

AIR POUCH
PRIORITY

CONFIDENTIAL
(Security Classification)

DO NOT TYPE IN THIS SPACE

299,943/4-254

FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : The American Embassy, Tokyo

1372

DESP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON.

April 2, 1954

DATE

REF : Embassy's Despatch 2624, June 8, 1953

15 For Dept. Use Only	ACTION	DEPT.
	FE-4	DC/R-2 OLI-6 L-2 SCB-R UN4
	REC'D	OTHER
	4/7	IN-5 CIA-7 OSD-2 ARMY-3 NAVY-3 AIR-3

J0306

SUBJECT: Discovery of Japanese War Dead Remains on Iwo Jima

3

1. The vernacular and English-language press on March 22 carried a United Press despatch from Iwo Jima which stated that in connection with the recent maneuvers conducted by United States Marines on Iwo Jima the remains of over 2,000 additional Japanese war dead were discovered in caves on the Island. A copy of the article as it appeared in the Mainichi is enclosed. The despatch concerns itself exclusively with this story and states that the bodies were found in sealed caves where they had apparently remained since World War II hostilities on the Island. They reportedly were discovered when the Marines opened the caves in preparation for the current military exercises.
2. As the Department will recall, an official Japanese Government mission was sent to the various Pacific Islands, including Iwo Jima, during February and March 1953, at which time all discoverable remains were presumably properly interred and token portions of the remains returned to Japan. It would appear from the instant report that a good portion of the remains in hidden caves on the Island had not been discovered by the Japanese mission and that their existence has only now come to light.
3. At the time that U.S. permission was granted to the Japanese Government to conduct the war dead repatriation expedition in the Pacific Islands, it was tacitly understood that this expedition was to be the only one of its kind and that any further requests to visit these islands for this purpose would not be favorably received by the U.S. Government. The only exception to this understanding was the granting of permission by the U.S. for Japan to conduct a similar expedition to Attu Island during June and July 1953.
4. The report of the recent finding of the additional remains on Iwo Jima was given wide publicity in the Japanese press. Unfortunately, the United Press despatch reports that "American officials" on Iwo Jima have stated that they believed the U.S. would be willing to work out a plan to enable the Japanese to claim these additional bodies.
5. During the past week, the reporting officer has been twice approached, informally, on the subject by Mr. TSURUMI, Chief of the 5th Section, Asian Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Mr. Tsurumi states that the Welfare Minister has requested him to obtain as much information as possible concerning the number of remains, their state of preservation, possibility of identification, and accessibility. This request, he claims, is principally motivated by the interest

JJConroy:fan
REPORTER

CONFIDENTIAL

INFORMATION COPY

CONFIDENTIAL
(Classification)

shown by the various "bereaved families associations" and religious groups after receipt of word that the remains had been uncovered. In Tsurumi's opinion, the pressure from these groups is sufficiently great that the Foreign Ministry will have to approach the Embassy formally on the subject within the near future, and he has asked what the Embassy believes might be done. He was informed by the reporting officer that any official discussion on the subject should be deferred until more information was available and the interested agencies of the U.S. Government had been consulted. In answer to questions, Mr. Tsurumi said that he thought the Japanese Government would like to send another mission to Iwo Jima to recover the remains and return them to Japan, but he conceded that the memorial services conducted on the island in 1953 were sufficient for all religious purposes and conjectured that, if the U.S. could arrange to have the recoverable remains returned to Japan in some manner, an expedition to the island would not be necessary.

6. On March 25 the Embassy was visited by a delegation from the Federation of Japan Religious Organizations and the Committee for Consolation of War Dead Overseas, headed by Mr. Itaru KISHIDA, Secretary General of the last named organization. Mr. Kishida was the moving force behind the previous war dead repatriation plans, and works closely with and is apparently consulted by the Welfare Ministry on such matters. The delegation expressed their thanks for the cooperation of the United States during the 1953 expeditions to the islands, and asked that it again permit the remains of Japanese war dead to be returned. Mr. Kishida said that he realized that Japan in 1953 had requested permission with the understanding that only one mission would be sent to the islands, but that at that time neither Japan nor the U.S. was aware of the existence of these great numbers of remains. He said that the associations which he represented, as well as the surviving families generally, were requesting the Japanese Government to take action and that they hoped the U.S. Government would extend its assistance and cooperation.

7. It is virtually certain that the Embassy will be approached formally on this question. Although both sides are fully aware of the understanding reached in 1953 that only one such request would be considered, there is considerable merit in the Japanese claim that the remains recently discovered were unknown or inaccessible at that time. It is suggested that if the United States does not wish to permit a second Japanese mission to visit Iwo Jima, the alternative of having the recoverable remains shipped to Japan might be considered. This might be accomplished by the Air Force complement on Iwo Jima, perhaps with the assistance of the Naval authorities exercising administrative control over the Bonin Islands.

8. A telegraphic request by the Naval Attache to the 3rd Marine Division for additional information has received a negative reply; a similar request to the Air Force C.O. on Iwo Jima has not as yet been answered. On March 29 the reporting officer met with Mr. Henry HAYWARD and Mr. Keyes BEECH, two American correspondents who covered the recent maneuvers on Iwo Jima. A memorandum of conversation prepared after that meeting is enclosed for the Department's information. If additional information is received by the Embassy from these or other sources it will be forwarded to the Department.

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL
(Classification)

9. Far East Air Force Headquarters, Tokyo, has also been contacted by Mr. Hisakichi MAEDA, publisher of the newspaper Sangyo Keizai in connection with the Japanese remains on Iwo Jima. Mr. Maeda reportedly requested the assistance of the Air Force in carrying out a "repatriation" program presumably to be sponsored by the newspaper. It is understood by the Embassy that Far East Air Force is willing to extend whatever cooperation it can to such a venture. The Air Attache of the Embassy is informing Far East Air Force that the matter is being referred to Washington by the Embassy and is requesting that no independent action be taken and no arrangements be made with Japanese individuals or groups pending Washington's decision on the subject.

10. Action Requested: It is requested that the Embassy be advised as soon as possible of the answer to be given any request received from the Japanese Government for the recovery of these remains.

FOR THE AMBASSADOR:

Samuel D. Berger

Samuel D. Berger
Counselor of Embassy

Enclosures:

1. March 22 UP Despatch
2. Memo of Conversation

CONFIDENTIAL

UNCLASSIFIED

(Classification)

U.S. OFFICIALS HOPE TO RETURN MORE BODIES FOUND IN IWO JIMA

United Press

Iwo Jima, March 22 — American officials privately expressed hope today that the bodies of Japanese found in caves here could be "properly and respectfully returned to their homeland".

Thousands of bodies of Japanese fighting men have been found in "sealed off" caves here since the end of World War II.

Only recently "2,100 or so" were located. The exact number, officials said, is not known. This point was stressed.

The additional bodies were found when preparations were being made for the current military exercises here.

In one cave alone, some 1,400 Japanese bodies were found.

There were others in additional caves, including one cave which was believed to have been a hospital.

Some of the bodies were in good condition because of the sulfur fumes which seep up with the ashes of this volcanic island.

A marine who took part in the fighting told United Press "there probably are many caves on the island with Japanese bodies in them".

Some time back, Japanese teams went to Iwo Jima to bring the remains of Japanese war dead back home.

It appears they did not find all.

American officials privately told United Press they thought something could be worked out to enable the Japanese to claim these additional bodies.

UNCLASSIFIED