Japanese Holdouts: Registry

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 different 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 guerilla 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 believe the war was over. On February 20, 1974, Onoda encountered a young Japanese university dropout named Norio Suzuki who was traveling the world 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 surrendered 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.
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

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.
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 lifestyle on an island in the middle of the ocean."
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

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

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

http://www.wanpela.com/holdouts/registry.html
**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 November of 1944 after fierce fighting. A band of 33 Japanese soldiers renewed fighting on the island by attacking a Marine patrol with hand grenades. At that time, only 150 Marines were stationed on the island, with 35 dependents. Reinforcement were called in to hunt down the hideouts. American patrols with a Japanese Admiral sent to convince the troops that the war was indeed over finally convinced the holdouts to come out peacefully.

**March 1947 - Ei Yamaguchi's Band**

Lead by Ei Yamaguchi band emerged from the jungle in two groups in late April, who turned over his sword and unit's battle flags.

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**Papua New Guinea**

**194? - Commander Namotaro Nagai**

Holdout in the mountains above Kaiapit in the Markham Valley just west of Nadzab. In the local language ‘Naganishi means to eat a little. Thus, Nagai himself may have survived the war period on little food, due to lack of supplies as a result of allied blockage of the supply lines. Nagai had a little hideout behind the hills overlooking the entire Markham valley towards Lae and further up towards Dumpu.  

*Thanks to Phil Bradly for this research*

An account in Australian War Memorial Archives:  

"The next day we arrived at Sauruan Village, where the present Kaiapit station is located. This is where the battlefield was, as there was already a Japanese base here before the arrival of the Allied troops after having set up the Nadzab air base. At Sauruan we interviewed Ben Pipias, who also told us of the killing on the Patrol Officer Harry Lumb. There were a lot of tunnels built by the Japanese in preparation of the allied advances. Native labour was used and the people lived with the Japanese."

**1949 - Eight Japanese soldiers Survived in Jungle, with Help of Village Chief**

Four years after the end of the war, eight Japanese soldiers from the forces that had withdrawn across the Finisterres from Finschhafen six years previously were found living 100 kilometres inland from Madang. A sympathetic village chief, had taken pity on them and had helped them to survive in the jungle. In February 1950 they arrived back in Japan. Here they were accepted not as soldiers but as exotic creatures to headlines of "Tarzan lifestyle in the jungle: five years on mice and potatoes."  

*Thanks to Phil Bradly for this research.*

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**Guadalcanal**

**Secured February 1943**

The land fighting officially ended in February 1943, but small bands of Japanese were encountered throughout the rest of the war. Years after the war, skeletons of starved or killed Japanese soldiers were discovered. Bombs and ammunition are still being discovered and defused.

**October 27, 1947 - Holdout Captured Stealing Food**

Four and a half years after the battle of Guadalcanal, and two years since the war ended, the last Japanese soldier surrendered. He was captured while breaking into the Honiara Police compound to steal food. His belongings included a water bottle, a broken Australian bayonet and a Japanese entrenching tool.

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**Solomon Islands**

**Secured February 1943**

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http://www.wanpela.com/holdouts/registry.html
Vella Lavella
As far as the holdout on Vella Lavella, here is what I have: "As recently as 1978 a Japanese straggler was found on Vella Lavella, and rumours of additional Japanese soldiers still holding out in the bush have long been circulated, in hopes of attracting Japanese tourists to the island!" This is from "The South Pacific Handbook" (sixth edition) by David Stanley. It is one of the Moon Travel handbooks. "South Pacific Handbook" 6th Edition by Moon Travel Publications, page 853.

Indonesia

Late 1954 - Japanese 18th Army Survivors
Four stragglers were found who were the remnants of an 18th Army unit ordered to march from Wewak (in New Guinea) to Hollandia (Dutch New Guinea) in April 1944. Of the 89 men who set out originally, 30 had drowned crossing a swollen river and most of the others had died from hunger or disease. The 21 men remaining were in Vanimo when they found out that Hollandia had fallen so they took to the jungle to await help. Initially using stolen rations to survive, they were soon discovered and attacked, driving five of them deeper into the jungle and across the border into Dutch New Guinea where they endeavoured to live off the land. In 1947 one man died from malaria and in 1951 they were discovered by native people of the region. Still not grasping that the war was over, it was not until 1954 that a police detachment brought them out of the jungle. Thanks to Phil Bradly for this research.

Morotai December 18, 1974 - Private Nakamura Teruo
Rumors of Japanese soldiers doggedly hiding out on the island had prompted Japanese officials to coax the loyal troops out from the mountainous interior by playing the wartime national anthem by loudspeaker.

Private Nakamura Teruo was spotted by a pilot of the Indonesian Air Force in an isolated clearing on Morotai around September 1974, but it took two months for the rumour to reach the Japanese embassy in Jakarta. Nakamura, who spent more than twenty years in complete isolation, did not know the war was over, and was convinced he would be killed if he was found. Nakamura was coming out of his little hut on the morning of 18 December 1974 when he found himself surrounded by Indonesian soldiers. He handed over a well maintained rifle and his last five rounds of ammunition. Nakamura was a Formosan Aborigine who had been drafted into the Japanese Army early in 1944, and he was repatriated to Taiwan, and died three years later.

Okinawa

Late 1960's - Early 1970's
When the Americans took the island they simply sealed off the Northern end of the island and left it up to the Japanese to surrender themselves. The last holdout that I know of on Okinawa was captured in this area in the late 1960's or early 70's. (Unconfirmed)

Thailand

Japanese As Communist Guerrillas 1989
When the Malaysian Communist Party surrendered in Southern Thailand in 1989, there were at least two Japanese soldiers. About 200 Japanese consisting of soldiers and civilian employees joined the MPAJA. While most of them joined soon after the end of the war, some who could not support the oppressive Japanese policies deserted the Japanese army to join the MPAJA during the war. They were resolved, together with the Malayan people, to liberate Malaya from British colonial rule. When the MCP finally decided not to wage an anti-British war, Lai Tek considered them to be obstacles to the implementation of this peaceful line. In accordance with his order, nearly 100 Japanese members were killed. Of the remaining one hundred, only two
managed to survive the protracted armed struggle that ended in 1989. Thanks to John Baker for this information