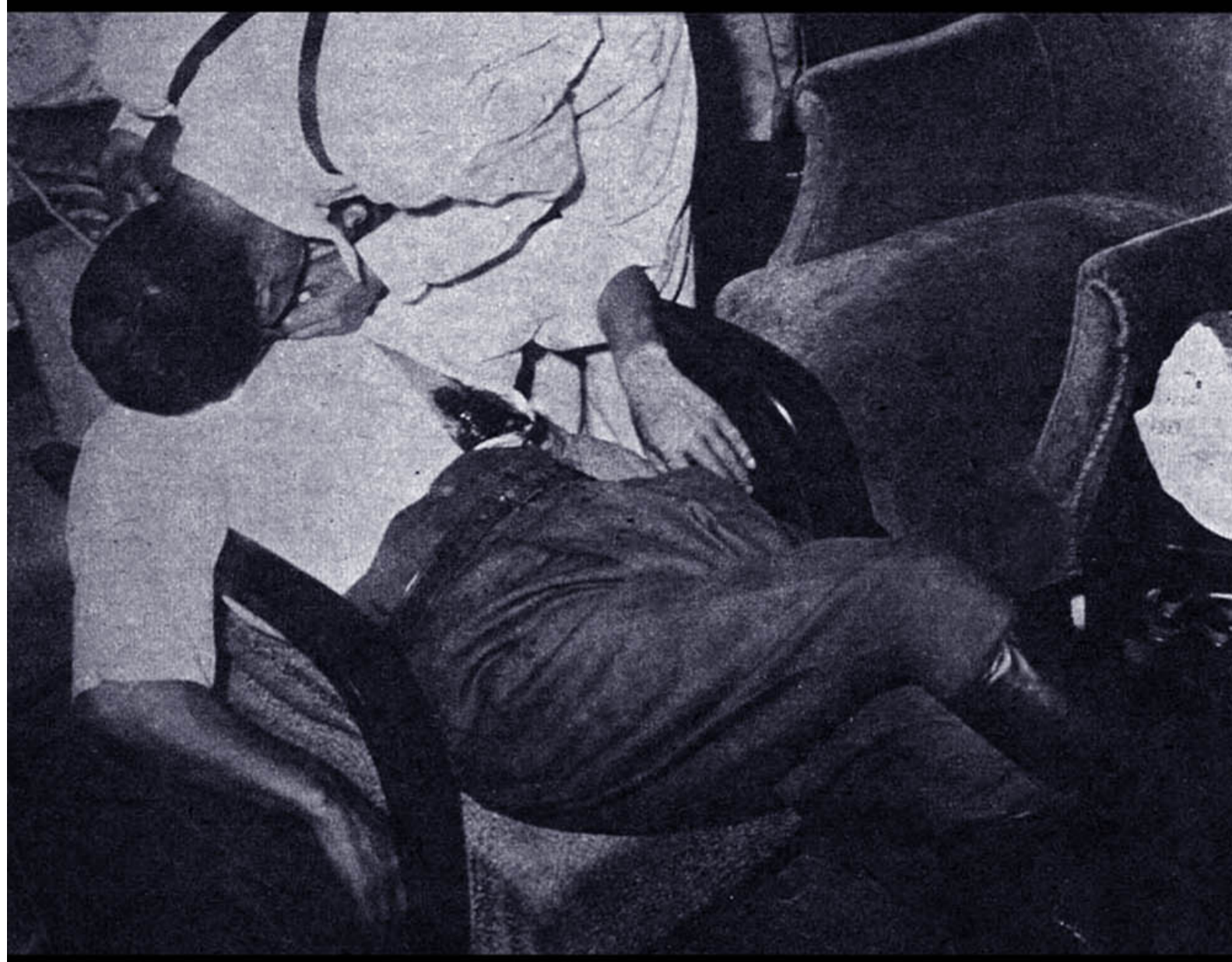


# TOJO'S NEAR MISS

One of the two photographers who were present when ex-Premier Hideki Tojo tried to commit streamlined hara-kiri with a .32, YANK's Sgt. George Burns reports, in pictures and story, how the event appeared to American correspondents on the spot.



Tojo's chauffeur, Shiget Hatakayama, hugged him and cried as he lay wounded in his chair.

**By Sgt. GEORGE BURNS**

**YANK Staff Correspondent**

**T**OKYO—I was sitting in the dining room of the Dai-Iti Hotel in Tokyo, having a late lunch, when Clark Lee, an INS correspondent, came over to the table. He said, "Do you want to eat that or see Tojo get arrested?"

We left the hotel about 12:45 and arrived at Tojo's house in the outskirts of the city some 30 minutes later.

Although orders to pick up Tojo had been issued by Gen. MacArthur's headquarters only an hour before, correspondents had already been after Tojo for two days, trying to obtain personal interviews. We weren't surprised to find two AP men camped out in front. A few minutes later four more showed up. We learned that Tojo was inside but would see no one. On this information things settled down to old newspaper tactics. Each little group of correspondents tried to make deals through Tojo's special police and servants to get in to see the general by themselves.

The house was a modest Japanese home, no more than 25 by 30 feet. The front was of terra cotta, while the sides and rear were of the usual wood. In some portions, sliding screens provided a view of the garden from within. The garden ran all around the house. It had a small walk, a few benches and a table for afternoon tea. Part of it had been dug up and converted into an air-raid shelter. In front of the house was parked Tojo's small Austin-like car.

For about two hours photographers (there were only two: Gorry of AP and myself) and correspondents milled around the place. A few minutes before 4 o'clock, CIC men appeared. We asked them, "Is this it?" and Maj. Paul Kruse, who was in charge of the group, said, "Yep, we're taking him to GHQ in Yokohama."

The group walked up the small path and ran into one of the police guards. There was palaver between Kruse and the guard through an interpreter whom one of the correspondents had brought along. Kruse told him that Gen. MacArthur's representatives had arrived to talk with Tojo.

The guard called someone from inside, and the messages went back and forth but nothing happened. This stall went on for about 10 minutes, with correspondents and Army officers beating around the place trying to find someone who would let them in. Finally a guard came out clad in undershirt and pants. He said that Tojo would see only one man, the officer in charge. While these negotiations were in progress a commotion was stirred up on the other side of the building by Tojo sticking his head out of a window and talking in Japanese to a few men over there. The rest of us ran around to see him.

As he stood there in the window his bald head looked as though it were in a picture frame. I

## TOJO'S NEAR MISS

raised my camera and snapped the picture. Tojo jumped back and closed the window.

Maj. Kruse shouted to the interpreter, telling him to tell Tojo to open up, because we were coming in. Again Tojo appeared at the small two-by-two sliding window and, speaking through the interpreter, he asked if the officers were actually from Gen. MacArthur's headquarters, and did they want to arrest him? Kruse produced his credentials, waving them at Tojo and saying he wanted to come in and ask him some questions. All during the side-window conference I shot pictures of Tojo and he made no further attempt to duck.

Finally he made motions for us to come around to the front door and slid the window closed with a frown. We started back around the house. Just as we reached the front door there was a shot.

Lt. Jack Wilpers of Saratoga, N. Y., quickly opened the front door and leaped up on the typically Japanese raised floor, trying to open the door to Tojo's room. It was locked, so he and Maj. Kruse bucked their shoulders against it. Finally Wilpers stepped back and kicked his big GI shoes through the door panel. I was directly behind him, and as the door panel fell away we saw Tojo slumped in a chair with a smoking pistol grasped in his hand and blood gushing from a wound in the left side of his chest.

A small divan had been placed against the door, and Lt. Wilpers pushed it aside and jumped into the room with pistol in hand. Maj. Kruse shouted to Tojo, "Don't shoot!" Wilpers had his gun trained on Tojo's head and was motioning to him to drop the pistol. The general's eyes were already shut. His head fell over on his shoulder and the gun dropped from his hand.

**T**HEN there was a helluva lot of confusion as correspondents, CIC men, police guards and household help piled through the battered door into the small, cube-shaped room. Sunlight filtering weakly through the frosted-glass window, highlighted the blue hue of the gunpowder smoke, and the acrid smell of powder was still in the air. Tojo was wearing a white, short-sleeved shirt, military breeches and high, brown riding boots. He had placed the chair in which he had chosen to die directly under a large oil painting about five by six feet. The painting showed him on horseback with a group of his staff officers, looking down on a valley in which Japanese soldiers and tanks were smashing triumphantly through Chinese defenses. In the foreground of the picture a tattered flag of China lay trampled in the dust. At the right of his chair propped up against the wall, was Tojo's sword. At his right hand, within easy reach, was a small table on which were another pistol and a hara kiri knife laid out on a white silk scarf. The pistol with which he had shot himself was a .32 colt automatic; the gun on the table was a 25.

By this time Tojo's chauffeur and relative Shiget Hatakayama, was hugging Tojo's head and crying. The general regained consciousness and started to mumble.

Someone yelled above the room's din, "He making a last statement!"

The interpreter was pushed to the head of the crowd, and somebody stuck pencil and paper in his hand. Whatever Tojo said didn't make much sense, so some of the correspondents went back to their notes and the rest just stood and stared at the blood gushing from the wound in his chest. Somebody went in search of a telephone, Maj. Kruse went for the medics and the rest of us stood around waiting for Tojo to die.

Everyone thought that with a bullet through his heart it would be only a matter of minutes before death. As the minutes dragged on, Tojo tossed and mumbled some more and the interpreter said, "He wants to lie down—he wants to die in bed." One of the Army men said, "No, we cannot touch him until the medics arrive." But the general still insisted he be placed in bed.

Finally the Jap police, some correspondents and an Army officer moved him gently over to a small couch in the corner of the room. His head was still toward the front of the building, away from the painting, and one of the Jap house attendants pushed it around so that he could see himself at the height of his career.

In about an hour a Jap doctor appeared. He went over to examine Tojo, but Tojo told him to leave him alone—he wanted to die. Lt. Wilpers said to the doctor, "I order you to do everything you can to save his life." After some hesitation, the doctor checked Tojo's pulse and then stood with a blank stare. Wilpers asked the interpreter why the doctor didn't do something, and he said that the doctor told him that Tojo could not possibly live much longer than an hour or two and

### TOJO'S NEAR MISS

his hospital had been bombed out, so he could do nothing for him. Wilpers still insisted he get busy. So the doctor wrote a note and gave it to a policeman. Before the policeman left, the note was checked by one of our interpreters. After about another hour the policeman returned with a Japanese nurse. She was carrying a little polished metal can in which were a few compresses. The doctor applied these and then retired to the hallway and sat there smoking a cigarette.

It seemed by now that Tojo must have missed hitting his heart. Apparently the bullet entered the body just left of the heart and passed out through his back, leaving a trail of feather stuffing from the chair behind it.

At 6:30 p.m., an Army doctor, Capt. James Johnson of Newark, Ohio, arrived from the 1st Cavalry Division medical squadron with his staff, Lt. Frank Aquino of Los Angeles, Calif., and T-5 Domino Snatarrou of Westfield, N. J., and started giving Tojo blood plasma. At 7 o'clock the doctor announced that he thought Tojo had a pretty good chance of living. He said that if the wound had occurred in combat, it would not have been considered too serious and that thousands of men had recovered from similar wounds during the war.

During the afternoon a note had been found in which Tojo had written that he had shot himself through the heart instead of the head because he wanted everyone to know that it was Gen. Hideki Tojo who was dead. About 7:15, four 1st Cavalry MPs picked up the general, still living, and carried him off to a waiting ambulance.

# YANK

[OldMagazineArticles.com](http://OldMagazineArticles.com)