Japanese Holdouts: Registry

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China

Late 1948
An estimated 10-20,000 well equipped Japanese troops were trapped in the mountains of Manchuria and did not surrender until late in 1948. They were caught in a no man's land of civil war stuck between the warring Nationalist and Communist forces and were unable to surrender. Another 140,000 Japanese soldiers went into service with the Red Army or living independently in Communist held areas. Some of these soldiers had been stranded without transportation back to Japan, or were unwilling to return to the American occupied home islands. Others feared disgrace from their families for surrender. Many choose to fight for the Chinese, Russians or the numerous warlords in their region. Others permanently relocated, beginning a new life and starting families where the war had left them.

Philippines

Occupied by the Japanese, and scene of intense fighting in 1945. 4,000 of the 114,000 troops in the Philippines as of August 1945 were still unaccounted for six months after the end of the war, in mid-1946. In the late 40's, only 109 miles from Manila, signs warned about Japanese soldiers still in the hills.

December 1945 - Holdout on Corregidor
A Japanese military person hid out alone in the tunnels under Corregidor for nine months after the island was recaptured by the Americans (March 1945).

January 25, 1946 - Mountain Battle between Filipinos and Japanese
On January 25, 1946 a Japanese unit of 120 men was routed after a battle in the mountains 150 miles south of Manila. The Japanese were armed with small arms and at least one light machine gun. 72 were killed by a Filipino battalion, led by American "Black Hawk" 86th Infantry Division. The survivors were tracked down and most were apprehended.

February 1946 - Post WWII island campaign
In February 1946 on 74 square mile Lubang Island, 70 miles southwest of Manila Bay a seven week campaign to clear the island was begun by the Filipino 341st and American 86th Division.

February 22, 1946 - Lubang island Allied casualties in a post WWII battle

Intense fighting developed on February 22, 1946 when troops encountered 30 Japanese. Eight Allied troops were killed, including 2 Filipinos. The Filipino and Americans sent for an additional 20,000 rounds of small arm ammunition, but not future battles occurred of this magnitude. In early April, 41 members of the Japanese garrison on Lubang island came out of the jungle, unaware that the war had ended.

April 1947- Mortar Team Surrenders

Seven Japanese troops armed with a mortar launcher emerged from Palawan Island.

April 1947 - Fifteen Armed Soldiers

Fifteen armed stragglers emerged from Luzon

January 1948 - Party of 200 Japanese Troops

200 well organized and disciplined troops finally gave themselves up on Mindanao.

March 5, 1974 - Lubang Island - 2nd Lt. Hiroo Onoda

Born in the town of Kainan, Japan in 1922 and when he turned seventeen, he went to work for a trading company in China. In May of 1942, Onoda was drafted into the Japanese Army. Unlike most soldiers, he attended a school that trained men for guerilla warfare. On December 26, 1944 (age 23), Hiroo Onoda was sent to the small tropical island of Lubang Island, which is approximately seventy-five miles southwest of Manila in the Philippines. Shortly after Americans landed, all but four of the Japanese soldiers had either died or surrendered. Hiroo Onda was also with three other holdouts, who had differnt fates:

Private First Class Yuichi Akatsu - (age 22 in 1944) Left the group in September 1949. He managed to live six months on his own before surrendering to the Philippine Army. In 1950, the remaining three found a note left by Akatsu stating that he had been greeted by friendly troops. He even led a group of soldiers into the mountains in search of the remaining men. Onoda and his men quickly concluded that Akatsu was now working for the enemy.

Corporal Shoichi Shimada (age 30 in 1944) In June of 1953 was shot in the leg during a shootout with some fishermen. Onoda nursed him back to health, but on May 7, 1954, Shimada was killed instantly from a shot fired by another search party sent in to find the men.

Private Kinshichi Kozuka -(age 24 in 1944) Killed by two shots fired by local police on October 19, 1972 when Kozuka and Onoda burned rice that had been collected by farmers, as part of their guerillia activities..

Circumstances of His Surrender

Despite the efforts of the Philippine Army, letters and newspapers left for them, radio broadcasts, and even a plea from Onoda's brother they did not belive the war was over. On February 20, 1974, Onoda encountered a young Japanese university dropout named Norio Suzuki who was traveling the wold and told his friends that he was “going to look for Lieutenant Onoda, a panda, and the Abominable Snowman, in that order. The two became friends, but Onoda said that he was waiting for orders from one of his commanders. On March 9, 1974, Onoda went to an agreed upon place and found a note that had been left by Suzuki. Suzuki had brought along Onoda’s one-time superior commander, Major Taniguchi, who delivered the oral orders for Onoda to surrender. Intelligence Officer 2nd Lt. Hiroo Onada emerged from the jungle of Lubang Island with his .25 caliber rifle, 500 rounds of ammunition and several hand grenades. He sureendered 29 years after Japan's formal surrender, and 15 years after being declared legally dead in Japan. When he accepted that the war was over, he wept openly.

Afterwards

He returned to Japan to receive a hero’s welcome. He was a media sensation and was hounded by the curious public everywhere he went. He was unable to adapt to modern life but wrote his memories of survival in a book "No Surrender: My Thirty Year War" After publication, he moved to Brazil to raise cattle. He revisited Lubang island in 1996, and still alive today. He then married a Japanese woman and moved back to Japan to run a nature camp for kids. Anyone with contact information for Mr. Onoda, email me.

Hiroo Onoda photographed immediatly after his surrender in 1974

Hiroo Onoda, 74
In May 1996, returning to the Phillipines: leaves Narita airport near Tokyo for his first trip to the Philippines to visit his former island hideout in the western Philippines.
Kyodo News Service

Lubang Island - Placing flowers at a monument on Lubang Island in the Philippines on May 2, 1996 during his first visit to the island in 22 years. **Kyodo News Service**

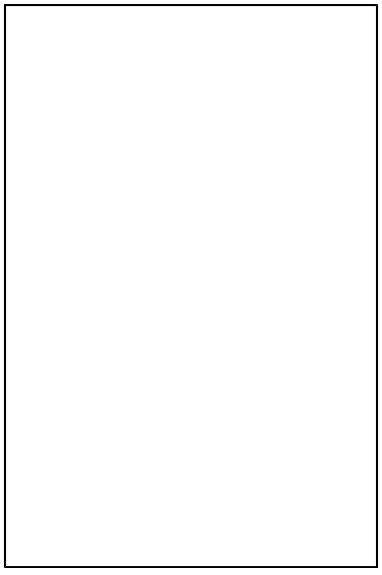
April 1980 - Captain Fumio Nakahira on Mindoro
Captain Fumio Nakahira of the Japanese Imperial Army, held out before being discovered at Mt. Halcon in Mindoro.

January 1997 - 85 Year old Sangrayban discovered on Mindoro
"WAR IS OVER An 85-year-old Japanese soldier has been found on the Philippine island of Mindoro. Going under the name of Sangrayban, he had been living among the Mangyan tribe for 54 years. He had a wife from the tribe who had given him four children and he was in very good health, according to Rufino Baldo, a member of a team searching for such Japanese stragglers. On Mindoro, Sangrayban was one of a group of soldiers who landed on the island in 1943 with orders "not to surrender under any circumstances". He thought that American leaflets dropped over the island in 1945 declaring that the war was over were a propaganda trick. After his companions died, he went native, living among the Mangyan tribe for 54 years. He married a Mangyan women and had four children. He has blocked out all his memories of pre-WWII Japan, but he still speaks an old fashioned form of Japanese. When discovered, he was in "very good health". He does not want to leave his sick wife and is unlikely to return to Japan." NOTE - This story was later proved to be a hoax.

Saipan

Secured July 1944

December 1, 1945 - Saipan Island
Captain Oba and about forty-six other members of his force surrendered to U.S. forces. These were the last organized hold-outs of the Japanese forces in Saipan. The story of Captain Oba's company of Japanese soldiers who held out after the Battle for Saipan hiding in the caves and jungles, carrying out occasional guerrilla actions against U.S. forces. American Memorial Park Website [Website Down] with pictorial history of the event an newspaper clippings. Oba, today deceased. Some of his men made severak return visits to Saipan. The book, "The Last Samurai" by Don Jones tells Oba's story.



Oba's troops surrender their flag.

June 30 1951 - Anatahan Island

A group of stranded survivors of a Japanese vessel sunk by the American military found their way to the island of Anatahan, 75 nautical miles north of Saipan. The island's coast line is precipitous with landing beaches on the northern and western shore and a small sandy beach on the southwest shore. It's steep slopes are furrowed by deep gorges covered by high grass. This brooding cone jutting from the sea floor is a large, extinct volcano with two peaks and a grass covered flat field, the final resting place for a B-29 Superfortress that crashed upon returning from a bombing mission over Nagoya, Japan on January 3, 1945 killing the aircraft's crew.

By 1951 the Japanese holdouts on the island refused to believe that the war was over and resisted every attempt by the Navy to remove them. This group was first discovered in February 1945, when several Chamorros from Saipan were sent to the island to recover the bodies of the Saipan based B-29, T square 42, from the 498th Bomb Group, 875th Squadron, 73rd Wing under the command of Richard Carlson Stickney, Jr. The Chamorros reported that there were about thirty Japanese survivors from three Japanese ships sunk in June 1944, one of which was an Okinawan woman.

Pamphlets had been dropped informing the holdouts that the war was over and that they should surrender, but these requests were ignored. They lived a sparse life, eating coconuts, taro, wild sugar cane, fish and lizards. They smoked crushed, dried papaya leaves wrapped in the leaves of bananas and made an intoxicating beverage known as "tuba", (coconut wine). They lived in palm frond huts with woven floor matting of pandanus. Their life improved after the crash of the aircraft . They used metal from the B-29 to fashion crude implements such as pots, knives and roofing for their hut. The oxygen tanks were used to store water, clothing was made from nylon parachutes, the cords used for fishing line. The springs from machine guns were fashioned into fish hooks. Several in the group also had machine guns and pistols recovered from the aircraft.

Personal aggravations developed as a result of being too long in close association within a small group on a small island and also because of tuba drinking. The presence of only one woman, Kazuko Higa, caused great difficulty as well. Six of eleven deaths that occurred among the holdouts were the result of violence. One man displayed thirteen knife wounds. Ms. Higa would, from time to time, transfer her affections between at least four of the men after each mysteriously disappeared as a result of "being swallowed by the waves while fishing." In July 1950, Ms. Higa went to the beach when an American vessel appeared off shore and asked to be removed from the island. She was taken to Saipan aboard the Miss Susie and, upon arrival, informed authorities that the men on the island did not believe the war was over.

Meanwhile, officials of the Japanese government became interested in the situation on Anatahan and asked the Navy for information "concerning the doomed and living Robinson Crusoes who were living a primitive

life on an uninhabited island", and offered to send a ship to rescue them. The families of the Japanese holdouts on the island of Anatahan , were contacted in Japan and requested by the U. S. Navy to write letters advising them that the war was over and that they should surrender. In January 1951, a message from the Governor of Kanagawa Prefecture was delivered.

The letters were dropped by air on June 26 and finally convinced the holdouts that they should give themselves up. Thus, six years after the end of World War II, "Operation Removal" got underway from Saipan under the Command of James B. Johnson, USNR, aboard the Navy Tug USS Cocopa. Lt. Commander James B. Johnson and Mr. Ken Akatani, an interpreter, went ashore by rubber boat and formally accepted the last surrender of World War II on the morning of June 30, 1951 which also coincided with the last day of the Naval Administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. For more information, read Saipan Oral Histories of the Pacific War by Bruce Petty, page 78, 119-120.

Guam

Secured August 1944

March 1946
A Japanese band of unknown size attacked and killed a six man patrol on Guam.

1961
Two Japanese soldiers hid in the jungle for 16 years after the war. There story is told in a book called The Emperor's Last Soldiers.

Roy Wiggs who was stationed on Guam recalls:
"I remember when they found the two soldiers but other than the fact that one of them was shot and wounded by an overexcited Guamainian while he and his comrade were trying to steal some food. The other one surrendered because he was scared to death and half starved, I don't remember when just that I was there at the time."

January 1972
Corporal Shoichi Yokoi was found by two hunters while he was fishing along the Talofofo River. He brought back his army-issue rifle, which he said he wanted to return to "the Honorable Emperor," adding: "I am sorry I did not serve his majesty to my satisfaction." He had seen reports of Japan's surrender in leaflets and newspapers scattered about the island but refused to surrender because he thought they were American propaganda. "We Japanese soldiers were told to prefer death to the disgrace of getting captured alive," he said. He died on September 23, 1997 click to read his obituary

"I am sorry I did not serve his majesty to my satisfaction...We Japanese soldiers were told to prefer death to the disgrace of getting captured alive,"
Shoichi Yokoi captured in 1972.

Tinian

Secured August 1944

1953 - Murata Susumu
Holdout Murata Susumu was captured in 1953. He was living in a small shack near a swamp since the war. For more information on his capture, read the account of Cristino S. Dela Cruz, who captured him in the book Saipan Oral Histories of the Pacific War by Bruce Petty, page 40

March 1947 - Ei Yamaguchi's Band Attacks US Marines

Peleliu is a small six mile long by three mile wide island. It was originally secured by American Marines in