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A Blessing for Spring



FEATURE—  
Heralding Spring

At 9:22 am on March 20, Wednesday, the sun enters the sign of Aries, the vernal equinox occurs and, according to the solar calendar, spring begins.

In Japan the day is called Shunbun-no-hi, or day of the vernal equinox. Shunbun-no-hi is a national holiday, a day when, according to custom, the Emperor pays respect to his imperial fathers. Formerly there was a festival known as Shunki-koreisai. Now the day is known only as Shunbun-no-hi without the former significance.

Spring in most of Japan, however, does not begin with Shunbun-no-hi. It begins more than a month earlier on a day called "Risshun."

The First Day

Risshun is the first day of spring according to a calendar (koyomi in Japanese) compiled by Yasui Shunkai, a mathematician. The calendar, called Teikyo Koyomi, was adopted in 1685, according to some sources. Many of the present important seasonal dates were established by Shunkai and modern adaptations of the Shunkai Koyomi still guide many families, especially in rural areas.

For instance, the koyomi not only lists solar and lunar dates and information, it is also a book of divination. It lists each day's fortune according to the year of birth, shows how to tell one's fortune according to physiognomy, interprets dreams and acts as a marriage guide. In short, it is the "Farmers' Almanac" of Japan.

Shortly after Risshun, which usually occurs in early February, according to the solar calendar, rites are often held at one of the most abundant of all shrines in Japan. The shrine is the Inari shrine, one of which appears in nearly every hamlet and village throughout Japan.

Farmers' Feast

The festival is known as Hatsu-uma (first horse day). It is a festival for the guardian deity of farmers. There are many customs, but in general it is a day of feasting, entertainment and games for the children. In olden days it was called Haru-matsuri, spring festival, and often was a special market day as well as a day of rites.

The origin of the Inari shrines (never in olden days called Inari, but O-Inari-san for respect) is based partly on historical data and partly on mythology.

In some sources it is said that Kobo Daishi in the year 711 A.D. met an old man carrying a sheaf of rice on his back and recognized him as the deity of his temple. He called this deity Inari, which means "ricebearer."

Kobo Daishi (774-835 A.D.) was a famed Buddhist teacher in Japan and inventor of the hiragana syllabary.

The year 711 A.D. was somewhat before his time.

The shrines are also said to have been started by Empress Gemmyo in 711 for the gods Uga-no-Mitama-no-Kami, Omiyama-no-Mikoto and Saruta-Hiko-no-Mikoto. Other names in other sources include; Princess Ugaji, Princess Ugatama and Princess Ukemochi.

They are described as goddesses of rice, spirit of the barn, goddess of five cereals or in some way related to the growth of rice.

Inari, the name of the shrines when written, means "rice bearer." However, it too has several interpretations. It also is said to be a shortened form of Ina-nari, which means "rice-growth." Princess Ukemochi is said to have grown rice within her stomach and taught the Japanese how to raise rice.

Another story reports that Inari may mean "stay as you are." It has this homonymous meaning. "I" means "to sit" and "nari" means "as you are." To support this meaning it is said that Inari shrines were founded on the castle grounds of feudal lords as a charm to keep the lord from being transferred to another clan.

Although one story reports that Inari shrines were founded by Kobo Daishi, a Buddhist, they are Shinto shrines.

There is an Inari shrine on the grounds of Shirasaki Hachimangu shrine in Imazu.

After the Fox

The shrines are often mistakenly assumed to deify the fox because there is often a pair of stone, wood or ceramic foxes sitting before the entrance.

The fox is a most important theme for folk tales, literature and drama in Japan. It is known for the varied forms of mischief it has played and

in superstition is said to assume many human, animal, plant or spiritual forms. In Japanese the fox is "kitsune."

They appear at Inari shrines because they have been deified as the messengers of the Inari deities.

In this respect it is said that in ancient times there were so many kitsune in one district the farmers began to carry food offerings to one area in hopes that the kitsune would be appeased by the offerings and no longer molest the farmers. The method was successful and the farmers soon made the spot a shrine in belief they had found the place where the messengers of the Inari kami gathered.

Another story says there were two old kitsune, male and female, that made a den near the first Inari shrine and in time were believed to be messengers of the gods of the shrine.

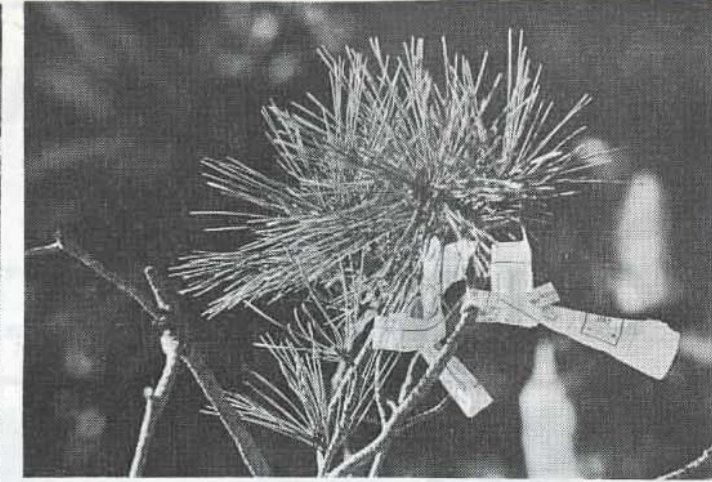
At the shrines, one fox image is often represented with a key in its mouth to represent the barn full of rice. The other fox image is often represented with a ball under one of its forepaws. It is said to be the spirit of Ugatama in some writings and Hoshu-no-tama (treasure-ball or Aladdin's gem) the source of all good in others.

Tales and Legends

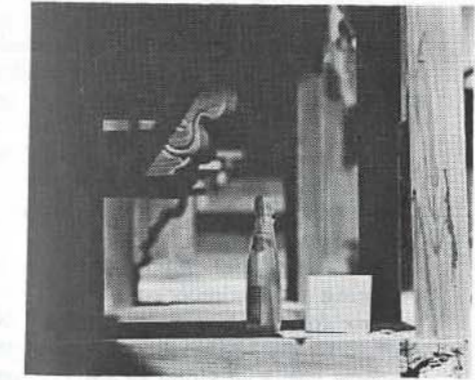
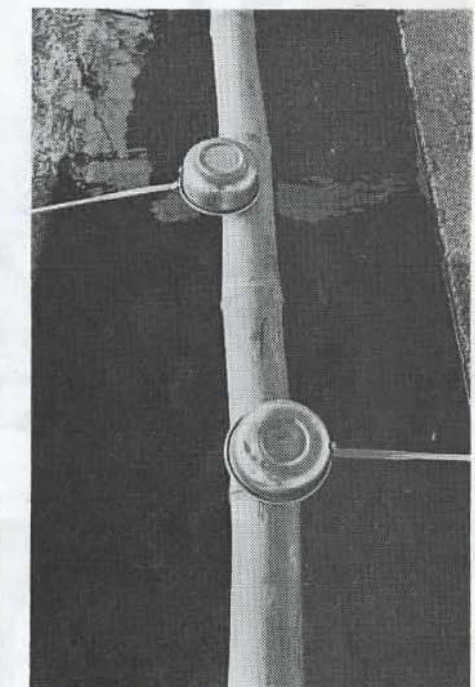
Folk tales abound with stories of tricks kitsune have played on people. Many stories are based on the superstition that kitsune possess people. There were professionals in the olden days who made a business driving the kitsune from those possessed.

Kitsune in stories often prove adept in punishing someone who offends or injures them. For instance, in one of the thousands of such stories, it is said a monk on the way to a gathering of monks came across an old fox sleeping by the roadside. On passing, the monk blew a loud blast on his conch shell trumpet and frightened the fox. Later the other monks saw a fox enter a pool of water and place some leaves on its head. It immediately turned into the first monk. Seeing this the monks expected the fox to impersonate the monk at the meeting. When they saw the monk at the meeting place they began to beat him with anticipation he would turn into a fox. However, he only screamed and moaned for mercy. The fox had returned his unkindness.

There has not been a fox around heralding the opening of spring, but the weather is getting warmer and the days are getting longer. Perhaps spring is indeed here.



Things  
To See  
This  
Spring

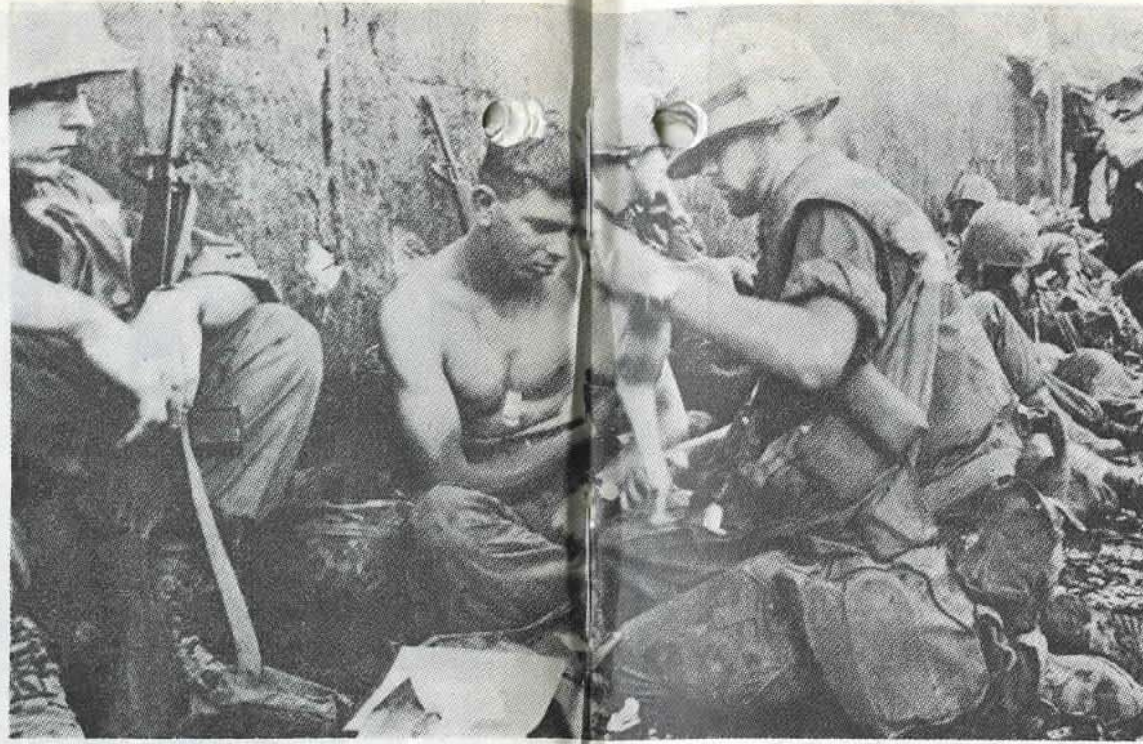
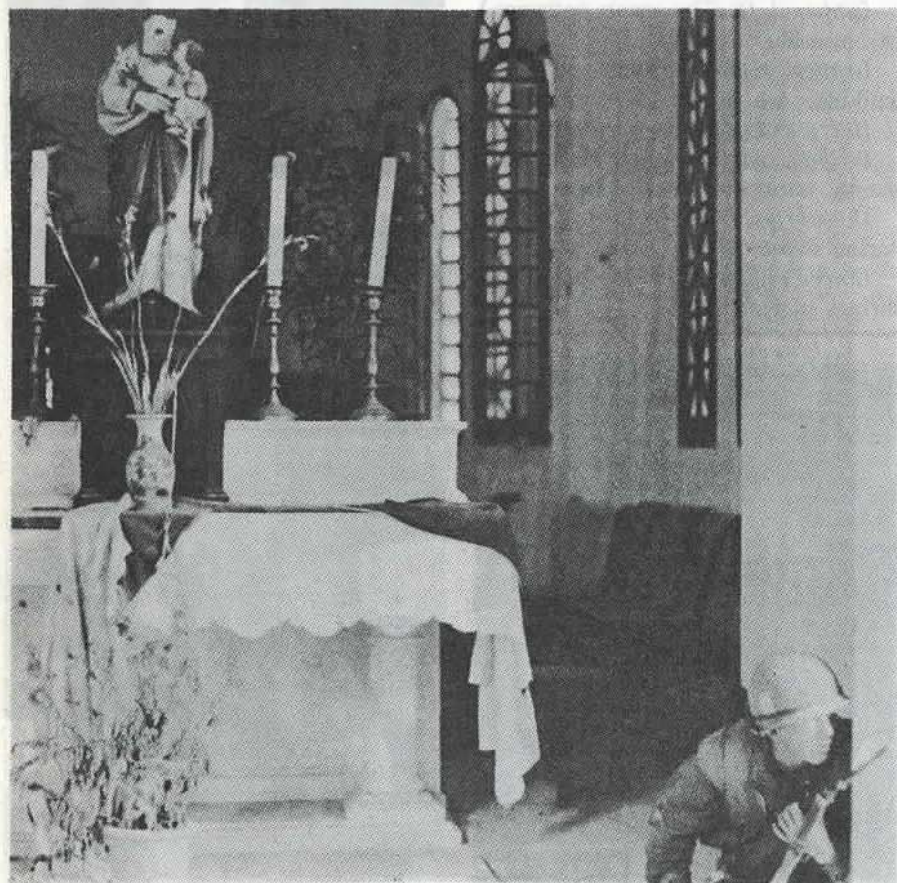
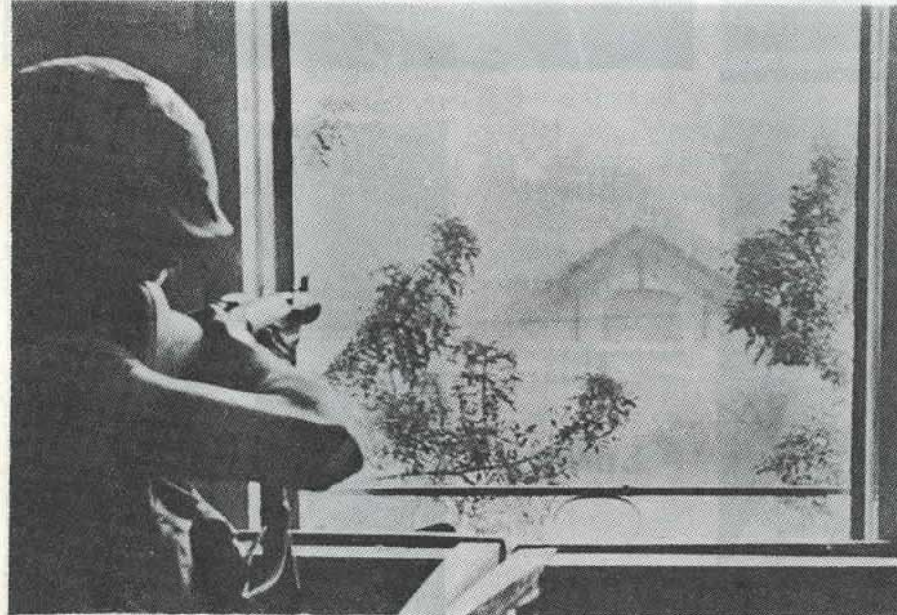


(upper left) The ornate entrance to Shirasaki Hachimangu.  
(upper right) Paper charms, omikugi, are tied to tree branches.  
(left) An offering of sake.  
(right) Before praying, the mouth is purified with water.  
(lower left) A midday visitor during a moment of peace.  
(lower right) One of the small shrines of Hachimangu.





# HUE - WAR IN THE CITADEL



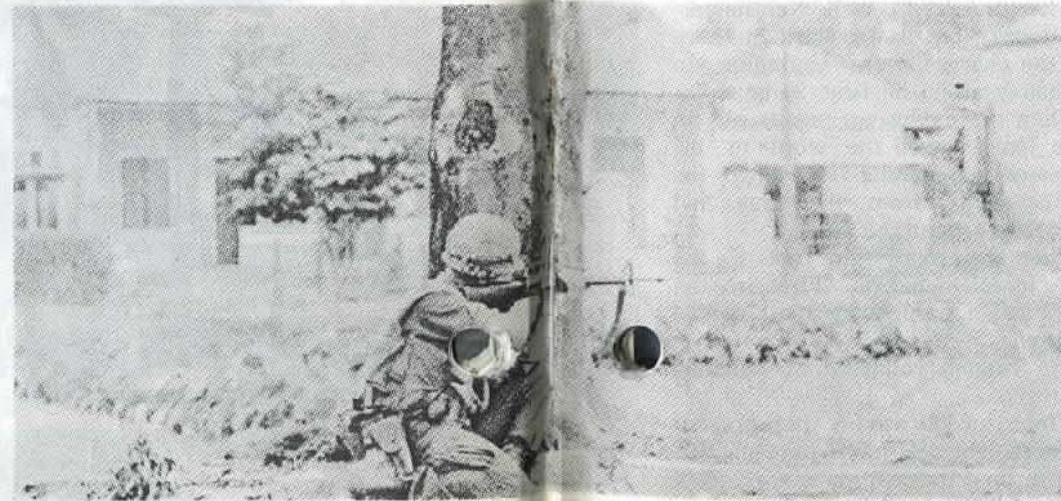
The sound of gunfire, exploding mortar rounds and satchel charges broke the early morning quiet. The NVA and Viet Cong were in open battle for the city of Hue, Mecca of Vietnam. The attempt to take the city had started three weeks before, during the lunar New Year holiday, Tet. While Vietnamese visited pagodas to pray for peace, the Viet Cong were also visiting, but not to pray. They were there to prepare sniper traps and strongholds to use against the allied forces and to force friends into silent passivity.

On February 2, the 2ndBn., 5th Marines and 1stBn., 1st Marines were ordered into Hue to combat the invasion of the city.

Engaged in the first heavy street fighting in 18 years, Marine advances were measured in yards and feet. The advance was met by rocket, mortar, machinegun and small arms fire. Snipers fired on the Marines from every conceivable building and ditch.

The hardest stronghold to crack was the Citadel. It required most of the 22-day battle to conquer. Built in the early 1800's to protect the city from pirates who sailed the nearby China Sea, the walls were more than 12 feet thick and over 2 stories high in most places.

On February 21, the Marines launched a surprise attack on the Citadel at 4 am, charging while the enemy slept. It seemed that the battle for Hue was coming to a close for the Marines. Aided by South Vietnamese Rangers, they breached the walls and were inside the enemy's last defense. The victory was not an easy one, though, because the Viet Cong would not give up. They stuck it out to the last man.





## Quick Lift

Expert maneuvering by a CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter pilot, Capt. Robert E. Godwin of Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron-164, resulted in the rescue of a 10-man reconnaissance patrol surrounded by North Vietnamese Army troops.

The patrol, an element of the 3rd Reconnaissance Bn., was operating west of Hue when they discovered they were in the middle of the larger but unsuspecting North Vietnamese force.

The team evaded the enemy and radioed for emergency extraction. Forces at Phu Bai, consisting of two Sea Knights and two Huey gunships, descended on the patrol.

Upon arrival, the crews found visibility hampered by rain, darkness and low-hanging clouds.

Godwin fired a pencil flare and succeeded in spotting the Marines, who were in a gully on the side of a steep hill.

Due to the rough, near-vertical terrain, Godwin was unable to get closer than 60 feet above the patrol. The rotor blades were spinning only a few feet from the side of the hill.

The crew quickly rigged the craft's hoist mechanism and began pulling the men in, one at a time.

The other CH-46 and the two Hueys covered Godwin, who had to hold the craft in position for 30 minutes.

Upon returning to Phu Bai, the pilot of the other CH-46, Capt. Richard G. Sousa, said, "Capt. Godwin did a remarkable piece of maneuvering, particularly for the length of time involved."

Godwin admitted that he was "really more concerned about the NVA in the area. But, for once, the bad weather helped us a little. I think the NVA could hear us, but due to the terrain and low ceiling, were unable to find us before we got away."

## Names to Know

### MCAS Chain of Command

President  
Sec. of Defense  
Sec. of the Navy  
Commandant  
Assistant Commandant  
CG FMFPac  
CG FMFPac Forward  
CO MCAS Iwakuni  
ExO MCAS Iwakuni  
CO H&HS  
ExO H&HS

Lyndon B. Johnson  
Clark M. Clifford  
Paul R. Ignatius  
Gen. Leonard F. Chapman, Jr.  
LtGen. Lewis W. Walt  
LtGen. Victor H. Krulak  
MajGen. John G. Bouker  
Col. Frank A. Shook Jr.  
LtCol. Richard H. Rainforth  
Maj. Bascom F. Gordon Jr.  
Maj. Ronald E. Blanchard

### Other Important Names

Vice President  
U.S. Ambassador to Japan  
CG U.S. Forces Japan  
Commander U.S. Naval Forces Pacific  
Commander 7th Fleet  
Commander U.S. Naval Forces Japan  
Commodore Fleet Air Wing Six  
CO Marine Aircraft Group Fifteen

Hubert H. Humphrey  
U. Alexis Johnson  
LtGen. Seth J. McKee, USAF  
ViceAdm. Roy L. Johnson  
ViceAdm. William F. Pringle  
RearAdm. Frank L. Johnson  
Capt. John J. Coonan, USN  
Col. Wilbur C. Kellogg

## Nervous Finger

With just 20 days under his belt in Vietnam and only six days in the field, Pfc. William Thomas proved that effective training pays off.

A member of "E" Co., 7th Marines, Thomas was on a four-day search and destroy operation.

Acting as rear security for the lead platoon, Thomas led two other Marines down a trail.

"About 30 meters in front of me," he said, "I saw a hat go down behind a grave mound."

That was all the nervous Marine needed. He wasn't about to take any chances.

As fast as it took him to squeeze the trigger of his M-16, Thomas emptied an entire magazine. Only three rounds were returned by the enemy.

A check of the area revealed one North Vietnamese Army regular dead and one wounded.

"We also found two AK-47 rifles and about 50 pounds of rice," Thomas added.

The entire encounter had lasted one minute.

"I guess all my training really paid off," he concluded. "I didn't even have to think — it was automatic."

## Underground Job

Blowing large Viet Cong caves and tunnels can be a lot of work for a combat engineer, particularly when a tunnel is more than 300 yards long.

Cpl. Douglas A. Jones, a combat engineer attached to "K" Co., 3rd Bn., Fifth Marines, was confronted by such a task recently.

His company had discovered a huge enemy tunnel about 25 miles south of Da Nang. It was so massive that Jones had to request 48 demolition charges (43 pounds each) to be heli-lifted to his position.

Working with a flashlight in cramped, dark quarters, Jones placed the charges every few feet in the tunnel where they would do the most damage. The job took more than three hours and involved a lot of back-breaking work to complete.

"The tunnel was well ventilated," said Jones, "but it was dark in there and the charges were beginning to get heavy after the first 20 or so."

When the explosives were all in place Jones passed the word to his company commander to move the Marines away from the area and prepared to light the fuse.

When the troops were out of the way Jones sounded, "Fire in the hole," and a tremendous blast rocked the area.

The tunnel collapsed, completely destroyed.

While the job was a backbreaker for Jones, the VC have a lot of digging to do if they ever want to replace the tunnel.

