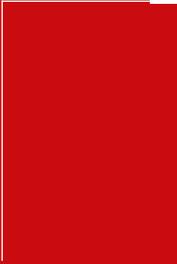




# The Japanese Red Cross in WWI: Humanitarianism for War Victims



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## Introduction

Following Austria-Hungary's declaration of war on Serbia on 28 July 1914, conflict soon engulfed the majority of Europe and large swathes of Asia. Urged by Great Britain, Japan soon thereafter declared war on Germany on 23 August 1914, albeit not legally bound to do so according to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance Treaty. Then, only four days later, Japan severed diplomatic relations with Austria-Hungary and entered into war mode. Japanese forces began landing operations on the Shandong Peninsula on 2 September, attacking the German port of Qingdao (Tsingtao). After a short battle, Alfred Wilhelm Moritz Meyer-Waldeck—then Governor of Tsingtao—surrendered to the Japanese, rendering both German and Austro-Hungarian soldiers prisoners of war (henceforth POWs).

In this chapter, I intend to examine the role of the Japanese Red Cross Society (JRCS) during the First World War (henceforth WWI). Indeed, the Society spearheaded three important undertakings. First, it sent medical personnel to Tsingtao to assist the sick and wounded—this being the first time the organization sent female nurses overseas. Second, it provided services to the POWs taken in Tsingtao, escorting them to Japan for internment. Third, it dispatched medical teams to Japan's allies—Britain, France, and Russia—to treat these nations' sick and wounded.

A discussion of the sources used during this chapter's composition is in order before proceeding. Primary sources consist largely of documents housed in the JRCS Archives, now owned by the Meijimura Museum in Aichi Prefecture and deposited to the Japanese Red Cross Toyota College of Nursing. The JRCS published a report on its relief activities in 1917.<sup>1</sup> The report was not, however, exhaustive, because it concentrated on medical services relating to the war between Japan and Germany and therefore omitted information on the JRCS's deployment of medical corps to Europe that would have been published later. *Nihon Sekijūji Shashi Zokuko Gekan* (*The History of the Japanese Red Cross Society, Vol. III*) contains documents discussing the JRCS from 1908 to 1922 and is more comprehensive than the aforementioned report.<sup>2</sup>

With regard to secondary sources, Olive Checkland gave an account of JRCS humanitarian initiatives during WWI based mainly on English and German sources in Chapter 6 entitled “German Prisoners of War, 1914–18” of her work *Humanitarianism and the Emperor's Japan, 1877–1977*.<sup>3</sup> Kawaguchi Keiko and Kawaguchi Ayako explored the wartime activities of JRCS nurses in *Jugun Kangofu to Nihon Sekijūjisha* (i.e., *Military Nurses and the Japanese Red Cross Society*), devoting an entire chapter, based on *JRCS History*, to the JRCS nurses dispatched overseas during WWI.<sup>4</sup> Kurosawa Fumitaka and Kawai Toshinobu edited *Nihon Sekijūjisha to*

1 Nihon Sekijūjisha (JRCS) ed., *Taisho Sanyonen Seneki Nihonsekijūjisha Kyūgo Hokoku* (*Relief Report of the Japanese Red Cross Society During the War 1914/1915* [hereinafter *Relief Report*]), JRCS, 1917.

2 Nihon Sekijūjisha (JRCS) ed., *Nihon Sekijūji Shashi Zokuko Gekan* (*The History of the Japanese Red Cross Society, Vol. III* [hereinafter *JRCS History*]), JRCS, 1929.

3 Olive Checkland, *Humanitarianism and the Emperor's Japan, 1877–1977*, St. Martin's Press, 1994, pp. 71–78.

4 Kawaguchi Keiko and Kawaguchi Ayako eds., *Jugun Kangofu to Nihon Sekijūjisha: Sono Rekishi to Jugun Shōgen* (*Military Nurses and the Japanese Red Cross Society: Its History and Oral History of Military Nurses*), Bunrikaku, 2008, pp. 48–65.

*Jindo Enjo* (*The History of the Japanese Red Cross Society and Humanitarian Assistance*) in 2009 after the JRCS Archives were made available to researchers.<sup>5</sup> Chapter 6 of their work went into the JRCS's relief activities surrounding the siege of Tsingtao, the deployment of the relief corps to Europe, and humanitarian assistance provided to POWs.<sup>6</sup>

Throughout this chapter, I prioritize JRCS material published by the JRCS in Japanese inaccessible to researchers because of language barriers. While the aforementioned *Relief Report* offered a comprehensive synopsis of the hospital ships and relief activities in Sasebo and Tsingtao, *JRCS History* summarizes the work of the Japanese relief corps sent to Europe and the humanitarian services provided to POWs in Japan. Although these materials are themselves rather comprehensive, since they were edited from JRCS archival documents, I shall refer to these documents when *JRCS History* does not offer sufficient detail.

Lastly, space limitations have forced me to restrict the scope of this chapter to the JRCS's work to benefit those affected by the conflict between Japan and Germany and the war in Europe. Accordingly, I have refrained from discussing the JRCS's humanitarian activities during the 1918–1922 Siberian Intervention.<sup>7</sup> Regarding Japanese names, I have followed standard Japanese convention by writing individuals' family name first and their given name second. Unless stated otherwise, the translations of the Japanese texts used in this chapter were done by myself, the author.

## Japan, the Red Cross, and the Geneva Conventions<sup>8</sup>

Before delving into the JRCS's activities during WWI, I should offer a brief overview of Japan's acceptance of the Red Cross and the first Geneva Convention. While Japan was under a self-imposed isolation for centuries it opened its doors to modern international relations in the mid-nineteenth century. Ten years after the establishment of a new government, a revolt led by Saigo Takamori, leader of retained samurai, occurred in Japan's southern island of Kyushu in 1877. Two aristocrats, Sano Tsunetami and Ogyu Yuzuru, appealed to a member of the imperial family to establish a society to help those wounded in the revolt, resulting in the Philanthropic Society's formation in May 1877, after which date the organization immediately started to carry out activities for wounded soldiers.

5 Kurosawa Fumitaka and Kawai Toshinobu eds., *Nihon Sekijujisha to Jindo Enjo* (*The History of the Japanese Red Cross Society and Humanitarian Assistance*), University of Tokyo Press, 2009.

6 *Ibid.*, pp. 175–195.

7 Regarding JRCS relief activities for those affected by the Siberian Intervention, see *JRCS History*, pp. 484–591. In addition, the JRCS rescued approximately 700 Polish children in Siberia, feeding and sheltering them in Japan from July 1920 to August 1922. See *ibid.*, pp. 829–853.

8 For readers outside Japan, one readily available publication in English that covers, among other topics, the birth of the Red Cross in Japan, is John F. Hutchinson's *Champions of Charity*: Westview Press, 1996, pp. 203–224.

Japan became a party to the first Geneva Convention in 1886, the second non-Christian country to accede to the treaty after the Ottoman Empire. As Japan adopted the Red Cross emblem, the Philanthropic Society was renamed the Japanese Red Cross Society and began using the Red Cross emblem in 1887. Although the Society had started conducting relief activities for victims of natural disasters as early as 1888, its primary objective was to serve an auxiliary function to the military during times of war. Imperial Ordinance No. 223, for instance, was issued in 1901 in which founding principles of the JRCS were laid out. Article 1 of said ordinance articulated that “[t]he Red Cross Society of Japan is authorized to assist the sanitary service of the Army and the Navy within the limits fixed by the Ministers of the Army, and of the Navy.”<sup>9</sup> Article 4 stipulated that “[t]he members of the Relief Corps of [the] Red Cross Society of Japan are subject to the discipline of the Army and Navy, whose orders they are under obligation to obey.” The JRCS thus played an auxiliary role under Japan’s army and navy in times of war, observing their military rules.

After the 1877 revolt, Japan found herself once again embroiled in a series of conflicts, namely, the Sino-Japanese War, Boxer Rebellion, and Russo-Japanese War. As a party to the Geneva Convention and other international treaties, Japan needed to observe her contractual obligations in order to demonstrate that she was indeed an equal partner in the international community. Japan made clear her willingness to adhere to international law in WWI in her declaration of war against Germany: “[w]e also command all our competent authorities to make every effort in pursuance of their respective duties to attain the national aim within the limits of the law of nations.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Relief Activities to the Sick and Wounded in Sasebo and Tsingtao**

### **Overview<sup>11</sup>**

During WWI, the JRCS provided relief and medical assistance to the sick and wounded aboard hospital ships in both Sasebo (Japan) and Tsingtao (China). Two JRCS hospital ships, the *Hakuai-maru* and *Kosai-maru*, were dispatched to China to ferry wounded Japanese soldiers and wounded POWs to Japan. Two relief teams were dispatched to a naval hospital in Sasebo, a Japanese city in Nagasaki Prefecture home to a military port, and two teams to the Chinese city of Tsingtao. The total number of those engaged in relief activities for the sick and wounded was 223.<sup>12</sup>

9 The English version of the imperial ordinance appears on pp. 1–2 of “The Regulations and Miscellaneous Informations [sic] about the Red Cross Society of Japan” in Kawamata Seiichi, *The History of the Red Cross Society of Japan*, Nippon Sekijuuishisha Hattatsushi Hakkajo, 1919. The ordinance was repealed in January 1947 after WWII.

10 John V. A. MacMurray ed., *Treaties and Agreements with and Concerning China 1894–1919, Vol. II, Number 1914/9 Japan*, Oxford University Press, 1921, p. 1153. Note that the clause stipulating that the law of nations be observed was not inserted in Japan’s declaration of war against Great Britain and the United States in December 1941.

11 This section is based on *Relief Report*, pp. 5–16.

12 *Relief Report*, p. 16. Two people were added to the total number as substitutes for two staff members who had fallen ill.

### Hospital ships<sup>13</sup>

The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 taught the JRCs that the organization needed ships to transport sick and wounded individuals. As such, the JRCs obtained the two aforementioned hospital ships in 1899.<sup>14</sup> The Boxer Rebellion of 1900–1901 saw these ships' maiden voyage transporting both Japanese and Western sick and wounded soldiers, with the majority of Westerners being of French origin.<sup>15</sup> While they had been used as liners by Nippon Yusen Kaisha, a Japanese liner company, during peace time, the JRCs repurposed them as hospital ships once war broke out.<sup>16</sup> In line with Article 5 of the 1907 Convention (X) for the Adaptation to Maritime Warfare of the Principles of the Geneva Convention, the two ships were “painted white outside with a horizontal band of red about a meter and a half in breadth.”<sup>17</sup> In addition, as Article 2 requires, the Japanese navy formally notified the German government of the two ships' status as hospital vessels on 24 August 1914.

A total of 102 individuals boarded the two ships: two chief surgeons, six surgeons, two pharmacists, two vice administrative managers, four clerks, two assistant pharmacists, two chief nurses, sixty female nurses, two male nurses, and twenty general laborers.<sup>18</sup> Each ship was deployed eight times to one of the several Chinese ports located in Shangdong from Ujina, Japan between September and December of 1914, which each deployment lasting roughly a week.

*Hakuai-maru* transported 1,013 patients during its eight missions, making the total number of person-days was 4,198. Of the total 1,103 patients, 547 were wounded and 466 were sick. While 428 were wounded in battle, another 119 suffered injuries by other means. The three most common diseases from which the sick suffered from were beriberi (136), respiratory disease (59), and venereal disease (59). *Kosai-maru*, on the other hand, carried 1,040 patients back to Japan over the course of its eight deployments. Of the 1,040 patients, 547 were wounded and 493 were sick. Similar to those on the *Hakuai-maru*, 424 were wounded in battle and another 123 in other circumstances. The three most common diseases were beriberi (117), respiratory disease (89), and nutritional disease (75). Lastly, two patients died aboard *Hakuai-maru* whereas no patients died on *Kosai-maru*.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> This section is based on *Relief Report*, pp. 24–52, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>14</sup> Kita Yoshito, “Byoinsen no Katsuyakushita Hokushinjiheh (Boxer Rebellion in which Hospital Ships Played a Part),” in Kurosawa and Kawai eds., *supra* note 5, pp. 88–90.

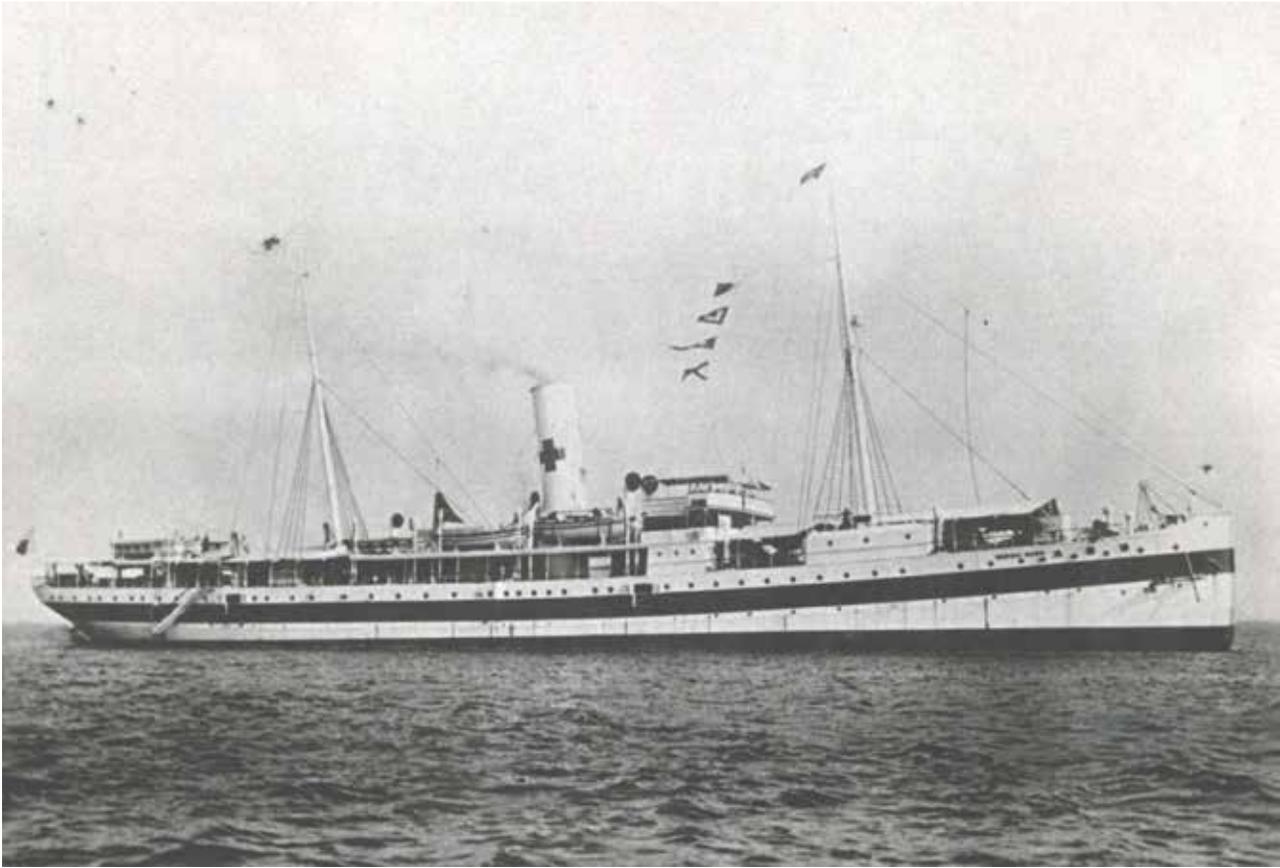
<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 97–100.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 88–89.

<sup>17</sup> ICRC, Historical Treaties and Documents, available at <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Article.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=B98C5D19877E5AFBC12563CD00516EED> (last visited 6 August 2022).

<sup>18</sup> *Relief Report*, pp.15–16.

<sup>19</sup> See Attachment 1.1 in *Relief Report* for the number of patients served by *Hakuai-maru* and Attachment 1.2 in the same work for the number of patients served by *Kosai-maru*. No page number is assigned to either attachment.

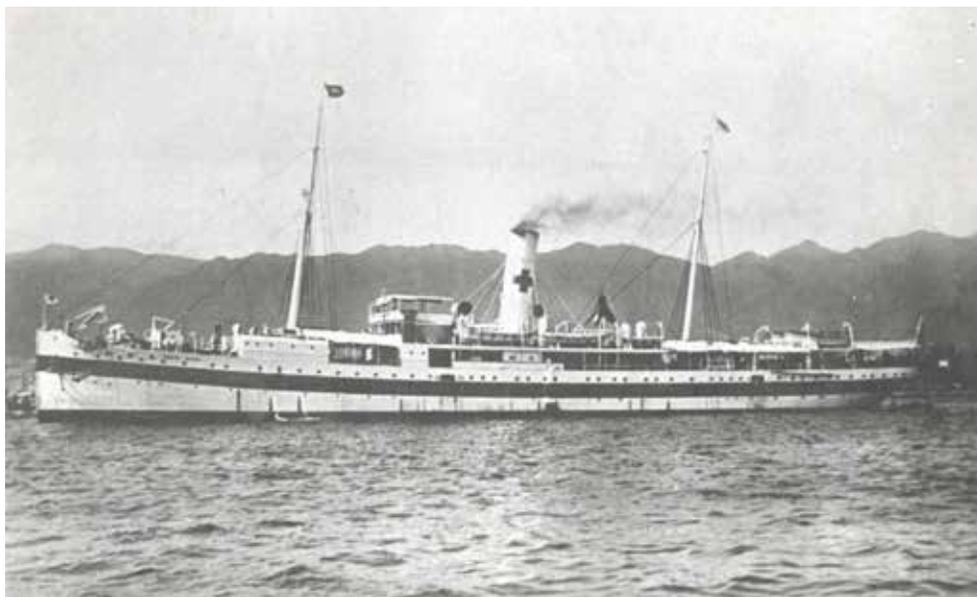


▲ Hospital ship *Hakuai-maru*

The weather was dangerously frigid during the months the ships operated, with frequent storms exacerbating the already precarious conditions. *Hakuai-maru* experienced such inclement weather on her maiden voyage that she tossed around on the sea so violently that “many became seasick” and “care of the patients became very difficult.”<sup>20</sup> Her second voyage was also plagued by bad weather, though fewer people fell seasick. Two patients died of beriberi on these first two voyages. Although neither hospital ship encountered a single German warships throughout the course of their deployment, *Kosai-maru* received warning that a German ship had appeared in the region before leaving a Chinese port. Although not attacked by said German vessel pursuant to the Convention for the Adaptation to Maritime Warfare of the Principles of the Geneva Convention, *Kosai-maru* was ordered by port authorities to remain in port until the warning was cancelled.

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<sup>20</sup> *Relief Report*, p. 27.



▲ Hospital ship Kosai-maru



▲ Inside hospital ship Kosai-maru

While most of the patients aboard the hospital ships were Japanese, thirty-one POWs were ferried to Japan.<sup>21</sup> Before deploying the hospital ships, JRCS president instructed the crew of *Hakuai-maru* that “treatment and nursing must be provided to all patients, be he friend or foe. When you accommodate foreigners, whose culture and customs differ from one another, special care must be taken to build confidence in you.”<sup>22</sup> Documents in *Relief Report* further reveal that “sick and wounded prisoners of war were offered different meals that were acceptable to them.”<sup>23</sup> While Japanese patients were provided with rice porridge, eggs, and vegetables, POWs were served Western-style meals. For instance an officer aboard *Kosai-maru*, for instance, was served oatmeal, fried fish, ham and eggs, curry and rice, boiled potatoes, bread and butter, and tea for breakfast on 23 November 1914.<sup>24</sup>

### Sasebo Naval Hospital<sup>25</sup>

As stated above, the JRCS sent two teams consisting of fifty-two personnel to the Sasebo Naval Hospital. The 17<sup>th</sup> Relief Team sent by the JRCS Nagasaki Branch began operations on 28 October 1914 whereas the 70<sup>th</sup> Relief Team sent by the Hiroshima Branch began on 16 November. In total, fifty-two staff members were sent to Sasebo: two surgeons, two clerks, four chief nurses, forty nurses, and four porters.<sup>26</sup> Both teams ceased their activities on 20 January 1915. The staff worked mainly in operating theatres and contagion wards while stationed in the naval hospital.

The 17<sup>th</sup> Relief Team treated and cared for 377 patients, and the total number of person-days was 6,949. Upon its inception, the 17<sup>th</sup> Relief Team performed surgeries and treated infections. Of the total fifty-five surgeries, two were performed on British servicemen from the HMS *Triumph*. The seventy-five cases of infection included dysentery, typhoid infections, and paratyphoid infections. Both a chief and an assistant nurse were assigned to the two British sailors, with whom they would communicate with body language and hand gestures before gradually learning English. Then on 15 November, the 70<sup>th</sup> Relief Team arrived at the hospital and took over the contagion wards managed by the 17<sup>th</sup> Team. The 17<sup>th</sup> Team remained in charge of the hospital’s surgical wards until 17 December, at which date it transferred responsibility of these wards to the 70<sup>th</sup> Team. There were seventy-two patients at the time of this handover, including eight soldiers who had sustained injuries in battle. Though the 70<sup>th</sup> Team sometimes experienced difficulties in treating incoming patients with critical cases after assuming charge of the hospital’s facilities, patient conditions were, for the large part, adequate.

21 *Ibid.*, Attachments 1.1 and 1.2. Twelve were aboard *Hakuai-maru* and nineteen aboard *Kosai-maru*.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

24 For menus for Japanese patients aboard *Hakuai-maru* between 24 and 30 September 1914 and for the POWs aboard *Kosai-maru* between 22 and 24 November 1914, see *ibid.*, pp. 40–41.

25 This section is based on *Relief Report*, pp. 52–62, unless otherwise stated.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

### Relief Activities in Tsingtao<sup>27</sup>

The Germans surrendered to the Japanese in Tsingtao on 7 November 1914. Three days later, when the Minister of the Army ordered the JRCS to send two relief teams to Tsingtao, the JRCS chapters of Fukuoka and Saga—two prefectures relatively close to China—formed two teams. In addition, a team headed by the headquarters' vice-chief of directors was organized to administer relief activities. Altogether, sixty-seven staff members were dispatched to Tsingtao: One vice-chief of directors, two surgeons, one inspector of nurses, four clerks, four chief nurses, forty nurses, five interpreters, and ten general laborers.<sup>28</sup> The JRCS teams left Moji Port on 18 November and arrived in Lao Shan Bay on 20 November. They finally arrived in Tsingtao on 22 November. The Independent 18<sup>th</sup> Division of the Japanese Army issued an order on 23 December, stating that “(i) The 84<sup>th</sup> and 88<sup>th</sup> Relief Teams shall be engaged in relief activities in Tsingtao. (ii) The 1<sup>st</sup> Field Hospital shall hand over the patients of the German-Chinese High School Hospital to these Teams.”<sup>29</sup> As it was relatively safe from attacks by the Japanese forces, the high school had been used as a hospital to treat seriously wounded patients.

On 26 November, the Tsingtao Defense Army Headquarters became responsible for the High School Hospital, replacing the Independent 18<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>30</sup> Gradually, however, JRCS personnel and patients were sent to Tsingtao Defense Hospital, culminating with the



▲ *Tsingtao Defense Hospital*

<sup>27</sup> This section is based on *Relief Report*, pp. 62–117, unless otherwise stated

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>30</sup> *Relief Report* writes this date as 26 December on page 70; however, it was revised to 26 November in *JRCS History*, p. 311.

eventual closure of the High School Hospital and transfer of JRCS personnel to the Defense Hospital on 18 December by military decree. Formerly the German Governor's Hospital, the Defense Hospital was so utterly destroyed by the Japanese forces that what remained "was the embodiment of the war's horrendous conditions."<sup>31</sup>

One report detailing the care provided by nurses in the High School Hospital describes how one of the school's halls was used as a ward for dysentery patients.<sup>32</sup> Although this 21m x 12m ward was equipped with electrical lighting, it suffered from frequent power outages. Coal was used to heat the ward to an ambient temperature of approximately ten to fifteen degrees centigrade.<sup>33</sup> Beds measured 1.4 meters long, 80 centimeters wide, and 45 centimeters high.



▲ *German-Chinese High School Hospital*

31 *Relief Report*, p. 71.

32 The report was reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 84-96.

33 Degrees Fahrenheit (50 to 60 degrees) were used in this report. See *ibid.*, p. 85.

While patients with mild symptoms were allowed to wear military uniforms, those with severe symptoms were required to wear hospital gowns. Toilets for patients with relatively severe symptoms were located near the ward whereas patients with minor symptoms were required to travel to the basement to relieve themselves. Meals were prepared by German cooks and volunteer women and served by patients with mild symptoms. The report mentioned that although cresol and a soap solution were used for disinfection, the effects of the war rendered disinfection efforts inadequate.

The two Relief Teams treated and cared for a total of was 347 patients in Tsingtao. Of this total, 201 were injured in battle, twelve were injured by other causes, eighty-six suffered from infections, and forty-eight had fallen ill to a myriad of other ordinary diseases. The total number of patient person-days was 5,445.

## **Dispatches of Relief Corps to Europe**

### **Overall Preparation of the Dispatches<sup>34</sup>**

After the Japanese Government requested that the JRCS dispatch relief corps to Britain, France, and Russia, the Standing Council of the JRCS responded on 11 September 1914.<sup>35</sup> The JRCS was tasked both to “organize a relief corps consisting of one doctor, twenty nurses, one clerk able to understand a foreign language, and one interpreter [...] to Britain, France, and Russia to assist the relief efforts of their respective Red Cross Societies.”<sup>36</sup> Since this was the first time that the JRCS sent aid workers to Europe, it was decided that in order for them to keep up with their European counterparts, all individuals “should be at least moderately familiar with foreign languages, their skills should be excellent, their bodies strong, and their minds sound.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Relief Corps in Russia<sup>38</sup>**

After deliberating with Russia, Japan decided on 30 September 1914 that the JRCS would organize a relief corps consisting of one chief surgeon, two surgeons, one pharmacist, one chief nurse, six nurses, and two clerks to work at a 100-bed hospital in the Russian town of Petrograd. The Ministers of the Japanese Army and Navy approved of the dispatch on 8 October, thereby prompting the Japanese Foreign Minister to notify the Russian Government of the developments on the same day.

34 This section is based on *JRCS History*, pp. 341–352, unless otherwise stated.

35 The Standing Council decided that “all the more important affairs of the Society”, according to Article 18 of the Articles of the Red Cross Society of Japan, The English version of the Articles appear in pp. 3–15 of “The Regulations and Miscellaneous Informations [sic] about the Red Cross Society of Japan” in Kawamata, *supra*, note 9.

36 *JRCS History*, p. 342.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 343.

38 This section is based on *JRCS History*, pp. 352–377, unless otherwise stated.



▲ *Opening ceremony of the JRCS Hospital in Petrograd*

The relief corps left Tokyo on 23 October 1914 and arrived in Vladivostok three days later. From there, the team boarded the Trans-Siberian Railway and embarked for Petrograd, arriving there on 16 November. The fourth floor of an “upper class gentlemen’s club” in the busy Italyanskaya district was planned to be used as a hospital. To formally inaugurate the hospital, an opening ceremony attended by Japanese and Russian dignitaries was held on 19 December.<sup>39</sup> The staff consisted of a mix of Japanese and Russian workers, with seven of the eighteen nurses being Japanese and the remaining eleven Russian. The hospital began admitting patients on 20 December 1914, only to reach its total capacity of 100 patients a short five days later. Of these patients, forty-eight suffered from gunshot wounds and forty-three from artillery wounds.

Although the relief corps was initially scheduled to operate in Russia for five months, the corps’ Russian mandate was extended in April 1915 for an extra five months, so as to last until October, as there was no end in sight to the war. After Countess Kleinmichel offered her villa at Yelagin during the summer of 1915, patients were moved to the villa on 23 June, staying there until 3

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 359.

October. Come summer, the JRCS in Tokyo petitioned the Japanese Government to repatriate the relief corps to Japan. The Japanese Ambassador in Russia, however, was insistent that the corps not return to Japan, as the situation on the ground in Russia had not changed since April. The JRCS decided that the relief corps would stay for an additional six months until April 1916, stipulating, however, that this would be the final of such extensions.



▲ *JRCS Relief Corps in Russia*

More patients awaited doctors upon their return from the villa to the Petrograd-based hospital because of the deteriorating conditions caused by the ongoing war. After enlarging the hospital to accommodate 300 patients, the JRCS sent an additional six nurses and one clerk to Petrograd in the final months of 1915. The number of patients, however, continued to decrease until February 1916 as fewer battles were fought during that period. The Winter Palace accommodated about 1,000 patients, and other hospitals even “competed to accommodate” patients.<sup>40</sup> On 27 March 1916, however, the number of patients shot up to 187 and then to 215 by the end of the month before gradually declining once again.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 368.

The relief corps was warmly received by the Imperial Family of Russia. Duke Alexander of Oldenburg greeted the staff at their arrival to Saint Petersburg and visited the hospital on 15 March 1914. On 1 July 1914, Empress Dowager Maria Feodorovna, President of the Russian Red Cross, visited the hospital with Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna where she addressed the entire staff. On 13 January 1916, the Czar awarded the Order of Saint Stanislaus 2<sup>nd</sup> class to Dr. Ueno, the head of the Relief Corps, as well as accommodations and medals to other staff members.<sup>41</sup>



▲ JRCs Hospital in Petrograd

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 373 and Appendix 6, pp. 68–69.

The relief corps finished its activities and handed over the patients to the Russians on 8 April 1916, having served 496 noncommissioned officers and the total number of person-days was 43,531 over the course of its one-and-a-half-year mandate. Many patients were severely wounded by gunshots and artillery shells. Of the total patients treated, 288 fully recovered, six died, and thirty-eight were transferred to other hospitals. The relief corps departed St. Petersburg on 25 April 1916 and arrived in Tokyo via Vladivostok and Korea on 13 May.

Upon request by the Russian Red Cross, one surgeon, Dr. Miwa Minosuke, remained in Petrograd until September 1917, well more than a year after the JRCS Relief Corps' departure from the hospital, treating the sick and wounded.<sup>42</sup> Dr. Miwa's report to the president of the JRCS cites 494 patients before the JRCS Relief Corps' departure<sup>43</sup> and 981 thereafter. The number of patients of person-days before the departure was 44,103,<sup>44</sup> while the number after the departure was 72,188. Since no additional personnel were assigned to the hospital following the relief corps' departure, remaining staff was heavily overworked once newly wounded soldiers began flooding in. Apart from inpatients, the hospital treated "many [outpatients] when riots broke out in the Russian capital."<sup>45</sup> After remaining in Russia for roughly three years, Dr. Miwa returned to Japan in October 1917.

### Relief Corps in France<sup>46</sup>

Japan and France discussed sending a relief corps to France, eventually agreeing to send a team consisting of one chief surgeon, two surgeons, one pharmacist, two chief nurses, twenty nurses, one clerk, two interpreters, and one porter that would leave Japan on 2 December 1914. The hospital was to be located near Bordeaux and would accommodate 150 patients. The Japanese Ambassador to France stated that the relief corps would operate under the supervision of the French Army. The relief corps left Tokyo on 16 December 1914, arriving in Marseille via Shanghai, Singapore, and the Suez Canal on 4 February 1915. Although Bordeaux was originally slated to host the hospital, the Parisian Hôtel Astoria located near the Arc de Triomphe was decided upon. The hospital was named Croix-Rouge Japonaise, Hôpital Bénévole n° 4 bis and admitted twenty-three patients from a British hospital on 14 February 1915.<sup>47</sup> After an official opening ceremony on 3 April, President Raymond Poincaré visited the hospital 24 April where he met 110 patients and the hospital staff.

42 *Zaioto Nihon Sekijujisha Kyugohan Byoin Jokyo Hokoku* (Report on the Japanese Red Cross Relief Corps Hospital in the Russian Capital [hereinafter Dr. Miwa's Report]), included in *Oshu Senran Rokoku Haken Kyugohan Hokoku* (War in Europe, Reports on the Relief Corps Dispatched to Russia), File No. Sen (War) 718, JRCS Archives. *JRCS History* does not contain any information on the Petrograd hospital after the relief corps vacated it.

43 *JRCS History* (p. 370) places this number at 492.

44 *Ibid.* (p. 370) places this number at 43,531. One possible explanation for this disparity is that Dr. Miwa expressly based his calculations on the Julian calendar. See Dr. Miwa's Report.

45 See Dr. Miwa's Report.

46 This section is based on *JRCS History*, pp. 377–405, unless otherwise stated.

47 *Ibid.*, p. 389.

The head of the relief corps, Dr. Shiota Hiroshige, wrote a report on 24 June 1915 in which he described the working conditions of the Japanese nurses.<sup>48</sup> The report stated that language barriers hindering communication between patients and nurses were the greatest difficulty faced by hospital staff. Moreover, volunteer French nurses served meals to patients, wrote letters for them, and applied cleaned bandages alongside the Japanese in the hospital. Although the Japanese nurses were patients' primary caregivers, these volunteer nurses sometimes unwittingly "meddled into" the Japanese nurses' affairs while acting as intermediaries between the patients and JRCS nurses.<sup>49</sup> While the Japanese nurses pick up French words necessary for daily conversation and both their nursing skills and enthusiasm helped them overcome said language barrier, the report emphasized the importance of learning the language.<sup>50</sup> Another difficulty the nurses faced was working with shoes on. Nurses were accustomed to wearing *waraji* (straw sandals) or *tabi* (traditional Japanese socks) in Japanese hospitals as opposed to shoes. The shoes they had brought from Japan were heavy and prevented them from moving with ease. The JRCS hospital ordered lighter shoes in response; however shoemakers were far and few between because of the war. Moreover, the standard French shoes they purchased did not fit Japanese women. The report concluded that "it should be heeded that the relief corps experienced undue hardship in such a trivial matter [as shoes] while overseas—and particularly in France—that might have significant consequences."<sup>51</sup>

Though the corps had been scheduled to remain in France until 13 July 1915, corresponding to a period of five months, "the ongoing war" prevented their departure.<sup>52</sup> The Japanese Ambassador asserted that since "it is currently impossible to infer when peace will be restored and that an increasing number of wounded soldiers would be sent back home," it was necessary to prolong the corps' mandate.<sup>53</sup> The JRCS extended the corps' stay in France for six months, until mid-January of the following year. The extension was indeed necessary, as the hospital housed 149 patients in July, 163 in late September, and 208 in October, thereby exceeding its capacity. A second extension was discussed and agreed upon by Japan and France on 21 December 1915. Since both nations wanted the corps' mandate to remain in France the JRCS Standing Council decided that the relief corps would remain until June 1916.

48 The twenty-first report (24 June 1915, Relief Doc. No. 812) included in *Oshu Senran Futsukoku Haken Kyugohan Hokoku* (War in Europe, Reports on the Relief Corps Dispatched to France [hereinafter Reports on the Relief Corps to France]), File No. Sen (War) 725, JRCS Archives. *JRCS History* did not include any account of this report.

49 *Ibid.*

50 *Ibid.* This report admits that nurses were unable to study French because of time constraints.

51 *Ibid.* The report found the Japanese doctors experienced the same problem with shoes.

52 *JRCS History*, p. 393.

53 The official communiqué was dated 30 April 1915 and reprinted in summarized form in *JRCS History*, pp. 394–395.



▲ JRCS Hospital in Paris

Although his report for the previous year candidly admitted the difficulties faced by Japanese nurses, Dr. Shiota boasted in his report dated 30 March 1916 that the JRCS hospital in Paris had come to achieve widespread acclaim, with British, Italian, Spanish, Swiss, and American newspapers and magazines reporting its activities.<sup>54</sup> This drove even higher numbers of wounded soldiers to seek admission to the hospital, which, in turn, forced hospital staff to consider applications scrupulously. In addition to wounded French soldiers, French civilians and foreigners, such as British and Mexican soldiers, sought treatment in the hospital's facilities.



▲ Inside the JRCS Hospital in Paris

The French Ambassador to Japan forwarded his government's wish that the corps remain in France to the Japanese Foreign Minister in May 1916. This time, however, the JRCS responded that the relief corps needed to return to Japan to deal with an "inevitable situation," thus ending the corps' deployment in France.<sup>55</sup> The JRCS hospital was handed over to the British Red Cross and Dr. Charles Georges Jarvis, who took over responsibility for thirty-seven patients on 1 July.

<sup>54</sup> The fortieth report (30 March 1916, Relief Doc. No. 484) included in *Reports on the Relief Corps to France*, File No. Sen (War) 725, JRCS Archives. *JRCS History* did not include any account of this report.

<sup>55</sup> *JRCS History*, p. 400.

A total of 910 patients were treated between 14 February 1915 and 1 July 1916 and the total number of person-days was 54,832. Of the 910 patients, 858 suffered gunshot wounds and twenty-three died. The French Government appointed Dr. Shiota *officier de la Légion d'honneur* and awarded accommodations and medals to other staff members on 24 June 1916 in honor of their service.<sup>56</sup> The relief corps left Paris on 10 July 1916 via Le Havre and arrived in Southampton on 11 July. They remained in London for several days before boarding *Fushimi-maru* and arriving in Japan on 15 September 1916.

### Relief Corps in Britain<sup>57</sup>

Unlike the relief corps sent to France and Russia, the British Government requested that the relief corps consist primarily of nurses who would care for wounded British soldiers. Accordingly, the JRCS sent a relief corps consisting of one chief surgeon, one surgeon, two chief nurses, twenty nurses, one clerk, and one interpreter whose immediate role would be patient care. The Japanese Ambassador to Britain informed the JRCS on 2 November that the relief corps would be assigned to a Red Cross hospital at Netley, Southampton. The Ministers of the Army and Navy approved of the dispatch on 18 November 1914, paving the way for the relief corps to embark out of the Japanese port of Yokohama on 19 December. After traversing the United States overland, the corps finally arrived in Liverpool on 22 January 1915. They moved to London where they stayed for one week and were warmly received by the British Government and the British Red Cross. They arrived in Netley on 31 January and begin operations on 1 February.

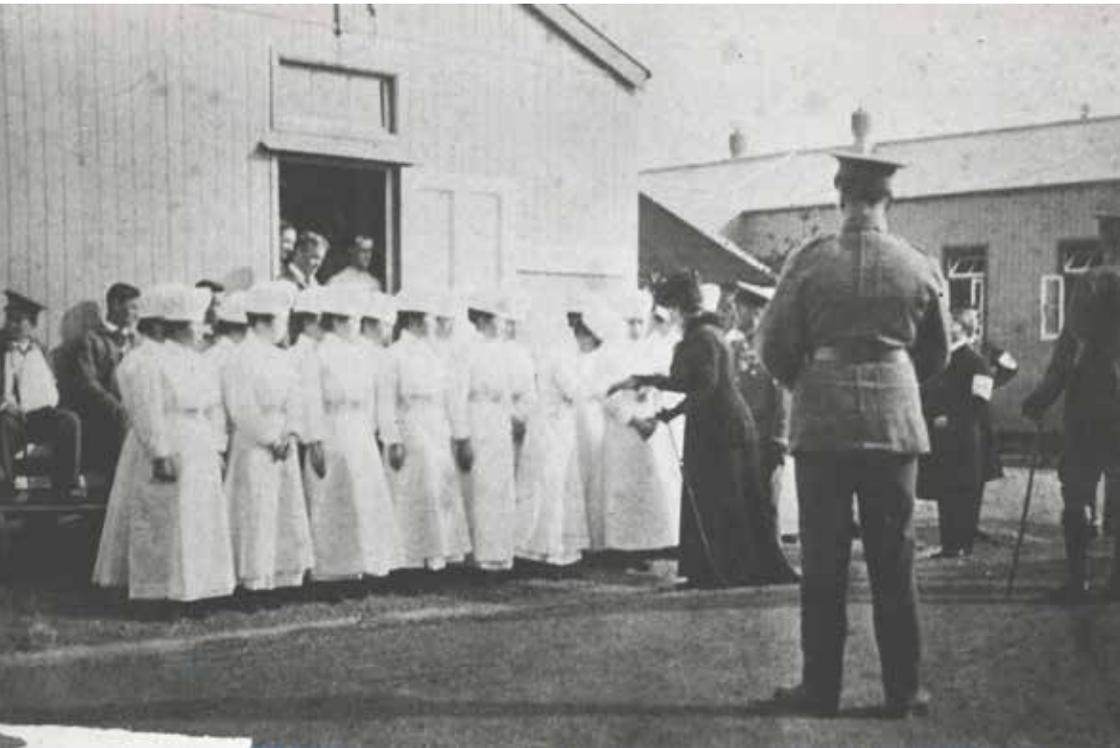


▲ JRCS staff with British patients at Netley

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Appendix 6, pp. 69–71. The French Government had previously appointed Dr. Shiota *chevalier de la Légion d'honneur* on 31 August 1915. *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> This section is based on *JRCS History*, pp. 405–438, unless otherwise stated.

Chief surgeon Dr. Suzuki Jiro complained that the British nurses at Netley had been rushed through their training because of the war and, as a result, were not as proficient as they should be.<sup>58</sup> Although the Japanese staff wanted to work by themselves, the head of hospital insisted that British nurses work with their Japanese counterparts because Britain suffered from a shortage of nurses as qualified as the Japanese nurses who had completed three years of education.<sup>59</sup> At the beginning, there was concern that the Japanese nurses worked with their British colleagues in the barracks of British doctors because “manners and customs were different and they did not understand English well.”<sup>60</sup> However, they had “excellent skills” and “learned English at unexpectedly high speed,” so that “patients trusted them more and more.”<sup>61</sup>



▲ Queen Alexandra shaking hands with JRCs nurses

58 Suzuki Ichō *Eikoku Haken Kyugohan no Kinmujokyo ni Kansuru Enjutsu Yoshi* (Summarized speech by Chief Surgeon Suzuki about the record of activities of the Relief Corps dispatched to Britain), included in *Oshu Oshu Senran Eikoku Haken Kyugohan Kankei, sono ichi* (War in Europe, Documents concerning Relief Corps Dispatched to Britain, No. 1 [hereinafter Documents concerning Relief Corps to Britain]), File No. Sen (War) 719, JRCs Archives.

59 *Ibid.* JRCs History did not mention a shortage of skilled nurses in Britain.

60 JRCs History, p. 418.

61 *Ibid.*, p. 420.

Although the relief corps had planned to stay in Britain until 30 June 1915, the British government requested that their mandate be extended until the end of the war. The JRCS was unable to extend the length of the corps' stay until the end of the war but did extend it for six months until the end of December, a proposal that Britain accepted.<sup>62</sup> By the end of September 1915, the number of patients for whom the Japanese surgeons were responsible had increased to 177 after arriving from continental Europe over the English Channel and from the Dardanelles. Those arriving from continental Europe had been wounded in battle, while those arriving from the Dardanelles had caught an infectious disease. As the Japanese staff, and particularly the nurses, was busy with these new patients and their mandate was scheduled to end in three months, another extension was requested and approved until 31 December. Before the termination of their service, however, two surgeons and two chief nurses were invited to Buckingham Palace on 15 December, where they were received by King George V and Queen Mary. The Order of St. Michael and St. George was bestowed upon the surgeons and the Royal Red Cross upon the chief nurses. Queen Alexandra, who simultaneously presided over the British Red Cross, hosted the entire staff of the JRCS relief corps at Marlborough House on 17 December.<sup>63</sup> The JRCS handed over 109 patients to British surgeons on 31 December 1915 when their mission was officially ended. The relief corps left the British Red Cross Hospital at Netley on 1 January 1916 and arrived in London the same day, where they stayed for three weeks to rest and sightsee. They departed Britain on *Fushimi-maru* on 24 January, arrived in Tokyo on 23 March, and were formally disbanded the following day.

Between 1 February and 31 December 1915, two Japanese surgeons oversaw seven wards and two Japanese nurses were assigned to each ward. A total of 663 patients received care in these seven wards and the total number of person-days was 23,405. The excess Japanese nurses were assigned to British wards, which cared for 1,930 patients and the total number of person-days was 78,809.

## **The JRCS and POWs**<sup>64</sup>

A relief commission was formed for POWs in the Headquarters of the JRCS in December 1914 after receiving the approval of the Ministers of the Army and Navy.<sup>65</sup> Article 3 of the commission's regulations requires it to "contact the Central Agency regarding prisoners of war" established by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and to "undertake

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 421.

<sup>63</sup> Although *JRCS History*, p. 427, refers to this place as Marlborough Hall, Chief Surgeon Suzuki refers to it as Marlborough House in his speech. As such, Queen Alexandra most likely hosted the JRCS staff at Marlborough House. See *The Japanese Red Cross Mission to England* by Dr. J. Suzuki, reprinted from the Transactions of the Japan Society of London, Vol. XIV, included in Documents Concerning Relief Corps to Britain, File No. Sen (War) 719, JRCS Archives.

<sup>64</sup> This section is based on *JRCS History*, pp. 591–622, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>65</sup> The establishment of the Commission is reported in *Bulletin international des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge*, No. 181, Jan. 1915, p. 91.

administrative work regarding prisoners of war in accordance with the Ninth Red Cross International Conference” held in Washington in 1912.<sup>66</sup> Article 3 further stipulated that the JRCS Relief Commission was to follow the procedures laid out by the Central Agency in Geneva while handling cash or other forms of material gifts sent by foreign Red Cross Societies to POWs interned in Japan and that upon receiving a request to inquire into a POW, it would petition the Information Bureau for Prisoners of War and relay what it discovered to the Central Agency. A total of 1,306 gifts and letters were received and another 1,122 sent between December 1914 and January 1920 when the last POW was released. The JRCS also played a role in forwarding gifts and letters to Japanese POWs interned in Germany.



▲ *Prisoners of war patients (officers) in Tsingtao*

66 *JRCS History*, p. 597.



▲ Prisoners of war patients in Tsingtao

Edited by the Information Bureau for Prisoners of War, the “Report about Relief for Prisoners of War” counted 4,353 Germans and 301 Austro-Hungarians among the total 4,654 POWs.<sup>67</sup> They were transported from Tsingtao to POW camps in Japan, where existing army barracks, Red Cross branches, prefectural assemblies, public halls, schools, temples, and other buildings were repurposed as camps. When Governor Meyer-Waldeck stayed at the JRC’s Fukuoka branch, he commented that the building featured “an exquisite view of [...] many old and famous places” in Fukuoka.<sup>68</sup> While the Japanese government was in charge of treating POWs, the JRC lent the government buildings in Fukuoka, Oita, and Shizuoka to house POWs.

## **ICRC Relief Activities for POWs and the JRC**

ICRC president Ador called for POWs to be treated equally to belligerents in Circular 163 issued on 15 January 1915. The JRC transmitted the circular to the Ministers of the Army and Navy, who responded that they did not find it “necessary to add changes to the existing laws and regulations or the actual mode of application” and that “prisoners of war, whether German or Austro[-Hungarian], are, as far as extant circumstances permit, treated by us in conformity with a philanthropic spirit.”<sup>69</sup>

<sup>67</sup> The report is reprinted in *ibid.*, pp. 602–612.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 603.

<sup>69</sup> *JRC History*, p. 600. The response was reprinted in French in *Bulletin international des Société de la Croix-Rouge*, No. 183, juillet 1915, p. 401.



▲ ICRC Delegate, Dr. Paravicini (second from the left), 11 July 1918

In January 1917, the ICRC contacted the JRCS to inform them that the Committee would send three doctors to Japan to visit German POWs. They did not reach Japan, however, because one of them fell ill.<sup>70</sup> The JRCS was informed on 9 May 1918 that the ICRC had appointed Dr. F. Paravicini, who was residing in Yokohama at the time, to visit Japanese POW camps in their stead.<sup>71</sup> Dr. Paravicini visited the camps at Kurume, Oita, Ninoshima, Aonogahara, Bando, Shizuoka, and Narashino between 28 June and 15 July 1918. JRCS personnel accompanied Paravicini as he toured the POW camps, the expenses of which were covered by the JRCS

<sup>70</sup> *Bulletin international des Société de la Croix-Rouge*, No. 190, avril 1917, p. 176.

<sup>71</sup> Letter dated 9 May 1918 from Swiss Minister F. de Salis to JRCS President Ishiguro, included in *Taisho Rokunen ki, Sekijūji Kokusai Iin*, Zai Honpo Dokuou Fūryō Shisatu Kankei (Visits to German and Austrian Prisoners of War in Japan by Members of the International Red Cross, 1917/1918 [hereinafter ICRC visits to Prisoners of War in Japan]), File No. 3130, JRCS Archives.



▲ JRCS staff at the tomb of Florence Nightingale

as per regulation.<sup>72</sup> Paravicini submitted his report entitled *Berecht ueber den Besuch der Gefangenlager in Japan 30. Juni bis 16. Juli 1918, zu Haenden des Internationalen Comites des Roten Kreuzes von Dr. F. Paravicini, in Yokohama, Delegirten des Internationalen Comites*.<sup>73</sup> While this chapter I have sought to introduce readers to the humanitarian activities undertaken by the JRCS during WWI in this chapter, detailed accounts on the services rendered by the ICRC are outside of the chapter's scope. Interested readers, however, can find Paravicini's report on the ICRC's website.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>72</sup> JRCS History, p. 615.

<sup>73</sup> The report is included in *ICRC Visits to Prisoners of War in Japan*, File No. 3130, JRCS Archives. It was later published as follows: Internationales Komitee vom Roten Kreuz, *Dokumente Herausgegeben Während des Krieges 1914–1918 – Berecht des Herrn Dr. F. Paravicini, in Yokohama, über seinen Besuch der Gefangenenlager in Japan (30. Juni bis 16. Juli 1918)*, zwanzigste Folge, Verlag Georg & C<sup>ie</sup>, Basel und Genf, 1919. The report is translated into Japanese and published in Ohkawa Shiro, ed., *Obeijin Horyo to Sekijuuji Katsudo: Paravicini Hakase no Fukken (European and American Prisoners of War and Red Cross Activities: Rehabilitation of Dr. Paravicini)*, Ronsosha, 2005, pp. 179–234.

<sup>74</sup> See ICRC, *Prisoners of The First World War ICRC Historical Archives, List of the Camps*, available at <https://grandeguerre.icrc.org/en/Camps>. Once there, click one of the Japanese camp sites to download the report, which appears in the same form as above.

## Conclusion

The JRCS was created in 1877 to assist soldiers wounded during the Satsuma Rebellion but would go on to play an auxiliary role to the military medical services during the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), Boxer Rebellion (1900-1901), and Russo-Japanese War (1904-05). The JRCS not only remained active but evolved during WWI. First, the Siege of Tsingtao was the first time the JRCS sent female nurses to work overseas, thus paving the way for female nurses, who had only worked inside hospitals in Japan prior to WWI, to be deployed to field hospitals outside Japan. Second, the JRCS sent relief corps to three of Japan's allies—Britain, France, and Russia—marking the first time that the JRCS would dispatch personnel to foreign countries to work under their military rules. Third, the JRCS acted as an intermediary for between the ICRC and POWs. Today, the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their 1977 Protocols detail provisions about the treatment of POWs, according to which the Red Cross, particularly the ICRC, plays a part in protecting. Although the first Geneva Convention did not contain such provisions during WWI, both the JRCS and ICRC spearheaded their own humanitarian initiatives for POWs.