

RIDDLE OF TWO OCTOGENARIANS DISCOVERED ON REMOTE PHILIPPINE ISLAND

Japanese soldiers 'hiding out since 1945 in mountains'



Puzzle: the sister-in-law of Tsuzuki Nakauchi visits his memorial in Japan

TWO elderly men found on a remote island are believed to be Japanese soldiers, in hiding since 1945 and desperate to go home.

Diplomats from Tokyo are investigating the claims of the men, identified by a news agency as Yoshio Yamakawa, 87, and Tsuzuki Nakauchi, 83. Their

BY PAUL SIMS

story emerged when a logger ran into them in the mountains of the southern Philippine island of Mindanao.

They told him they wanted to return to Japan but were afraid of being court-martialled for get-

ting separated from their division and withdrawing from action. They had equipment that suggests they are former soldiers.

According to reports there may be more than 40 other Japanese soldiers living in the mountains, all wanting to go home almost 60 years since Japan formally surrendered.

Japanese embassy representatives are going to the region to interview the men. Prime minister Junichiro Koizumi said in Tokyo he hoped the mystery would be cleared up soon.

He said: "It is a surprise if it's true. We are checking it now."

The reports are reminiscent of Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda, who believed the war was still on when he was found in the jungles of the Philippines in 1974.

He refused to give up until the Japanese government flew in his former commander to tell him personally that the war was over.



JAPANESE SOLDIERS SAID TO HAVE BEEN HIDING FOR 60 YEARS

Wartime: a family photograph of Tsuzuki Nakauchi, believed to be one of the two men

Is the war really over?



Riding out: A young Tsuzuki Nakauchi

From **Simon Atkinson**
in Manila

TWO Japanese soldiers who did not know the Second World War was over have been found in the Philippines jungle after hiding out for 60 years, it was reported last night.

The men, aged 85 and 87, are said to want to return home – but fear they may face a court martial for desertion.

Japanese diplomats who flew to the Philippines had hoped to officially identify the two yesterday at a meeting arranged in the city of General Santos, 600 miles south of the capital Manila.

But the men failed to show up at a hotel, apparently because they were nervous about large crowds that had gathered.

The diplomats are trying to contact a mediator to schedule another meeting this weekend.

Japanese media named the men as 87-year-old Yoshio Yamakawa from Osaka, and 85-year-old Tsuzuki Nakauchi, but the Tokyo government refused to confirm their identities.

Nakauchi's family released an undated picture of him as a young lance corporal on a horse, but gave no further details.

The discovery of the men comes 31 years after a Japanese officer, Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda, was found living in the jungle on the Philippine island of Lubang. He thought the war was still on, refusing to believe notes dropped by aircraft saying it was over.

Onoda would not give himself up until the Japanese government flew in his ex-wartime commander to formally tell him that his country had surrendered to the Allies in September 1945. He was pardoned by Philippines president Ferdinand Marcos and returned home a hero.

Yesterday, Japan's prime minister Junichiro Koizumi said it is unclear whether the two newly-found men are genuine soldiers,

Two Japanese soldiers are found holding out in jungle after 60 years

or whether they had known the war ended 60 years ago. 'If this is true, it's quite a surprise,' he added. 'They've really done well to stay alive this long.' He said the government would make every effort to repatriate them, if that is what they want.

The men were found in the mountainous Columbo area of Mindanao Island – now a hotbed of kidnapping gangs and Muslim rebels. Local news reports said they had made contact with a Japanese who was searching for

the remains of soldiers in the area. Goichi Ichikawa, chairman of a veterans group in Japan, said he believed the reports to be true, and had been told that several other soldiers are living in the mountains of Mindanao.

'It's amazing they were able to survive for 60 years,' he added. 'Of course I am stunned.'

The Philippines was the scene of murderous fighting at the end of the war as U.S. troops drove out the Japanese, who had invaded in 1941. Hiroo Onoda,

trained in guerilla warfare, was left in the jungle with a small band of soldiers and forbidden by his commander to commit suicide. He was told: 'We'll come back for you whatever happens.'

The remaining soldiers died, but Onoda survived on bananas and coconuts. In October 1945, he first saw a leaflet that claimed the war was over – but dismissed it as an Allied ruse.

After returning to Japan, he moved to Brazil, and was last heard of running a ranch there.

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