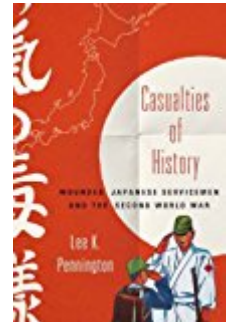


Lee Pennington. *Casualties of History: Wounded Japanese Servicemen and the Second World War.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015. xviii + 282 pp. \$39.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8014-5257-4.



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As long as there have been conflicts there has been the issue of what to do with those whose wounds, whether physical or psychic, have rendered them unable to resume their pre-conflict occupations. The irony of the issue of disabled veterans is that as wars and weapons became more destructive of human flesh, medicine has evolved to have more, and more severely injured, soldiers survive. The Romans would employ disabled veterans within the *castra* (fort); however, following the fall of the Roman Empire, disabled veterans, unless of the nobility, were generally left to beg the charity of the public, a situation that only gradually began to change in the early modern era, evolving to the current emphasis on the rehabilitation and reintegration of the wounded veteran we see today. As part of the evolving scholarship on the wounded and the veteran, Lee Pennington examines the severely wounded veterans of modern Japan.

Pennington begins his narrative with the veterans of the Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese Wars, the first wars of post-Meiji Japan. The num-

ber of disabled veterans was small, and the early emphasis was on private and patriotic efforts, assisted by imperial charity, to care for them. Following World War I the Japanese government and military took the lessons of the powers that had large numbers of casualties, and began to develop a primarily government-run system, and one that shifted emphasis from domiciliary care to rehabilitation and reintegration. With the beginning of the conflict with China in the early 1930s, the system came under pressure to expand and reorganize as casualties of the war in China began to return to Japan with wounds that rendered them lost to the military. At the same time, as part of the national effort of militarization, the term for a disabled soldier was officially changed from *haihei* (crippled soldier) to *shoi gunjin* (sick or wounded soldier). Simultaneously, disabled soldiers were touted as "heroes in white" (after the white robes they wore).

Pennington goes into detail on the pensions and pension systems for wounded veterans and families of the war dead and uses a few personal

narratives as well as examples of children's books and magazines to illustrate the effort to glorify the wounded, an important theme in a society not very tolerant of physical deformity. The years 1941-45, or the "Pacific War," contain less detail than other sections of the book; the author explains that many records of this period were destroyed in 1945, and also the reality that by 1943 evacuation of casualties from the Pacific Islands to Japan was cut off by the US submarine force. Left unsaid is the reality that as islands were taken by the US forces there were few survivors at all.

Most poignant is the section on the postwar period. During the occupation the Americans worked hard to demilitarize Japanese society, and this included dismantling all military pension systems, including those for disabled veterans and war widows. There needs were to be taken care of through a wholly civilian social welfare system, without any preferences. Only in the late 1940s were organizations advocating for greater benefits for disabled veterans (and war widows) tolerated. As the author notes, disabled veterans went from heroes in white to forgotten men.

This book is rich in detail and sources, and places the wounded veteran in the greater context of Japanese culture and the militarization (and subsequent demilitarization) of Japanese society. Where I noticed errors they were minor, and of a medical/technical nature—one example being the misrepresenting a functional artificial arm of the 1920s in Japan as one of the first functional prostheses whereas such prostheses had been used since the 1860s/1870s. The author does properly defend the Japanese military medical system against charges of systemic inadequacy—the logistical failures of the Japanese military severely impacted the ability of the medical department to care for sick and wounded. In fact, during the Russo-Japanese War American observers had touted the Japanese Army Medical Department for its high standards and efficiency, especially

compared the Russian system. Overall Pennington's work is a valuable addition to the expanding historiography on those survivors of war aptly described as the debris of battle.

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