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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Henry Hayward, Foreign Correspondent, Christian Science Monitor

Mr. Keyes Beech, Foreign Correspondent, Chicago Daily News
Mr. John J. Conroy, Political Officer, American Embassy

DATE: March 29, 1954

SUBJECT: Japanese War Dead Remains on Iwo Jima

I had luncheon on March 29th with Mr. Beech and Mr. Hayward who have just returned from covering the recent Marine invasion maneuvers on Iwo Jima. In the course of our conversation, I mentioned the various press releases which had appeared in the Japanese papers during the past week and which stated that 2,000 Japanese remains had been discovered in caves on the Island. I said that the news stories generally stated that these remains were quite accessible and that military authorities on the island had indicated to newspapermen that they would cooperate in any plan to recover the remains for return to Japan. I mentioned that these reports had — the Japanese to renew their interest in the subject and that undoubtedly there would be some requests for action on the part of the Embassy. I asked the two correspondents if they could shed any light on the story.

Both Hayward and Beech said that the stories were true and that when they heard that they were being published in Japan, they felt that there would undoubtedly be some repercussions, especially since Japanese news cameramen were present on Iwo Jima and had taken numerous pictures of the remains. Mr. Beech, who is well informed concerning Iwo Jima through his participation in the original invasion and three trips which he has made to the island since the war, said that the news reports released so far greatly underestimated the number of Japanese remains which had come to light. He said that an accurate figure would be closer to 10,000.

Mr. Hayward remarked that due both to natural erosion and to the reopening of Japanese caves by demolition charges and by activities in preparation for the Marine exercises, thousands of remains have been brought to light which up to now had not been discovered. Many of them, he said, were in a remarkable state of preservation and could probably be identified. He added that many of the locations would be extremely hazardous to any search party because of the presence of mines and unexploded ammunition and that he doubted whether a thorough search of some caves could be made without risking casualties.

Mr. Beech stated that he had discussed the subject with the Air Force Chaplain stationed on the island and that the latter had made quite a survey of the Japanese underground installations. Mr. Beech said that it appeared to him that many of the American personnel on the island spent their off duty hours in exploring the caves and that they seemed eager to describe their finds in detail to any visitors to the islands. He remarked that he did not believe that the subject of Japanese remains on Iwo Jima could ever be closed unless the United States took positive measures to seal off as many of the caves as

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possible and to enforce "off limits" regulations as far as these areas were concerned. Referring to the hazards involved in searching the caves, Mr. Beech said that in one instance the Marines exploded charges in order to dispose of a quantity of live ammunition in one of the caves. This set off a "chain reaction" of explosions which continued down through the various connecting tunnels so that continuous explosions were heard for a period of 18 hours.

/s/ J. J. Conroy

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