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The Innocence of Evil: Reflections on War and the Battle of Okinawa

C. Douglas Lummis and Yoshida Michiko

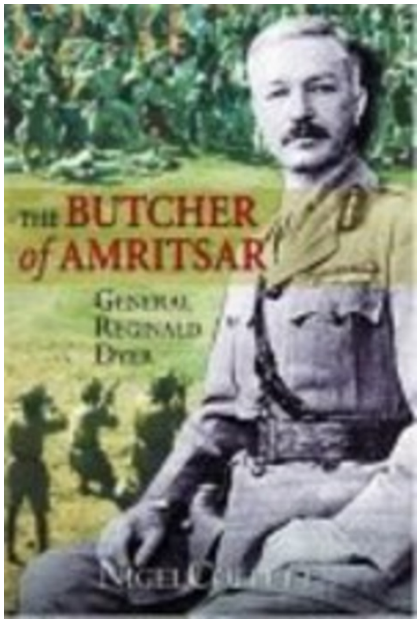
World War II produced many great villains, but as for the supreme Monster, many would award that dishonor to Adolph Eichmann, the man who administered the deaths of six million Jews, and who made "I was only doing my job" into an expression laden with bitter irony in the post war world. Hannah Arendt, after attending his trial in Israel, shocked the world by announcing that she found him to be not a Monster at all, but rather a Nobody – or worse still, an Anybody. Her book, *Eichmann in Jerusalem – A Report on the Banality of Evil* was attacked on the reasonable grounds that where there are monstrous acts, there must be a Monster. But as terrifying as Monsters are, Arendt was pointing to a truth more frightening still: that monstrous acts can be carried out by ordinary (banal) bureaucrats.

Adolph Eichmann

The Battle of Okinawa – said by some to have been the most terrible battle of World War II – also produced many villains, but perhaps the most infamous name is that of General Ushijima Mitsuru, who could have saved tens of thousands of lives, military and civilian, by surrendering, but who instead ordered his troops to fight to the last and then committed suicide, leaving them leaderless and condemned by him to death.

Now we learn from his grandson that he was known to be a gentle man, presumably good to his children and grandchildren. There is no reason to doubt this. Probably most of us know someone who went to war, committed there monstrous acts, but was kind and gentle both before leaving and after returning. One reason we like to believe that monstrous acts can only be committed by Monsters is that it helps us to believe that the wars carried out by our friends, neighbors and relatives can't possibly be all that monstrous. But if we are to believe the grandson Ushijima Sadamitsu, then we must face a possibility even more frightening than the one proposed by Arendt: monstrous acts can be carried out by the innocent. Shall we call this, "The Innocence of Evil"?

If asked who was the great Monster produced during India's struggle for independence, I suspect that many Indians would name Brigadier General Reginald E. H. Dyer of the British Army. In 1919, at Amritsar, Dyer ordered his troops to fire on an unarmed and unresisting crowd attending a political meeting. According to Louis Fischer's calculation, 1516 casualties were produced at the expenditure of only 1650 rounds of ammunition fired, an efficiency rate rivaled by few slaughterhouses.



Yet Gandhi refused to label Dyer as a Monster, or even as a bad man. This does not, I think, mean that Gandhi was naïve, or overly optimistic about human nature. Rather he was pointing to something more frightening than the existence of Monsters. Gandhi argued that Dyer was able to carry out such an act precisely because he sincerely believed it to be for a good end. He wrote, "General Dyer (and he had thousands of Englishmen and women who honestly thought with him) enacted [the massacre] for a cause which he undoubtedly believed to be good. He thought that by that one act he had saved English lives and the Empire. That it was all a figment of his imagination cannot affect the valuation of the intensity of his conviction." This captures the essence of Gandhi's argument against the position that violence is justified if carried out for good ends. In fact it's the other way around. It is when pure motives passionately believed in are carried out by violent means that the most Monstrous acts occur. *C. Douglas Lummis*

Okinawa Commander's Grandson Fights for Peace

Yoshida Michiko

Ushijima Sadamitsu was told his paternal grandfather was a gentle man. How, then, could his grandfather have ordered his troops to fight to the last man during the Battle of Okinawa in 1945? Hoping to find an answer to that question, Ushijima, 56, an elementary school teacher in Tokyo, has repeatedly visited the southern island prefecture since 1994.

His grandfather was Lt. Gen. Ushijima Mitsuru, the Japanese Imperial Army commander of forces on Okinawa, the site of the bloodiest ground battle of the Pacific War. Ushijima committed suicide at Mabuni, on the southern tip of Okinawa's main island where the last fierce battle was fought, on June 23, 65 years ago. He was 57.

Sadamitsu Ushijima displays his grandfather's family photo during a peace education class at an Okinawa elementary school (Photograph by Yoshida Michiko)

Okinawa now marks June 23, when organized Japanese resistance to the U.S. forces ended, as a day to remember the battle's more than 200,000 victims.

As a teacher, Ushijima long focused his efforts on integrated education that encourages children with disabilities to learn alongside their non-disabled peers.

But he stayed away from Okinawa as a subject. He hated his name, which includes the same Chinese character as his grandfather's. He was afraid he would be asked about the late commander.

His first visit to Okinawa in 1994, at the urging of colleagues, changed all that. Ushijima visited a peace memorial museum in Mabuni to find his grandfather's fight-to-the-last order on exhibit at the entrance.

The explanation said that because of that order, "more than 100,000 noncombatant civilians were left behind in the hail of shells and bullets."

Ushijima stood petrified. But he soon realized the only way forward was to squarely face the past.

He talked to people who knew the grandfather he had never met. He entered the Mabuni cave where his grandfather killed himself. He read his death poems again and again.

"Mitsuru gave priority to defending the mainland, where the emperor resided. After all, he looked only to the emperor," he thought at the time.

Discovering an answer of his own, Ushijima saw his mission as a teacher. He started a peace education class to pass along history to children. He has given classes in Okinawa, as well as at his schools in Tokyo and elsewhere in Japan.

On June 18, he again visited an elementary school in Okinawa, the seventh year he has given his class in the prefecture. He talked about his grandfather, the war and Okinawa, and then concluded: "Armed forces do not defend civilians. That's what we learned from the Battle of Okinawa."

Ushijima has long hated his name. But he now understands how his own fate is tied to the name.

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