



## JAPANESE WAR CRIMES 1937-1945

Between 1937 and 1943, Japanese military aggression spread across East Asia and the Pacific region like a hideous stain. Slaughter, looting, rape, and other forms of appalling brutality, accompanied the conquerors as each country fell victim to the Japanese war machine.



Singapore has fallen, and Britain has been humiliated. Victorious Japanese troops scream "Banzai!" These twentieth century barbarians slaughtered, raped, and looted their way across East Asia and the western half of the Pacific Ocean between 1937 and 1945. Including victims killed in China, historians estimate that the Japanese brutally murdered at least five million captive civilians and prisoners of war.

Historians outside Japan estimate that at least five million captive foreign civilians and prisoners of war were brutally murdered by the Japanese military between 1937 and 1945. To that figure, can be added hundreds of thousands of victims who were slowly murdered by starvation, disease, and beatings in Japanese prisoner of war and internment camps, and hundreds of thousands of women who were brutally raped by Japanese soldiers. The appalling rape figure includes two hundred thousand women in Japanese-occupied countries who were forced into sexual slavery in Japanese Imperial Army brothels. Finally, we cannot forget the terrible fate of hundreds of prisoners of war who were murdered by the Japanese Army's infamous Unit 731 in the course of horrible biological experiments.

### The use of the word "murder" instead of "execution"

I have used the word "murder" in the context of Japanese war crimes when a barbaric act would constitute murder under the civil laws of Western countries and is contrary to the generally accepted laws and usages of war. I find the use of the word "execution" in connection with the victims of Japanese war crimes to be misleading, because the word "execution" can convey a false impression that a victim of Japanese brutality has undergone a semblance of a fair trial that resulted in a lawful order of execution.

### Japanese military atrocities appal and puzzle Western societies

The Japanese conducted their military aggression in East Asia and the Pacific region with a savagery that most Westerners find difficult to comprehend. Even the Nazi Waffen SS troops at their worst would have had difficulty matching the brutality, racism, and fanaticism routinely displayed by the Japanese military; their cruelty towards, and frequent mass slaughter of prisoners of war and captive civilians; their wanton destruction of cities, towns and villages; their raping and looting; and their willingness to fight to the last man and never surrender.

Evidence of that brutality, racism, and fanaticism can be seen in the mass slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians and prisoners of war after the fall of the Chinese capital Nanking (now called Nanjing) in 1937; in the thousands of Allied prisoners of war murdered during the infamous Bataan Death March and Sandakan Death March; in the murders of American Navy airmen captured by the Japanese at the Battle of Midway; in the mass slaughter of Australian prisoners of war after their surrender on the islands of New Britain, Ambon and Timor; in the forced conscription of 200,000 foreign women, mostly Chinese and Korean, to be sex slaves in Japanese Army brothels; in the slaughter from March 1943 of all merchant seaman survivors after their ships had been sunk; and in the order by the Japanese Army to the civilian population of the island of Saipan in the Mariana Islands to kill themselves and their children rather than endure the shame of being captured. Unable to reach the Japanese villagers in time to stop this atrocity, American marines could only watch as hundreds of Japanese mothers threw their children off a cliff onto the coral below and then followed them. These child murders and civilian suicides were praised and encouraged back in Japan.

Some Japanese were taken prisoner but no Australian survived as a prisoner of war during the bloody fighting in 1942 on the Kokoda Track. In addition to murdering all Australians captured by them on the Kokoda Track, the Japanese compounded this horror by killing and eating wounded Australian soldiers.

The brutal treatment of women, children, and other non-combatants by the Japanese military during the Pacific War 1941-45 is especially puzzling, because although Japanese troops were taught that surrender was contemptible and that all foreigners were inferior to them, it was the Chinese who had been singled out for labelling by the Japanese military as sub-human and equivalent to vermin. The Japanese slaughtered British hospital medical staff when Hong Kong fell in December 1942. They slaughtered a group of twenty-one Australian Army nurses who had reached Bangka Island after their ship was bombed and sunk after leaving Singapore. Only one woman survived this massacre to testify at a war crimes trial. The Japanese bombed clearly marked hospital buildings on Bataan in the Philippines. They bombed and torpedoed clearly marked hospital ships in Australian waters in 1942 and 1943. Japanese troops hunted down and murdered two Australian female missionaries who fled inland when the Japanese landed at Buna on the northern coast of the Australian Territory of Papua in 1942. On the Alaskan Island of Attu, Japanese troops overran an American base camp in 1943 and slaughtered all of the patients and medical staff at the field hospital.

The brief references above comprise only a tiny cross-section drawn from many thousands of documented Japanese atrocities committed during the Pacific War 1941-45 and Japan's brutal undeclared war against China that began in 1937. These war crimes were committed in every place reached by Japan's conquering armies and the number of those slaughtered, raped, and brutally treated in other ways can be numbered in millions. The range of Japanese war crimes is so vast that it is not possible on this web-site to cover it extensively, and the material that follows and the historical reference material included at the end of this treatment of Japanese war crimes are primarily intended for those who want to learn more about this dark page in human history.

For those who are tempted to deny the full horror and extent of Japanese war crimes between 1937 and 1945, Lord Russell's book "The Knights of Bushido" is recommended preliminary reading. Lord Russell of Liverpool served in both World Wars and, at the conclusion of the war in Europe, he served as Deputy Judge Advocate General for the British Army of the Rhine. He gave legal advice on the prosecution of war criminals in the British Zone of occupied Germany. See [Historical source material](#).

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