plunged it through the man's heart.

The second man now sat bolt upright in his bed. Hashitsune, with a single stroke, cut clean across the man's throat with his short sword; the blood from his jugular spurted across the room to where Nakamura was standing.

Mission completed, Nakamura and Hashitsune began their retreat. Before they reached the back door, however, they could tell from noises in the street that their presence had been detected.

Following agreed procedure when they reached the street, the men pointed their horses in directions opposite from each other—Hashitsune facing back the way they had come and Nakamura toward the

other side of the town. As they spurred the horses Nakamura yelled over his shoulder, I'll see you tomorrow back in Harbin.

But the street in front of Nakamura suddenly closed in from both sides; he was riding into a semicircle of men armed with rifles. A single shot rang out and Nakamura's horse went down, throwing him hard against the ground. He staggered to his feet.

The horse likewise righted himself. Perhaps he has enough left in him to get me out of here, Nakamura thought. But as he attempted to remount, he was pulled off by a mesh of strings pulling at him from all sides; the Cossacks had thrown a large net, the kind the locals used to fish the river with during the summer, over his head.

The Cossacks closed in on Nakamura, now hopelessly entangled and thrashing on the ground. They bound the waded net, contents and all, with a rope that cut into his arms and legs. One of the soldiers then tied the rope to his pony's saddle. All the while whooping and cheered on by his comrades, the Cossack jumped on his horse and spurred him into a gallop with the bundle bouncing along behind him. At the end of the street, the horseman turned and, still whooping, galloped back to the point from which he had begun. Nakamura was vaguely conscious of being lifted up and thrown into the back of a wagon; after that, the world went dark.

When consciousness returned, the first thing Nakamura was aware of was the cold. He was lying on a dirt floor inside of some kind of building, but the darkness was so complete that he could not see his hand in front of his face. Groping across the floor on all fours, he came upon a stack of coarse straw matting of the kind used to transport cargo; inserting himself in between the layers of matting, he fell promptly asleep.

Saburo slept soundly for what felt like an eternity. When he awoke, he was being pulled out from between the matting by Cossack guards. The guards placed him on his feet and led him out into the daylight.

His prison, he could see, was one among a row of storehouses; the smell he had been aware of inside came from large barrels of fermenting miso, the fermented soybean paste that is a staple of the northern Chinese, Korean, and Japanese diets. The captain of the Russian regiment had chosen this place because the merchant who owned the miso plant also owned the best house in town, a house the captain felt entitled to "borrow" as his residence and office. The storehouses made convenient stockades and were frequently used to incarcerate Cossacks when they got out of line; as well as women and liquor, the Cossacks had a penchant for picking fights.

Nakamura was taken to a room in one of the houses and seated in a chair for questioning. The army considered their prize important enough to have even procured a Japanese-speaking interpreter.

Nakamura's inquisition was to continue for close to a month, and the short, morning walk from the storehouse to this room, as well as the evening walk back, was to become routine. The Russians were determined to find out who was this stray Japanese and what had he been up to, and Nakamura was equally determined to give up nothing. The sessions would begin early and go late, the inquisitors working in shifts. Their plan was to wear their captive down, and at this they succeeded. Every time that the faces of his tormentors began to blur in front of his eyes and his head drop, the guard standing beside him would slap him sharply on the side of the face, forcing him back to attention.

But Nakamura refused to say a word. Whether or not he gave them information was, he knew, immaterial to his own future; either way he was going to be executed. His priorities were, first, the integrity of the Japanese intelligence network and, second, the security of his comrades still in the field.

His nights were passed in darkness among the musty odors of fermenting miso. In the morning and evening, his captors fed him a couple of pieces of *mantou*, the steamed bread that was a staple of the local population, made from sorghum and wheat flour.

One evening, not long after he had retired, the storehouse door slid partially open and a hushed voice called into the darkness in Chinese. Japanese man, are you in there?

Nakamura revealed himself, whereupon the man quickly explained that he had been sent by the owner of the miso establishment. Nakamura followed him out from between the rows of storehouses to a small dwelling. Here he was ushered into a carpeted and furnished room kept delightfully warm by a well-stoked heating oven; it was the warmest Nakamura had been in months, let alone the two weeks of his captivity. Wait here the man said. Nakamura settled into a large, cushioned chair of the Chinese variety with a deep, wide seat and a straight back.

Minutes later an elderly Manchurian, well dressed, entered from an adjoining room and bowed. He was the owner of the miso enterprise, he explained. He had learned that the Russians were holding a Japanese man and had wanted to meet him because his granddaughter had recently been rescued from bandits by a party of Japanese men. For this he felt deeply ingratiated to the Japanese and wished to help.

At this moment, the door from the adjoining room opened again and a young girl stuck her head in. She looked up at Nakamura and gasped; then she ran to him and threw her arms around his waist, all the while sobbing uncontrollably. Grandfather, she said. This is him. This is the man who saved me.

So much had happened during the last month that Nakamura had forgotten all about the two girls that he and his men had returned from Oharu's village, but looking down now into the young girl's face, it all

came back to him. It's you! he said in amazement. Come to think of it, the distance they had traveled and the direction in which they had traveled to return the girls would have indeed put them in the vicinity of the village behind the train station, the village where Saburo had been captured two weeks earlier.

The old man promptly prostrated himself before Nakamura. I can never repay you for the kindness shown my granddaughter, he said. But anything in my power to do for you now I will gladly undertake. The soldiers are currently drunk and enjoying themselves; you must flee from here immediately. We will provide you with a horse. Please hurry; you do not have much time.

Nakamura did not move. What would become of these good people when the Russians discovered that they had been accomplices to their prisoner's escape?

Sensing what Nakamura was thinking, the old man sought to reassure him. Don't worry about us, he said. We know how to take care of ourselves.

But the opportunity had in fact already passed; for the sound of soldiers reached them from the street. Quick, Nakamura said. Back inside and lock the door.

The man and his granddaughter disappeared into the main part of the house without time to say goodbye. When moments later a soldier entered from the street, he found Nakamura seated comfortably in the chair with his hands to the oven and a look on his face that said, Just trying to get warm.

Following this incident, security around Nakamura's captivity was escalated. He was moved to another storehouse with a heavier door and kept permanently under guard; furthermore, his right leg was shackled and tethered with an iron ball and chain.

The Manchurian guard assigned to Nakamura had been chosen for this post because he spoke some Japanese, having worked as a young man for several years on the docks in Yokohama. The Russians evidently hoped that Nakamura might divulge something in casual conversation that he would not divulge under interrogation. Nakamura, on the other hand, was happy to have someone to talk to and developed a friendly relationship with his guard over the next couple of weeks.

One evening after Nakamura was returned to his storehouse cell as usual after a long day of interrogation, and after he had washed down the evening ration of mantou with the warm water provided him for this purpose, the guard approached him with a concerned look on his face. Was there anything that the prisoner wanted, he asked Nakamura. The question struck Nakamura as odd, given his circumstances, but when Saburo assured him that he was well fed and reasonably comfortable, the guard insisted. No need to hold back, he said. Just tell me what you want.

Sensing that something was wrong, Nakamura pressed the guard for an explanation. With ample coaxing, the guard finally confessed. Don't be surprised, he said. You are to be executed in the morning.

If the guard was expecting some display of emotion from his charge he was disappointed. Nakamura had been resigned to the ultimate outcome of his captivity from the day it began. Any day now, he had been thinking; so when he received this news from the guard he accepted it with a nod. Is that so? he responded.

Now it was the guard who expressed surprise. Is that so?? I'm telling you that you have less than twenty-four hours to live, and all you have to say is, Is that so?

Everyone has to die sometime; just happens that my day is tomorrow, Nakamura explained. But if you really want to do something for me then let me go to sleep. I have a big day tomorrow and want to be sure that I am well rested.

The guard was incredulous. His Japanese prisoner was telling him that he wished to spend the greater part of his last few remaining hours asleep. Before he allowed Nakamura to retire, however, he extracted from him a promise that Saburo would name him inheritor of his few possessions; these consisted of no more than the clothes on his back, but Saburo was wearing a leather vest that was beyond the guard's humble means. The guard had obviously had his eye on this vest for some time.

This agreed, Nakamura turned in and slept soundly. He was awoken as usual at five in the morning; only this time three Cossack guards stood outside the door. Nakamura had been sentenced to execution and his execution was to take place today they informed him by way of the interpreter. But before that, he was told, he was invited to share breakfast with their captain.

Nakamura was familiar with the captain, as he had appeared several times during the interrogation. He was a tall, handsome Russian, roughly the same age or perhaps slightly younger than Saburo.

At the captain's residence, Nakamura, still wearing his ball and chain, was seated across from the captain at a table liberally laden with sumptuous Russian fare. The Cossack guards stood behind him at attention and the interpreter at his side, while Nakamura helped himself freely.

Was there any message that Nakamura wished to send home, the Captain asked. They could arrange to do so through the Red Cross.

There was not.

The captain was acting under orders, he explained. He bore no grudge against Nakamura and would carry out these orders with a heavy heart.

Are you saddened to know that your life is coming to its end?

But Nakamura was not in the least bit sad. He had fulfilled his mission and would be dying a noble death for the national cause.

What of your mother, the captain asked. Won't she be sad?

Of course she will be sad. But she will also be proud, Nakamura explained. Nakamura's mother had seen him off with the strict instruction that he was to fulfill his duty to the nation at any cost, and Nakamura knew that he had lived up to his mother's wishes. The one regret, one that he did not express to the captain, was that his mother would never have the satisfaction of knowing he had upheld his honor and dignity right to the end.

The captain shook his head in disbelief. I will never understand you Japanese, he said. Producing a handkerchief and a fountain pen, he asked Nakamura to sign it. Nakamura wrote his name in capital Roman letters. In Japanese too, the captain requested. Nakamura complied, writing his name in clear, bold strokes.

What became of the handkerchief, Nakamura never learned. The following day, however, he would reflect upon the supreme irony of this scene and the entire exchange; for although Saburo had no inkling at the time, as it was to turn out, this meal was to be not his but the captain's last.

Nakamura was unshackled, then mounted on horseback with his hands tied and led out of the village into the frozen countryside. After only a short journey the procession came to a spot where the Russian troops had built a cricket field which they used during the summer. In the middle of the field, a single birch pole had been planted in the snow and frozen in place. The soldiers lifted Nakamura off of his pony, untied him, and led him to the pole; here his hands were again tied, this time behind him around the pole. In front of him at a distance of about ten meters stood the captain, the interpreter, and three Cossack guards.

The captain stepped forward and read the charges and sentence, with the interpreter faithfully interpreting word for word. Upon finishing, the captain asked, Do you have anything to say?

Nakamura remained silent and shook his head.

Whereupon one of the Cossack guards stepped forward with a piece of white cloth. What are you doing? Nakamura objected.

The interpreter came forward. This was a favor granted by the captain. The soldier would blindfold him so that he would not see when the command to fire was given.

But Nakamura would have no part of it. I want to see with my own eyes exactly where the bullets hit, he said.

The Cossacks took up their positions. One lay prone with head and rifle raised on his elbows; the second kneeled, his left elbow resting on his advanced left knee to steady the rifle against his shoulder; the third remained standing. All three had their sights trained on the prisoner.

Aim for the heart, Nakamura yelled. I don't want you to leave the job half finished.

The interpreter stepped forward again. The prisoner's life was now in the hands of fate, he explained. Should all three bullets miss, his captors would interpret this as a sign from God and release him unconditionally. This final message delivered, the interpreter stepped back and the captain raised his saber to give the command.

At this instant the tranquility was disrupted by a deafening roar and the forceful shock of an explosion. Nakamura was knocked over backwards, pole and all, onto the snow.

The cricket field was covered with a thick haze of smoke. For a split second Saburo wondered if this was what the afterlife looked like. But his head hurt, his ears were ringing, and he could feel the cold; unlikely then that he was dead.

The next moment he was being lifted to his feet. Hashitsune was speaking into his still ringing left ear. Are you all right?

Nakamura did not attempt to make sense of this turn of events; that could wait until later. Hashitsune cut him loose from the birch pole and the two men ran for cover into an aspen grove close by. This way, Hashitsune said. We have horses waiting.

But after advancing a couple of steps, Hashitsune suddenly stopped. No good, he said. I forgot the girl.

What girl?

The girl that we rescued that day from the bandits. I told her it was too dangerous but she insisted on coming.

They ran back toward the cricket field, one edge of which sloped suddenly away; this embankment was what had provided Hashitsune with the cover he had needed to approach the firing squad. There, the girl's body lay lifeless in the snow, half buried by frozen rubble from above. In her hand she was clutching the dagger that Nakamura had left with her.

Not until they were safely back in Harbin did Nakamura learn the whole story. After several weeks of patient work, Hashitsune had deduced where Nakamura was being held. He had slipped into the miso establishment one evening and there encountered the girl and her grandfather. They not only confirmed Nakamura's presence but also informed him of the time and place of his scheduled execution.

Hashitsune, a master of breaking and entering, secured a substantial amount of gunpowder from one of the Russian powder magazines, and from this he fashioned a small arsenal of hand grenades. These he and the girl, who had insisted on accompanying him, carried out to the cricket field the prior evening, and the two of them passed the night in the open field, the embankment serving as their only protection from the elements.

When the firing squad had assembled itself on the field, Hashitsune had made his way down the length of the embankment to the point closest to the soldiers. Here he lit the fuse of his grenade and lobbed it into their midst.

Meanwhile the girl, further away and hidden from Hashitsune by a bend in the embankment, was left guarding the remaining explosives. In the confusion following the blast, and looking out onto the smoke-filled field, she had evidently seen Nakamura lying in the snow and assumed that the plan had failed. She then lit one of the remaining grenades and attempted to throw it onto the field but lacked the necessary strength to clear the lip of the embankment; the bomb had lodged above her, bringing down the embankment with it when it exploded. The sound of a distant, muffled second explosion had reached Nakamura and Hashitsune as they were running from the field, but its significance had escaped them until they returned to find her partially interred body.

In spring the following year, near the end of the war and before his final departure from Manchuria, Nakamura would return to this spot to say a silent prayer for the spirit of this young girl whose fate had become so mysteriously entwined with his and who had shown bravery beyond her years on his behalf. Many more years later, Saburo's younger brother—younger by twenty years—was to write a novel based on Saburo's stories from Manchuria. The novel was published in 1931. It in turn was picked up by a playwright who turned it into a play that opened at the national theatre in Tokyo to favorable reviews and capacity audiences. The girl's part in this drama was the featured supporting role.

With the tightening of Russian security following the outbreak of the war, other Japanese agents were also apprehended and met fates less lucky than that of Saburo. Some, caught in the act of espionage or sabotage, were killed on the spot; others were captured, tried, and executed, much as Nakamura would have been, far away from outside scrutiny. Either way, the majority of these men became non-entities in the journals of history; just where and how they died, no one will ever know.

In a more highly profiled case, a Japanese colonel named Yokogawa Shozo and a captain named Oki Sadasuke were apprehended near Harbin disguised as Mongolian lamas. Under questioning these men

proudly stated their names and military ranks, thus attracting international attention. Their execution was staged on April 21st, exactly one month to the day from Nakamura's own would-have-been death by firing squad, and like Nakamura, these men, tied to birch poles and read their sentences, faced death with pride, confidence, and equanimity, earning the respect of not only their Russian captors but a German military observer and other Europeans on hand. The story was picked up and distributed by the Associated Press.

In deference to their military standings in life, the bodies of Yokogawa and Oki were cremated and preserved by the Russians. As the story was to play out, when the Japanese learned of this fact, and also learned exactly where the remains were being held, the job of retrieving these remains would fall to Nakamura and his party. They were to break into the army compound and steal the vessels containing the ashes of their fallen comrades out from under the Russian guards; the ashes were returned to Japan and interred by their respective families.

At the time of Yokogawa and Oki's execution, however, Nakamura and his men were far from Harbin. No sooner had Nakamura returned from the jaws of death than his party was dispatched on another mission. The men set out in late March, heading due west after first veering south to distance themselves from the railway. They traveled overland for ten days into the wilderness, laden with supplies and leading an extra set of horses. Spring was still far off and the further into the interior they travelled, the lower the temperature dropped. They were buffeted by sub-arctic winds and followed by wolves for much of their journey. Crossing from Manchuria into Mongolia, they came to the Hinggan Ling mountain range. Here they turned north, following the mountains where they met the plains until they came once again within sight of the Russian railroad.

The railway, everyone knew, was the Russian Achilles' heel, and the Japanese had begun a relentless campaign to disrupt the movement of troops and supplies into the front. In Moscow, the Japanese embassy was secretly funneling funds to Lenin and his revolutionaries to support their sabotage activities, and Japanese saboteurs penetrated Siberia all the way to Lake Baikal.

Nakamura and his two comrades surveyed their target from a wooded slope overlooking the railway before it disappeared into a tunnel under the mountains. Security of the railway was so critical to the Russians that they had positioned army encampments at regular intervals along its entire length, from which mounted Cossack patrols rode back and forth, so that at no time was any section of track left unwatched for longer than about thirty minutes.

This was the window within which the Japanese had to work. Under cover of darkness they slipped down to a gully close to the tracks and waited until a Cossack patrol rode by. Once the riders were past,

the men sprung into action. With pickaxes brought for just this purpose, they hacked their way through ice and into the frozen earth between two railway ties. Into this shallow trench they laid the explosives that Hashitsune and Kondo were carrying wrapped around their waists. Nakamura then unwound a length of fuse from his own waist; this they inserted into the explosives and then covered their work back up with the extracted frozen earth, patting it down as they did so.

When Hashitsune sighted the lantern of another Cossack patrol approaching, Nakamura instructed the others to depart ahead of him. From his vest he took a perforated metal box that produced a still smoldering cigarette; in this snow-laden wasteland, the light from a single match could be seen for miles but a cigarette ember was inconspicuous. Nakamura puffed on the cigarette to bring it back to life and then touched it to the exposed end of the fuse. Once he was sure that the fuse was lit, he himself turned and ran from the scene.

He ran as fast as he possibly could, following the tracks that the three of them had made on the way down and the other two had made again on their return. Less than a hundred meters out, he saw his own shadow cast in front of him by a flash of light followed by a thunderclap. The shock-wave from the explosion sent him headfirst into the snow in front of him.

The men recovered their horses and gear from where they had left them and retreated into the forest. All had gone according to plan, a plan that they had rehearsed over and over and that was based upon the principles of demolition that Nakamura had been taught in his Tokyo training. Moving further west, they conducted one more successful attack before turning around and beginning the trek back.

Given the remoteness of the sections of track that they had reached, each damaged section of rail would take over a day to repair, and every day that the supply train schedules were disrupted had tangible effects on the progress of the war far to their south. According to official Russian tally, Japanese sabotage between the February outbreak of the war and May resulted in thirty-seven instances of damaged track and twenty-four instances of damaged bridges. These attacks also produced enough casualties to overflow the beds available in the only hospital in Harbin.

Nakamura and company, after returning to Harbin, were assigned to the retrieval of the remains of Yokogawa and Oki. This took place in May. They came away from this episode after surviving an animated chase by the Cossack guards, during which all but small dustings of the ashes were spilled; even so, the operation was deemed a success. Then, upon orders, the three said goodbye to Harbin and headed south to meet up with the Japanese forces. In June, Nakamura was given leave and returned to Japan for a much needed and well deserved rest.

The Japanese closed in relentlessly on the Russians, ultimately successfully severing their supply line. The siege of Ryojun was an encounter of horrific proportions, lasting for five months and producing combined casualties of close to 100,000. But in the end the Japanese prevailed. The final battle on land occurred at Mukden, but the war ended as it had begun at sea—this time in the Tsushima Straits, where the Japanese defeated the Russian Baltic Fleet on May 28, 1905. The Japanese had defeated a major European power, turning the tide of unbridled Western conquest and domination in Asia.

Their military prowess was, however, not matched by their diplomatic skills. Out-foxed and out-maneuvered by the Russians at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, they signed a treaty that allowed them to retain Ryojun and Dairen but failed to exact the financial retribution they were counting on to repay their war debts; the war left them militarily and financially spent.

Nevertheless the Japanese were to remain in Manchuria, even acquiring the East China Railway left behind by the Russians. All of this was to carry Japan into another, less glorious phase in her history; but that history is beyond the scope of the story at hand.

Following the end of the land campaigns, the special intelligence agents were called in from the field and instructed to assemble in Mukden. Thus was in March, 1905. Of the 113 agents dispatched from Tokyo to Manchuria and Mongolia two years earlier, only seven showed. Among them was Nakamura Saburo.

Saburo, in the mean time, was contending with an entirely different kind of struggle. After beating all odds in the field and returning home a hero, he had been dealt an even more difficult hand to play. During his reprieve in Japan, he had been diagnosed with tuberculosis. Confronted in this way with the stark reality of his own mortality, the same man who had unflinchingly faced a firing squad would now show another, weaker side of his character; hero made victim, he would succumb to emotions of fear and remorse. But that turn of events marks the beginning of the next phase of his life story.