Post-WWI Military Education During a Year of Active Duty

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In April of 1924, forty-five graduates of the Keijo Normal School enlisted for one year of active service in the 79th infantry regiment in Yongsan, Korea. Following their discharge in 1925, they published a "military diary" entitled Gyoshi no ichinen (Watchful Year) which comprised edited selections of the daily journals they kept individually as part of their education. At a time when anti-war anti-military ideology was reaching its peak in post-WWI Japan, these soldiers were expected to act as "bridges between national and military education" in their future roles as primary school teachers. This study examines the published diary to understand the ways that the military's existence was explained to and understood by these teachers-to-be inside the barracks.

During their year of active duty, the soldiers were instructed on more than abstract themes of "loyalty to the sovereign" (chukun) and "love of nation" (aikoku). They were instructed on the value of the military's existence in connection with concrete international circumstances such as the League of Nation's impotency and American intimidation; additionally, they clearly addressed general society outside the barracks when they spoke on such matters in daily life. They regarded life in the military as an experience of great significance for their future lives, likening it to a "national school" (kokumin gakko). In the stories they tell, we begin to understand how the military defined the value of its own existence and sought to legitimate itself to the nation. The "diary" was but a mechanism designed to have the soldiers digest the substance of their education and express it in their own words.

There is no reason to conclude that these soldiers fully internalized the military's logic in the one year of active duty they served. Nonetheless, the publication of Gyoshi no ichinen represents an attempt to communicate with society at large as the agents of a logic taught them by the military. Their intellectual framework and practices are illuminating when considering the continuities between the Taisho period, whose image is one of strong anti-war and peace ideology, and the subsequent institutions of wartime mobilization.