



SAVING THE THRONE

Bonner Fellers spares Hirohito from war crimes charges in post-surrender Japan.

by Richard Holden

How did an Earlham alumnus help save Emperor Hirohito from prison or worse, thereby preserving the Chrysanthemum Throne and guaranteeing the development of post-war Japan into the constitutional democracy that we know today?

The question sounds fantastic? It was posed exactly that way in a television documentary produced by Japan Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) and aired to the Japanese nation last June. Titled "The Showa Emperor's Two Monologues," the documentary focused on the origin and content of a memoir Hirohito had dictated, following Japan's surrender to the allies on August 14, 1945.

The manuscript explained, from the emperor's point of view, the events and personalities that put Japan on a militaristic path beginning in 1928, and the decisions that led to the conquest of Manchuria, the invasion of China, then ultimately the attack on Pearl Harbor and Japanese expansion throughout the entire Asian Pacific rim.

Hirohito may have felt compelled to set down his version of events in the expectation that the conquering allies would demand some kind of personal accounting. American occupation forces had arrested many of Japan's wartime government and military leaders. Chief among those charged with war crimes was Prime Minister Gen. Hideki Tojo. Certainly Hirohito realized that his future as emperor was in question, and should the allies prosecute him as a war criminal so might be his very life.

Most Americans at the time equated the Japanese emperor with Hitler and Mussolini, one of the evil triumvirate of megalomaniacs who had waged

war for world conquest and lost. The December 7, 1941 sneak attack on Pearl Harbor particularly burned in the public's mind. Reflecting that mood, the U.S. Senate on September 18, 1945 voted unanimously for putting Hirohito on trial. That same

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month, the governments of Australia and the Soviet Union formally demanded the emperor's arrest and prosecution.

Hirohito dictated his narrative in the confidential presence of five of his close advisers, who thereafter treated the monologue as a court secret. The document's very existence was not confirmed until 1990 when the daughter

of Hidenari Terasaki, one of the five aides, discovered it amid her father's personal archives. The monologue's publication that same year caused a sensation in Japan. Before his death in 1989 the emperor had never spoken of his involvement in the war, and here was a written record in his own words. But why had he made a personal record? Historians theorized that the monologue was Hirohito's testimony to the American occupation command. If so, then an English version had to exist. But where?

It was another daughter who furnished the answer. Nancy Fellers Gillespie '52 had the English document in the wartime files of her late father, Brigadier General Bonner Fellers. Fellers had been military secretary to General Douglas MacArthur, supreme commander of allied forces in the Pacific, and one of MacArthur's most competent Japan experts. He had long studied and admired Japanese culture and had visited Japan three times before the war. His 1937 Command and General Staff School thesis, *Psychology of the Japanese Soldier*, was a manual for American officers in the Pacific theater.

Because of his special insights into the "Japanese mind," Fellers had directed Psychological Warfare operations in the Pacific, a function that included radio broadcasts and the dropping of leaflets on Japanese cities and troop installations in the Pacific. Fellers' leaflets, an observer on the ground wrote, "were masterpieces of insight and knowledge of the Japanese, of their poetry and psychology, their love of nature."

Fellers was whetted to the wonders of Japan as a student at Earlham College between 1914 and 1916. His tutor was a Japanese woman, Yuri Watanabe '16, who had been assigned as his upperclass mentor. Fellers, the son of Quaker parents in Ridgefarm, Illinois, must have been amazed when he reported to campus as an entering student and was introduced to the beautiful young woman wearing a kimono.

Left: Terasaki and Fellers. The two collaborated to protect the emperor while ascertaining Hirohito's responsibility for the Pacific war. Fellers was amazed to learn that the Japanese diplomat's American wife was his second cousin.

"My father fell in love with Japan through her," daughter Nancy of Washington, D.C. reminisced. Certainly the two formed a fast friendship, and perhaps something deeper, at Earlham that would last the rest of their lives. After graduation in 1916, Yuri returned to Japan where she would eventually marry and found a Christian girls school outside of Tokyo. Fellers, now awakened by Yuri and his studies to a fascinating world that lay beyond the campus, left Earlham after his sophomore year to enter the U.S. Military Academy. He reasoned that the military life offered opportunities for widening his view of the world, and with the way events were going in Europe, the United States would soon be needing officers. Fellers earned his degree and his Army commission from West Point two years later.

Despite their living in vastly separate worlds, Yuri and Fellers maintained a regular correspondence preceding the outbreak of war between their two countries. Chances to visit Yuri and her family strengthened Fellers' motivation for trips to Japan.

Their next meeting took place amid the rubble of bombed buildings at the edge of Tokyo. On August 30, 1945, two weeks after Hirohito announced Japan's acceptance of unconditional surrender, MacArthur landed at Atsugi Airfield to take command of the occupation. Fellers accompanied the general on the plane, and as soon as a break in duties permitted he hopped a jeep and went looking for Yuri.

Thankfully, she and her family had survived the American bombs and the privations of war. Although her home was relatively undamaged, Yuri's school had been wrecked. Her old

Earlham friend was in a position to help — with food, medicine for her sick husband, and soon with a new building for the school, which Fellers requisitioned in downtown Tokyo. Within weeks of the occupation, Yuri and her husband found themselves as regular Sunday dinner guests at the

American embassy where table conversation dwelt on the obvious question of the reorganization of Japan.

Fellers later told Nancy how MacArthur appreciated Yuri's counsel, which Fellers often shared with the supreme commander. Besieged as he was with advice from Washington and military officials, MacArthur could value the opinions of ordinary Japanese, especially those of a Japanese woman who had been educated in the United States. MacArthur had told Fellers on the flight to Atsugi that he intended to demand a new constitution for the Japanese, a constitution that granted voting rights to women. A female influence on government, MacArthur said, would temper Japanese male militarism.

A subject Fellers discussed a great deal with Yuri was the possibility that Hirohito would be charged with war crimes. Yuri warned against such a move. Many Japanese revered their emperor as divine, the throne was the foundation of the nation, she reminded him. Were the allies to treat him as a war criminal the Japanese

people would revolt and turn on their occupiers. The consequences might lead to a renewal of the war.

On September 27, the emperor made a personal call on MacArthur at the American embassy. Dressed in striped trousers, button shoes, morning coat, and top hat, Hirohito stepped out of his ancient black limousine and tentatively approached the entrance. Waiting at the door, Bonner Fellers saluted then extended his hand in welcome. The emperor took it gladly, and was escorted inside the embassy where he and MacArthur met privately for 35 minutes. Their meeting concluded,



YURI WATANABE (IN HER 1916 GRADUATION PHOTO) OPENED JAPAN TO FELLERS' IMAGINATION WHEN HE WAS A STUDENT AT EARLHAM.

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MacArthur joined Fellers in watching the emperor depart from the embassy. Fellers described the scene in a letter that evening to his wife Dorothy and daughter Nancy:

"General MacArthur, noticeably moved, said: 'I am a liberal. I was raised in a democracy and the Emperor's abject humiliation hurts me.'

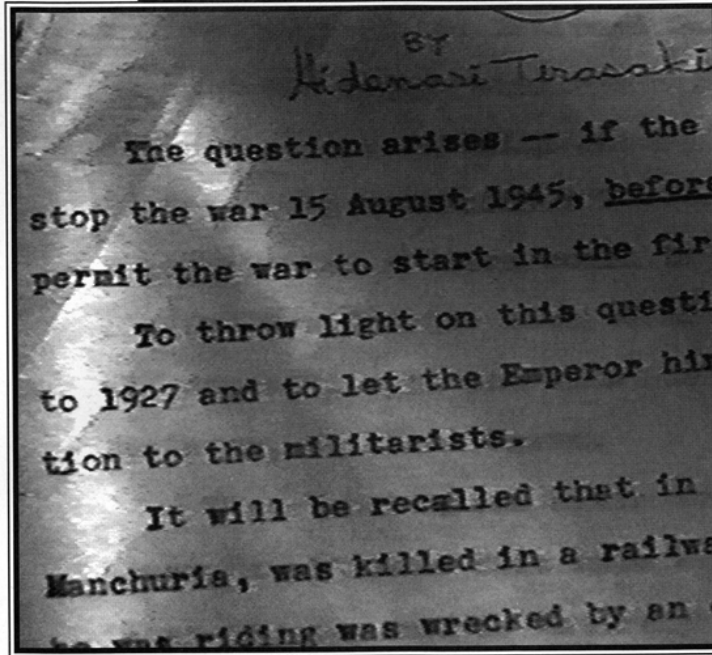
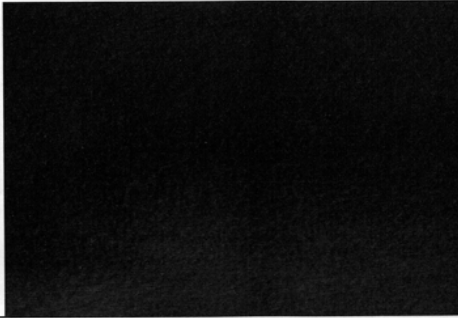
"On the way to the office, General MacArthur said the Emperor was in a daze but that his words were well chosen and he talked intelligently. 'He understands English and understood readily everything which I said.'

"I said, 'The Emperor fears that you will punish him.'

"General MacArthur replied, 'Yes, he is prepared to take it. He feels he is liable to lose his neck.'"

MacArthur was silent about his intentions for the emperor, and opinion among his staff was divided. In Washington, Dean Acheson, undersecretary of state for Asian affairs, was leading a movement in the administration to indict Hirohito. President Truman, though aware of the Senate's resolution for prosecution, spoke little of the matter, apparently waiting for guidance from MacArthur in Tokyo. As indictments were being drawn up at General Headquarters (GHQ) on many Japanese political and military leaders, the world watched to learn whether the emperor would be charged. MacArthur assigned the question to Bonner Fellers.

On October 2, Fellers put his recommendation in a one-page memorandum to the supreme commander. The emperor, he wrote, "was the living symbol of the race in whom lie the virtues of their ancestors. . . . To try him as war criminal would not only be blasphemous but a denial of



TERASAKI'S TRANSLATION OF THE MONOLOGUE ADDRESSED THE QUESTION OF THE EMPEROR'S AMBIGUOUS POWER PUT TO HIROHITO BY FELLERS. NANCY FELLERS GILLESPIE '52 HAD THE ENGLISH VERSION IN HER FATHER'S RECORDS.

spiritual freedom." Fellers noted that in effecting its bloodless invasion, the United States requisitioned the services of the Emperor. "By his order seven million soldiers laid down their arms and are being rapidly demobilized. Through his act hundreds of thousands of American casualties were avoided and the war terminated far ahead of schedule."

Japanese historians and journalists have given Fellers' memo considerable credit for influencing

MacArthur, and ultimately Washington, in sparing Hirohito. Faubion Bowers, GHQ's assistant military secretary, told NHK interviewers, "Fellers was the only one who was a gentleman, who was well-born, who knew something about Japan. All the others

knew nothing, and MacArthur relied on him for information about the Japanese. Bonner wrote that wonderful memorandum which turned the tide of the whole thing." On January 25, 1946 MacArthur sent a secret telegram to the State and War departments. Adopting Fellers arguments and some of his language, MacArthur wrote that indictment of the emperor would cause a tremendous convulsion among the Japanese people. "Destroy him and the nation will disintegrate."

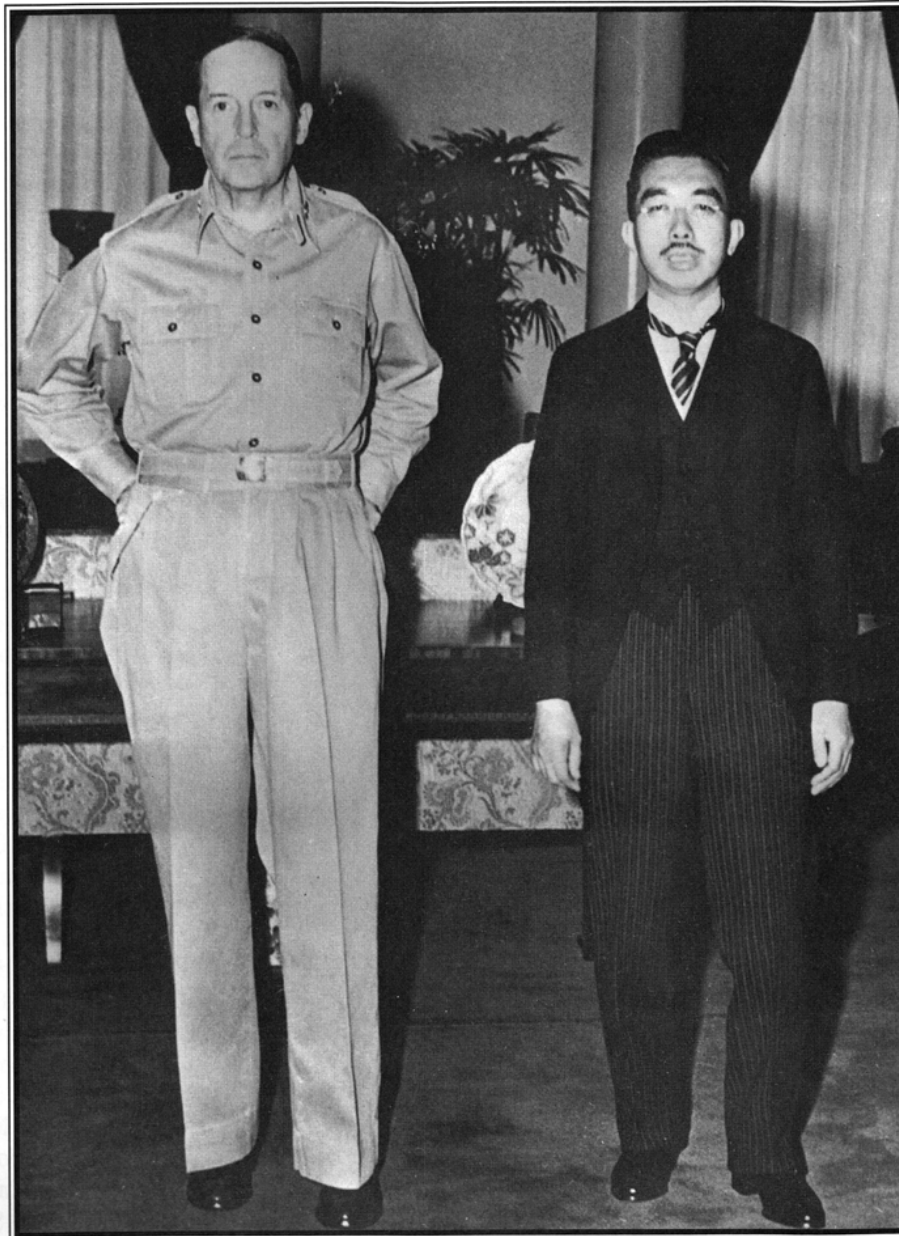
Washington decided to retain the imperial system during the occupation, but the Truman administration could not reach a consensus on how to treat the emperor himself. With the war crimes trials set to begin in early May, Fellers' role in protecting Hirohito took on new urgency. He was particularly worried that the Soviet prosecution team, soon to arrive in Tokyo, would push their demand for the emperor's indictment. Fellers had expressed his concerns in another memo to MacArthur warning that the Soviets wanted to demolish the imperial system and start a revolution in Japan. Now Fellers came up with an audacious measure that might prevent prosecution. On March 6, he summoned navy chief and prewar prime minister Mitsumasa Yonai to his quarters and proposed his idea. NHK has uncovered in the Japanese Naval Archives Yonai's diary of the conversation:

NHK photo

"The best strategy would be for the Japanese side to prove the emperor's innocence," Fellers told Yonai. "It would be best to blame all responsibility on Tojo. I want Tojo to say that he was going to force Japan to go to war with the United States no matter what, even if the emperor had opposed it. Would you ask Tojo to say it?"

Yonai replied, "I am in complete agreement with you." Through Yonai, Fellers' message was conveyed to Tojo in prison. According to the Japanese lawyer who actually delivered it, Tojo replied: "Tell Yonai not to worry. The only reason I continue to live, despite the shame, is to prove precisely that point."

At his trial, delayed until December 1947, Tojo gave a defiant defense. The government he led was justified in instigating the war and attacking Pearl Harbor, he testified. "I believe firmly, and will contend to the last, that it was a war of self-defense and in no manner a violation of presently acknowledged international law." Tojo vigorously defended the emperor against charges of responsibility for Japan's aggressive action in December 1941. However, on cross examination by the American prosecutor, he said that no Japanese subject "would go against the will of his Majesty." Pressed further on that



AS BONNER FELLERS WATCHED OFF-CAMERA, MACARTHUR AND HIROHITO POSED FOR A PICTURE BEFORE BEGINNING THEIR HISTORIC MEETING AT THE AMERICAN EMBASSY SEPTEMBER 27, 1945.

issue, Tojo stated that while his cabinet and the military high command had decided on the war "the emperor consented, though reluctantly."

What was the emperor's culpability? In probing for the answer, Fellers had opened direct communication with the palace through a liaison officer, Hidenari Terasaki. They met on February 20. Terasaki was a career diplomat who twice had held mid-level posts at the Japanese Embassy in Washington. He spoke English fluently and had even earned a master's degree in English literature from Brown University. Remarkably, Terasaki was married to an American woman, Gwen Harold from Tennessee. They had met at an embassy party in 1930, were

married the next year and became parents of a daughter, Mariko. Over the decade, Gwen and Mariko had accompanied Terasaki on diplomatic assignments to Shanghai and Havana, with intervals in Tokyo. In 1941 the foreign office posted Terasaki back to Washington, and that is where the family was on December 7 when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Choosing her marriage over patriotism, Gwen accompanied her husband in the exchange of diplomatic personnel and lived in Japan throughout the war. She

has written her extraordinary story in a book, *Bridge to the Sun* (University of North Carolina Press, 1957).

Fellers was fascinated in his first interview with Terasaki to hear about his American wife from Tennessee. "Where is your wife at present?" Fellers asked.

"She is here with me in Tokyo," Teraskai answered. "She came back to Japan with me when the diplomats were exchanged."

"Good God!" Fellers responded. "What was your wife's maiden name, may I ask?"

"She was a Harold, from Johnson City, Tennessee," replied Teraskai.

Fellers sat stunned as he absorbed the information. "That is the most astonishing thing I ever heard of," he said finally. Gwen Harold was Fellers' second cousin. "Mr. Terasaki," the general announced, "I think we must be some kind of cousins-in-law."

Through Terasaki, Fellers asked Hirohito about his responsibility in the war. He wanted, as he had told Yonai, proof of the emperor's innocence. Fellers wrote in his diary, "As my investigation progressed it became clear that the emperor himself personally forced the militarists into accepting the terms of the [surrender]. Then the question is, if the emperor had the power to stop the war even before Japan was invaded, why did he permit it to start in the first place?"

Terasaki posed the question directly to Hirohito.

"Let me explain my reasons," the emperor replied, and so began the dictation of the monologue, created with the impending war crimes trials in mind. Hirohito traced the origins of the war to a series of international peace treaties following World War I in which the western powers sought to limit Japan's naval power and territorial claims in Asia. He also blamed the great powers for rejecting Japan's call for racial equality, citing as one example the United States' rejection of continued Japanese immigration to California. "This was sufficient to

infuriate the Japanese people," the emperor said. "Because the military stood up under such circumstances, shouldering the rage of the nation, it was extremely difficult to stop them."

In his conclusion, Hirohito said, "As the monarch of a constitutional state I had to recognize the decision of the Tojo cabinet to go to war. Let's suppose I vetoed the decision to go to war. The country undoubtedly would have seen an enormous rebellion. People I trust would be killed, and my own life would have been endangered. Never mind that, but ultimately it would have led to a violent war and would have brought about a tragedy far worse than the Second World War. Eventually, Japan would have been destroyed."

Hirohito authorized Terasaki to create an English version of the monologue and give it to Fellers. In writing the translation, Terasaki omitted a few of the emperor's points, significantly his references to racial discrimination, and emphasized Hirohito's powerlessness against the generals and admirals. In comparing the Japanese and English versions, NHK noted that the latter concluded with these words: "Under the constitution, the emperor has to listen to the decision of the cabinet. If I would have exercised veto around November-December 1941 there might have been terrible disorder. The trusted men around me would have been killed. I myself might have been killed or kidnapped. Actually, I was virtually a prisoner and powerless. My opposition would never have been known outside the palace. It might have gone to a most barbaric war, and it would have been impossible to stop the war at all no matter what I did."

The Tokyo war crimes trials began May 3. The emperor's name was not included in the list of 29 defendants. MacArthur's policy retaining Hirohito for American use during the occupation was implemented and the Soviet judge did not demand the emperor's prosecution.

However, MacArthur and Fellers did not think the danger had passed. On May 5, former president Herbert Hoover visited Japan on a fact finding mission for Truman. Fellers told Hoover about the monologue and asked for his advice. "Because of American bitterness, material from the emperor would not be as effective now as a little later," Hoover said. He advised Fellers to keep the document for use "the moment that an emergency justified."

Fellers returned to the United States in late 1946 and retired from the Army after 28 years of service. In 1948, as the Tokyo trials neared a conclusion, a new problem arose: the issue of the emperor's abdication. Western media had been demanding his resignation. Fellers, back in Washington, wrote to Terasaki in July, warning that "his abdication would be a blow to the MacArthur occupation and would reverse all the gains toward a new Japan. . . Communist Russians would consider it a victory."

On November 12, the Tokyo trials came to a close. Tojo and seven other defendants were sentenced to death, others to prison. The same day, Hirohito submitted a letter to MacArthur stating his intention not to resign. The issue of the emperor's war responsibility came to a close.

In a later dictation around this time, Hirohito reflected, "Now that the new constitution is in place, perhaps it was more fortunate for the people of Japan to have lost the war than to win and become a radical, militarist country."

In 1971, the Japanese government awarded Fellers the Order of the Sacred Treasure second degree, the highest honor the nation can award to a non-citizen. In an accompanying document from the Foreign Ministry, comes the citation: "Bonner Fellers, as an officer in GHQ, saved the emperor from being prosecuted as a war criminal."

Richard Holden is editor of the Earlhamite.