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**[Document 49]: “Your bones are buried in the Japanese soil. Be at ease.” *Human Bullets*, memoir of a soldier in the Russo-Japanese War, 1907.**

The Russo-Japanese War! This tremendous struggle is now happily at an end, and the hundreds of thousands of brave and loyal officers and men have come back from the fields with laurels on their heads, and welcomed by a grateful nation. What a triumphant air! How happy they look! But in their hearts is something behind the joy. At the back of their smiles lie hid the deep sorrow and the often forced-back tears for the multitudes of their comrades who, for the cause of their country and of His Majesty, have turned their bodies into the earth of lone Manchuria and cannot share in the delight of the triumphal return.

Toward the end of the Sinico-Japanese War, a certain detachment was ordered home, and before sailing paid a final visit to the graves of their dead comrades. One private stepped out of the ranks and stroked the tombstone of his special chum, saying with falling tears: —

“Dear Kato! I am going back to Japan. We have faced wind and rain together and fought in the hail-storm of bullets together, and you died instead of me, and I am going home in safety. I feel as if I were not doing right. I am very sad to leave you here alone—but be happy, dear Kato, Liaotung Peninsula is now ours! Your bones are buried in the Japanese soil. Be at ease. Understand, Kato? —I have to go.”

He talked as if to a living friend. Every word was from the bottom of his heart, trying to comfort the departed spirit of his patriotic comrade. His loving bosom was full of a sense of the eternal separation of the living from the dead. He was silent and in tears for a while, then wiped



his eyes and cheeks, offered water to the grave from his water bottle, and reluctantly resumed his place in the ranks.

The detachment who sailed home from Liaotung Peninsula a decade ago learned on their way that the peninsula was wrested from them. Poor Kato, who died with a smile for his country, did he die in vain? And was his heroism all for nothing? The rage and disappointment of his comforter may well be imagined, for after all loyal Kato's ashes were not buried in the Japanese soil.

For ten years we had been waiting and preparing for a chance of chastising the unjust. When the invincible Imperial Army first landed on that battle-ground of ten years before, how eagerly they must have been welcomed by the spirits of their dead friends who could not find a permanent rest buried in a place which was once theirs and then was not. When I landed on the peninsula and printed my footsteps on its earth, I cried out with a spontaneous joy: "This is also Japanese soil! Bought by the blood of our brave fellows at arms!"

I paid constant attention while at the front to find traces of those buried there during the previous war, but could not find even a rotten piece of wood marking such a spot. But I felt sure that their spirits were always with us and guiding us in the battles, stirring us up to do our very best for the country and for the sire.

"Beneath this your elder brothers' ashes are buried! Above here your comrades' spirits must be soaring, unable to find an eternal place of rest! Men die, but their souls do not perish. Your comrades in the world beyond are fighting with you in this great struggle!" were the words with which I used to stimulate men under my command.

Through the abundant grace of Heaven and the illustrious virtue of His Majesty, the Imperial forces defeated the great enemy both on land and sea. Our arms were crowned with an



unparalleled success and our country with awe-inspiring dignity and world-wide glory. And the peninsula wrested from us is once more under our care, the neglected graves of those who perished in the unsuccessful struggle ten years ago are once more being properly attended to. The story of how over one million men left their homes and country, ready and willing to die for the great cause, and of how they passed eighteen months of hardship and privation among the mountains of Liaotung, on the plains of Manchuria, and on the waters of the Yellow Sea and the Sea of Japan, will forever be told to posterity in the history of our country.

The record of the great Russo-Japanese War will be written by the pens of able historians and writers. I simply as an insignificant fighter who took part in what may be called some of the hardest and ugliest battles in the annals of warfare and of strategy, of all times and of all nations, propose herein to describe with a hand not at all familiar with the holding of a pen, recollections of what I personally experienced and observed in the siege of Port Arthur, so that those who have not been in a similar position may picture to themselves the actual scene as best they can.

**Source:** Sakurai Tadayoshi, "Preface," *Human Bullets: A Soldier's Story of Port Arthur*. Trans. Honda Masujiro. London: Archibald Constable & Company, 1907, xiii-xvi.

**Context.**

Two episodes lay behind Sakurai's memoir, which was published just two years after the end of the Russo-Japanese War. First was the Triple Intervention of 1895, when European powers pressured Japan to return the Liaodong Peninsula at the southern tip of Manchuria to China, after Japan had taken that area in the peace settlement ending the Sino-Japanese War. The European coercion spurred an outburst of public anger and created a determination among most Japanese to win Liaodong back. The second episode was Japan's success in securing a new hold on Liaodong in the negotiations that ended the Russo-Japanese War. Like most of his fellow citizens, Sakurai celebrated Japan's triumph in that war in an emotional, patriotic way that ignored how difficult and costly the battles had been and bespoke a thirst for even greater acquisitions on the Asian continent. His account sold 40,000 copies in its first year of publication, providing what its editor called "a sympathetic insight into what the loyal sons of Japan love to call 'Yamato-Damashii,' the Spirit of Old Japan." (*Human Bullets*, viii)

**Questions.**

1. Assess the tone and rhetoric used by Sakurai. How does he justify Japan's war with Russia? Which features of war does he emphasize; which does he ignore?
2. Reading this, what insights do you gain into the role that perceived injustices or wrongs play in stirring up tensions between nations? Can you think of similar cases elsewhere in the world?
3. How might Sakurai's evaluation of the situation in Liaodong be different if he were to consider the attitudes and experiences of the Chinese there?



**Terms.**

*Sinico-Japanese War.* The Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, won decisively by Japan. “Sinico” is an archaic spelling of “Sino.”

*Liaotung Peninsula.* This is the old Romanization for Liaodong, the peninsula at the southern tip of China’s northeastern region, which was called Manchuria.

*The Sire.* This refers to Japan’s imperial ancestors, who often were called the grandsires.

*Siege of Port Arthur.* Port Arthur (Lüshun in Chinese) was the entry port for the Liaodong Peninsula. The siege, one of the most important campaigns of the war, lasted more than five months and claimed some 20,000 lives before the Russians surrendered to the Japanese on January 2, 1905.