As told to
Captain
Lowell M. Limpus
(*Inactive*)

STRATEGY MUST CHANGE

THIS article was dictated in a prison cell in Manila by the most famous Japanese soldier produced by World War II. Shortly after he dictated it a U. S. Military Commission convicted him of responsibility for inhuman atrocities committed by troops under his command. He was hanged near Manila February 23, following a review of his trial by the Supreme Court of the United States.

The article is presented solely as a significant revelation of the technical and professional military ability of a leading member of the Japanese High Command. Its publication has nothing to do with the question of General Yamashita's guilt or innocence of the charges on which he was tried. It implies no endorsement of the validity of his conclusions, although they should be of interest to students of warfare everywhere.

Yamashita was Japan's most successful commander in the early stages of the war. He was the man to whom the faltering Empire vainly turned when the tide of battle flowed against it. As commander-in-chief of the Japanese forces in Malaya, he conquered Southeastern Asia and captured Singapore. As commander of the Japanese Fourteenth Army Group, he suffered a crushing defeat in the Philippines and ultimately surrendered the remnant of his armies at Baguio.

During the progress of his six-week trial in Manila, he began a series of professional discussions with Captain Limpus, who was present in the theater as a war correspondent. In the course of these discussions he agreed to dictate an article summarizing his professional conclusions, providing it was intended for publication in a "reliable and responsible" professional military journal. And he specifically declared that he considered The INFANTRY JOURNAL outstanding among such magazines.

By General Tomoyuki YAMASHITA

General Yamashita devoted the greater part of three hours to outlining the theories propounded in the following article. He was exceedingly careful and conscientious about it, frequently pausing to consult two of his professional advisers in the process. They were Lieutenant General Muto, his Chief of Staff, and Major General Utsunomiya, assistant chief. Both were present as associate defense counsel, personally requested by him to help handle his case. General Utsunomiya speaks English fluently and assisted the official interpreter (a Japanese graduate of Harvard) in the translation. Generals Yamashita and Muto both speak some English and each followed the translation carefully.

All four Japanese appeared at ease in the comfortless cell and they pondered and fully discussed virtually every statement before it was finally enunciated. The three generals sat around a table, the two juniors cross-legged with their bare feet tucked up under them in Japanese fashion. All wore undershirts and khaki trousers.

Yamashita illustrated his various points in dramatic fashion, moving a collection of fans, ash-trays, cigarette holders and canteen cups around on the table. Occasionally he hurried to a small blackboard to snatch up a pointer and demonstrate his ideas upon the maps suspended there. At such times he spoke swiftly and earnestly, as if lecturing before a class in the General Staff College.

The Japanese commander seemed to me to be well grounded in professional subjects. He interlarded his remarks with references to Clausewitz, Sun-Tsu, Admiral Mahan, "Stonewall" Jackson and Homer Lea, as well as to Japanese authorities, who are less well known in the Western World.

Yamashita was a stocky, bullet-headed man . . . a veritable giant for a Japanese (the phrase is General Muto's) . . . who resembled a self-confident Buddhist Monk. He possessed a compelling personality, which fairly dominated his associates, even in a prison cell. Both the junior generals, the interpreter and the Japanese orderlies, detailed to wait upon them, were extremely punctilious in observing military courtesy toward him at all times. All of them, including Yamashita, were equally punctilious in their attitude toward American visitors.

The ideas presented here are Yamashita's own, and given in his own words, with unusually careful attention paid to their translation.—CAPTAIN LIMPUS.

I BELIEVE WE ARE FACING REVOLUTIONARY CHANGES IN the basic principles of military strategy and tactics.

My own experience, in the closing days of this war, revealed developments in armament, involving changes so great that they should force us to revamp these principles. They will be so radical that they will amount to a complete rewriting of those traditional principles which have been heretofore accepted by military men everywhere.

You need not remind me that General Homer Lea . . . whom I consider a very great soldier . . . declared very properly that tactics change with every new weapon but that the basic principles of strategy never change. That statement was true at the time he made it, which I think was about 1909. It had been true since the beginning of time and it remained true until the closing months of this war. But my experience teaches me that modern war has finally brought about developments in weapons and tactics so revolutionary that now, at last, even strategy must change, too.

This statement is so radical, coming from a professional military man, that it requires explanation. And some of this explanation must go back to what we all recognize as fundamentals.

The object of war remains the same thing in these modern times that it always has been. It is to crush an enemy nation's will to fight. The traditional method of achieving this end is by deploying your combat forces in such a manner as to gain an advantageous position and then to handle them in such fashion that you attain your objective. In doing so you have due regard for such factors as terrain, supply lines, artillery dispositions, and so on.

But these methods have been sharply affected by the improvements in armament made during this war.

With modern arms, even in their present stage of development, we can no longer make the former sharp demarkation between the battle front and the home front. And right there we encounter the compelling factor in the new situation.

When we military men project ourselves into the immediate future, we find ourselves in an era of atomic bombs, strategic bombers (by which I mean extremely long-range bombers) and other new weapons. And in this era our old conception of time-space relationships simply explodes.

Henceforth distance is no longer the preponderant factor that it always has been in the past. Nor are many of the other traditional factors that have governed our strategy and tactics as important as they used to be.

When we couple the power of the atomic bomb with the probable future development of long-range heavy bombers

—perhaps pilotless—flying at very high speeds, it behooves every commander, of whatever nation, to admit that his former conception of strategy has been altered to such an extent that it amounts to a change in our basic principles. And you Americans had better get ready to rewrite the textbooks you've been using at West Point, Annapolis and your other service schools.

The changes to which I refer include those in the tactical methods, by which we implement the destruction of purely military objectives. That is understood. But I go further. They also include those methods by which we formulate our strategy.

In order to crush any nation's will to fight, we attempt to reach and destroy its political and economic centers, including its industrial areas, ports, railways and other means of transportation. That has always been the purpose of both strategy and tactics. And that purpose remains. But the means of achieving it have changed.

Formerly, in order to accomplish the destruction of these centers, we relied upon the ground forces to ultimately reach and destroy or take over each of these targets in turn. But that was formerly.

Now we are about to enter—we seem, in fact, already to have entered—a stage where we don't really need the ground forces at all to reach and attain this strategic objective. Now, with the high-speed, long-range plane carrying the atomic bomb, it is possible to destroy virtually all these centers simultaneously and at a single blow.

Consequently, in the future, we should be able to accomplish this destruction, and thereby achieve our real strategic objective, by striking that one blow. And when we do that, remember, we will have accomplished the object of all military strategy. We will have gained the decision in a flash.

The war will be over, to all intents and purposes, even if enemy forces are still in existence, still unengaged and still undefeated. They will be dependent on supplies which they can never receive. And the employment of our own ground forces will be necessary only if those doomed enemy combat forces continue to wage their hopeless fight to the end.

The next war starts off where this one ended—and a striking example of the conditions under which this one ended and the next one will start off is close at hand. That example is Japan. And Japan's present situation illustrates how those conditions will affect strategy.

You can readily see that it will no longer be necessary to concentrate all your ground forces in the same fashion that it was when the ground forces were the principal factor in the commander's problem. Then we had to deploy them carefully and try to seize advantageous positions for them before we engaged in combat. But no more.

Now you can attack through the air. You can attack from any distance and from any variety of widely scattered bases. And it really isn't going to matter much whether your field armies have been properly deployed or not. The decision will have been gained and the war won or lost far behind them.

But please do not misunderstand me. I am talking about a change in the methods of achieving the objective of strategy—not a change in that objective itself.

Of course, there is no call to change the basic objective of strategy. That always remains the same. We still, as always, will seek to destroy the enemy's will to fight. But the factors which affect that will among the national population have been shifted.

In other words, I feel that it is undeniable that the balance which has heretofore existed between the fighting spirit of a nation and its material resources for war has been dislodged. And it has been dislodged to the side of the material.

Again, I do not wish to be regarded as minimizing the importance of the fighting spirit of the fighting man. We Japanese have always stressed that. And it will continue to be of great importance. But we must admit now that that spirit cannot be regarded as so preponderant in our calculations as it formerly was.

The example of the great Takeda Shingen, which inspired that belief in that spirit, was the basis of the Japanese stress on the offensive. Takeda Shingen is generally unknown to your Western military students. He was an old warrior who lived and fought in Japan about four hundred years ago. He is noted among us for the fact that he was not always depending upon the strength of artificial fortifications.

Takeda Shingen taught us to make a stronghold of the hearts of the troops, rather than one of stone and concrete. And the fighting spirit which composed that stronghold, which he inspired and stressed so much, was the most vital factor in war—until these recent developments in armament came along.

But this wasn't enough to win this war. Our Japanese troops possessed it in the highest degree. They demonstrated it over and over again. But we must admit that it wasn't enough. Our cause was lost even before you had recourse to atomic bombs and long-range bombers. We were fatally handicapped by lack of those material resources that dislodged the balance.

In the defense of Luzon my troops were hampered by lack of such things as gasoline and oil, but their case would have been hopeless even if we had had it. It was hopeless because of our lack of air power. I scarcely need to point out that tanks are useless in modern war without an air umbrella over them. And that we lacked.

Lacking that, as well as so many other things, we simply couldn't match your best tactical strokes. I might add that it seems to me that the basis of all the best tactical strokes given by the Americans was the continuous, perfect coördination of your ground, air and naval forces, working in absolute synchronization.

It was that coördination which simply nailed us down in our positions. I think I felt it most in the fighting at Balete Pass.

But this coördination in tactics is an example of the effort that may be wasted in the future, because the strategic objective may be attained elsewhere while it is going on. That is the big thing which all military men of all nations must keep in mind from now on.

Therefore, from the foregoing facts, we can deduce the following principle:

In the future that country which possesses the largest terrain in area and attains the highest technical progress, that country will be in a highly enviable position.

In fact, it will be almost unbeatable.