



So Belka, you don't bark anymore?

Earth Thought Notebooks

FURUKAWA Hideo

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Histoire & stratégie

Disturbing and sometimes disturbing, this almost confidential book tells an almost unknown episode of the Second World War: "Nobody knows these things anymore...", writes the author... by Professor Françoise THIBAUT.

In the North Pacific, in June 1942, two North American islands of the Aleutian archipelago were conquered and occupied by the Japanese: Attu Island and, further east, Kiska Island, which they renamed Atsuta and Narukami by raising the banner of the rising sun on June 8. The United States had set up a weather station on the island, where a dozen or so observers lived, who had been repatriated immediately after Pearl Harbour. But their bitch, Explosion, was left there. A Japanese unit was deployed with important equipment and fighting dogs. The only time in the 20th century when the American territory was occupied. The operation was launched as a diversion to the planned attack on Midway, which began on June 5th.

When everything started to go wrong, the Japanese evacuated the two islands, whose climate was terrible, between May and the end of July 1943: two cruisers and nine destroyers evacuated the whole of the 5.200 men, an operation totally unnoticed by the American army because of the thick fog. But they left four dogs on Kiska Island: three Japanese, Masayu, Masaru, and Kita, and Explosion; the four dogs survived as best they could until the return of the Americans in October.

Furukawa recounts the extraordinary destiny of the descendants of these four valiant quadrupeds.

In passing, the author unveils the tradition of using dogs in military theatres of operations, a very ancient practice of all armies: guards, defenders, attackers, sniffers, spies,

messengers, retrievers, stretcher-bearers, and more recently deminers, and then.... eventually, heaters and snacks if there is no other solution. In 1942, the Japanese were 40 years ahead of the Americans in the training of fighting dogs: their first use was in 1904 during the war against Tsarist Russia; later, they were widely involved in the conquest of Manchuria. However, most of their technique came from the German training school: in 1899, the German Shepherd Dog Society was created to support military operations. At the end of the Great War, about 20,000 dogs "did wonders". The Japanese used this knowledge, crossing shepherds with hokkaidos, samoyeds, ushakis, Belgian mastiffs and mongrels too. At the end of the Second World War, all fronts combined, it is estimated that about 500,000 "fighting" dogs were used. Some of them were decorated with great pomp and circumstance.

In short, Explosion finds the Yankees, whom Masaru doesn't like: after biting the first one who approaches him, he commits suicide, like a good Japanese, deliberately, by rushing into a minefield. The Americans reinvest the two islands. Explosion gives birth to five puppies, then dies in January 1944. The two surviving males and the puppies are repatriated to Alaska; these seven survivors are the founders (and founders) of the Marine Hunting School. Their descendants now number in the hundreds of thousands... spread all over the world. Indeed, all these dogs were later engaged in the Korean War, during which some of them remained with the Chinese, the Russians and what was to become North Korea; then a very active role was given to the dogs during the Vietnam War. The descendants of all these "descendants" swarmed in Siberia - on the Russian and Chinese sides -, in Afghanistan (often crossed with local breeds), in the Middle East, in Ukraine... They took part in many operations, not always very gleaming or admirable. Among them, the astonishing Belka, with his numerous descendants, whose intelligence left those who approached and accompanied him stunned.

The work is disconcerting, sometimes of great cruelty, abundant, often delirious, which presents, in addition to its very seriously documented historical account, two particular aspects:

- first, as often in oriental literature, it mixes duly verified historical facts with an imaginary narrative. It is also subtitled "novel". The little girl who becomes a dog, the murdering old man, are all uncertain creations from the Siberian mists. The reader is in the unclassifiable, the savage, whose dreamlike reality cannot be untangled;
- secondly, and perhaps most satisfyingly, many passages, sometimes entire chapters, are told "from the point of view of dogs". This "low" view of events, which is at calf level, conceals a devastating, cynical humor, putting the stupid human manias in a box.

1) Philippe Picquier editor. Successfully published in Japan in 2005, it is not translated into French - remarkably by Patrick Honnoré - until 2011. En Poche in 2015

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