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DEPARTMENT OF STATE INSTRUCTION

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NO.: A- 901 June 4, 1954

Subject: Discovery of Japanese War Dead Remains on Iwo Jima

To: The American Embassy, Tokyo

Reference is made to Embassy Tokyo's despatch 1372, dated April 2, 1954.

The Department referred the subject despatch to the Department of the Navy with the request that consideration be given to the possibility of permitting the Japanese authorities to recover the remains of Japanese war dead reportedly found on Iwo Jima. The Department has now received the following reply:

".... As the Navy Department administers the Bonin-Volcano Islands and Marcus Island through the Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, who is the Military Governor of these islands, I requested the Chief of Naval Operations to review the contents of your letter and pertinent information and to provide me with the necessary information on which to base this reply.

"In February and March 1953, a Japanese war dead repatriation mission, consisting of representatives of the Japanese Government, visited certain islands in the Pacific, including Iwo Jima, for the purpose of conducting 'token disinterment,' holding brief religious services and erecting stone markers where feasible. Details of this expedition were planned and agreed to by officials of the governments of the United States and Japan. In paragraph (1) of this agreement appears the statement that only one visit to the islands will be made by representatives of the Japanese Government in order to carry out this program.

"During the seven week period between early February and mid-March 1953, the Japanese vessel NIPPON MARU, with a party of thirty (30) Japanese officials, priests and laborers aboard, visited Marcus, Wake, Saipan, Tinian, Guam, Angaur, Peleliu and Iwo Jima. Representatives of the staffs of Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet, Commander Naval Forces Far East and Commander Naval Forces Marianas met the NIPPON MARU at all of the above islands except Marcus and assisted the Japanese representatives in carrying out their mission. Following the completion of the ceremonies on Iwo Jima on March 13, 1953, the Japanese Government informed Commander Naval Forces Far East that it was pleased with the arrangements that had been made and with the results of the mission.

"A copy of your letter and a copy of Tokyo Despatch No. 1372 were forwarded to the Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet requesting his comments and recommendations. The Military Governor strongly opposes a repeat visit

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to Iwo Jima for the purpose of removing bodies reported to be in caves on the island. The Military Governor considers that the removal of these bodies would be hazardous because of the presence of live explosives in the caves. Especially he considers that the arrival of war dead remains in Japan would tend to incite anti-United States feelings.

"It may be presumed that there are remains of other Japanese war dead entombed in caves in the Mariana and Caroline Islands. By modifying the original agreement made with the Japanese Government, which emphasized that there would be but one visit to the graves in Nanpo Shoto south of Sofu Gan, such action could be considered as granting tacit approval for future expeditions to the southern islands. If permitted to start, such excursions could extend over a period of years with nothing of a religious nature to be gained. An official of the Japanese Foreign Office, Mr. Tsurumi, has stated that the memorial services conducted on Iwo Jima on March 13, 1953 were sufficient for all religious purposes. On the other hand, repeated war dead repatriation missions could endanger the security of the islands and return of the bodies to Japan could threaten American-Japanese friendship.

"I consider, therefore, that the Japanese war dead program in the Pacific has been completed to the satisfaction of the Japanese Government. Based on the above facts, I am unable to endorse favorably any proposal of the Japanese Government to enter the islands under the administrative or security control of the Navy for the purpose of disinterring additional Japanese war dead remains. I am also opposed to the use of United States or indigenous personnel of the islands to disinter the bodies of the war dead for shipment to Japan."

Using as much of the foregoing as is considered desirable, the Embassy should in its discretion inform the Foreign Office that the United States cannot permit a second Japanese mission to visit Iwo Jima for the purpose of recovering war dead remains and that, in view of the dangers involved in removing the remains from the caves where live explosives are still present, the United States cannot permit the use of United States or indigenous personnel of the island to disinter the remains for shipment to Japan.

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