

Thomas, Tom (ed.), *The Honshu Pioneer: The U.S Occupation of Japan and the First G.I. Newspaper*

North Charleston, SC.: Createspace, 2013. Paperback; 456 pages; 82 black and white illustrations; RRP AUD \$20; ISBN: 9781489523662

Tom Thomas's book is a fascinating and educational labour of love which provides rich insights into the conditions, experiences, hopes, and frustrations of U.S. soldiers stationed in post-war Japan. The bulk of the work is transcribed from original copies of the *Honshu Pioneer*, and features columns written by the editor's father Arthur DeLong Thomas Jr, who served with the 97th Division of the U.S. Army in Germany and Japan. After discovering how historically rich the other contents of the *Pioneer* were, Thomas then expanded beyond his father's columns to include the editorials and cartoons of J. Hanratty and Fred Stark, which also tells us much about the absurdities of life and the political views of the soldiers. This work is particularly significant because it presents direct first-hand experiences of the time, in contrast to many current books whose reflections looking back from 60 years afterwards can be somewhat filtered.

The book is an absorbing mix of political comment and satirical reflections on everyday life: for example; Art Thomas's humorous notes on the high cost of cigarettes due to the black market (pp. 99-100), what animals were deemed acceptable take-home baggage (not the fictitious "Giant Eurasian Manalvarix") (p. 111), and how soldiers were no longer a fad back in the U.S.A. (pp. 118-9).

Art Thomas frequently combines reflections on current camp conditions with political comment, such as when he writes of Russia's takeover of Lithuania and how "this little country will make a great contribution to Russia's sewerage difficulties", especially through the invention of one "Mde. Bielogusrsksas" (p. 167). He writes columns on being interrupted by visiting Japanese homemakers while he's sitting on the "6-holer" (pp. 46-47), and on the importance of teaching Japan never to commit war again (p. 289).

Many of Hanratty's editorials are equally utopian, for example, "We must face the future and realize that if we are to make sure our sons are not drafted into a far

bloodier holocaust than it is on our shoulders that the burden of peace rests” (p. 39). Given that the threat of global nuclear war was becoming a topic of concern, this is a vivid insight into front-line fears and dreams. The intensity of this anti-war philosophy may have been increased by the staggering fact the 97th Division took 80% casualties during just four days of fighting near the Sieg River in Germany. The newspaper authors thus saw many die around them, and living in Japan under the shadow of nuclear clouds must have affected their viewpoint.

Various other very insightful columns by Art Thomas also deal with the hope that Japan will reach economic stability and democracy (p. 43), the mania for bureaucratic charts and the war in Indonesia (p. 85), and the sensationalism of U.S. tabloids (p. 88). Art Thomas had an interest in history and gained a Master of Arts in that field, and this shows in many of his columns. For example, he writes satirically about why the Greeks in Cyprus may prefer to be under the Greeks rather than British (p. 93), and about the “blow-back” in South America (p. 103).

Tom Thomas is not a trained historian like his father, yet his editorial comments are often insightful. He provides a useful historical introduction and extensive thematic analysis all through the work. Regarding the civil war in China and one editorial that lamented Western propaganda about Communists, he notes with surprise the pro-Communist position, and explains why the Chiang Kai Shek side was not so popular either (p. 50). Tom Thomas also discusses the soldiers’ misunderstandings about regimented Japanese culture (p. 62), and the prophetic nature of his father’s observation that the Japanese were excellent copyists of U.S. machinery (p. 68). He is at his most poignant in adding to his father’s warning about the continued dangers of the military-industrial complex that Eisenhower criticised (pp. 348-9).

There are many topics worthy of further study in this book, such as exploring the changing desires and hopes of servicemen after the war ended, or the political views of U.S. soldiers regarding China. The concluding extensive presentation of Stark’s cartoons reveal so much more than words could ever convey.

Tom Thomas has done history a great service by bringing to light his father’s newspaper. It is appropriate to conclude with a stunning paragraph from Thomas’s father, who wrote frequently about his dreams for a war-free future: “It might be said that in great part the responsibility for World War II was that of our parents and their

generation. This was due to a lack of interest in their personal duties towards our democracy. Are we going to repeat their mistake? This is written as a reminder that none of us want our kids to go through another war period. Such a situation will not occur unless we participate actively in the affairs of our democracy” (p. 90).

John D’Alton
Monash University