



## **My Drift**

**Title: The Last Japanese Soldier**

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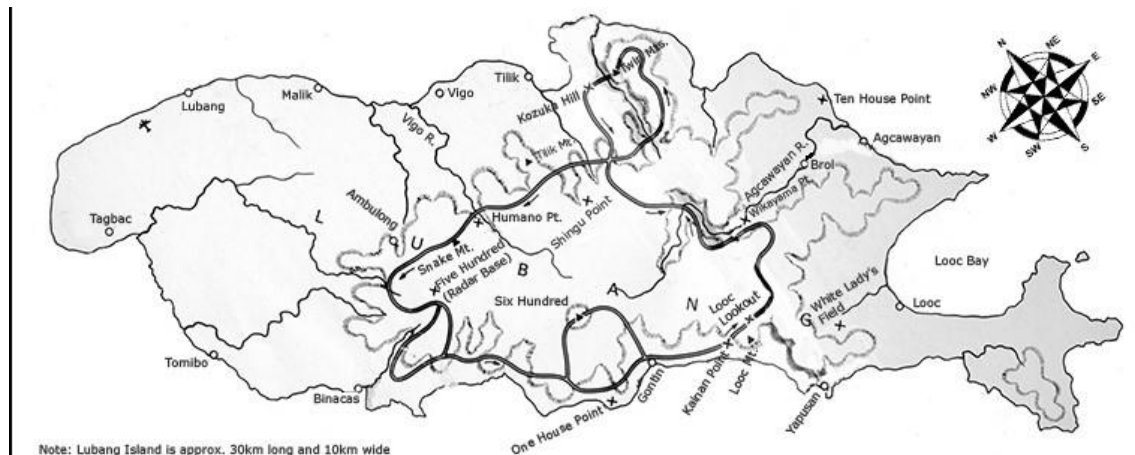
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**Do you remember Second Lieutenant Hiro Onoda? He became famous as the last World War II Japanese Soldier. He was an Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) intelligence officer who fought in World War II and did not surrender at war's end in August 1945. Onoda spent the next 29 years holding out on the island of Lubang in the Philippines until his former commander traveled from Japan to formally relieve him from duty by order of the Emperor in 1974.**

**Most of us remember something about this but I'm going to tell you the rest of the story. I hope you find it as interesting as I did.**

**Onoda had been on Lubang since 1944, a few months before the Americans invaded and retook the Philippines. The last instructions he had received from his immediate superior ordered him to retreat to the interior of the island – which was small and in truth of minimal importance – and harass the Allied occupying forces until the IJA eventually returned. “You are absolutely forbidden to die by your own hand,” he was told. “It may take three years, it may take five, but whatever happens, we’ll come back for you. Until then, so long as you have one soldier, you are to continue to lead him. “You may have to live on coconuts. If that’s the case, live on coconuts! Under no circumstances are you to give up voluntarily.”**

## The Philippines



The island of Lubang is nearly 19 miles long by 6 miles wide. Onoda and his remaining men circled regularly around series of temporary bases, as shown in the above map.

Onoda continued his campaign as a Japanese holdout, initially living in the mountains with three fellow soldiers (Private Yūichi Akatsu, Corporal Shōichi Shimada and Private First Class Kinshichi Kozuka). Onoda complied with such determination that he ignored repeated efforts to persuade him to surrender – by leaflet drop, by loudspeaker and by patrols on the ground – and continued to take the war to the local people. Over the course of three decades, he and a dwindling band of companions killed 30 Lubang islanders and wounded



Young Onoda

100 more in a sporadic guerrilla campaign that saw the once-mighty Imperial Army reduced to the assassination of some cows and the occasional immolation of piles of harvested rice farmed close to the jungle's edge. After the loss of the last of his three men in a firefight with the local police, Onoda soldiered on alone.



**Norio Suzuki and Onoda**

On 20 Feb 1974, Onoda met a Japanese man, Norio Suzuki, who was traveling around the world, looking for "Lieutenant Onoda, a panda, and the Abominable Snowman". Suzuki found Onoda after four days of searching. Onoda described this moment in a 2010 interview: "This hippie boy Suzuki came to the island to listen to the feelings of a Japanese soldier. Suzuki asked me why I would not come out." Onoda and Suzuki became friends, but Onoda still refused to surrender,

saying that he was waiting for orders from a superior officer. Suzuki returned to Japan with photographs of himself and Onoda as proof of their encounter, and the Japanese government located Onoda's commanding officer, Major Yoshimi Taniguchi, who had since become a bookseller. He flew to Lubang where on 9 March 1974, he finally met with Onoda and fulfilled the promise made in 1944, "Whatever happens, we'll come back for you," by issuing him the following orders:

1. In accordance with the Imperial command, the Fourteenth Area Army has ceased all combat activity.
2. In accordance with military Headquarters Command No. A-2003, the Special Squadron of Staff's Headquarters is relieved of all military duties.
3. Units and individuals under the command of Special Squadron are to cease military activities and operations immediately and place themselves under the command of the nearest superior officer.



**Second Lieutenant Hiro Onoda Finally Surrenders**

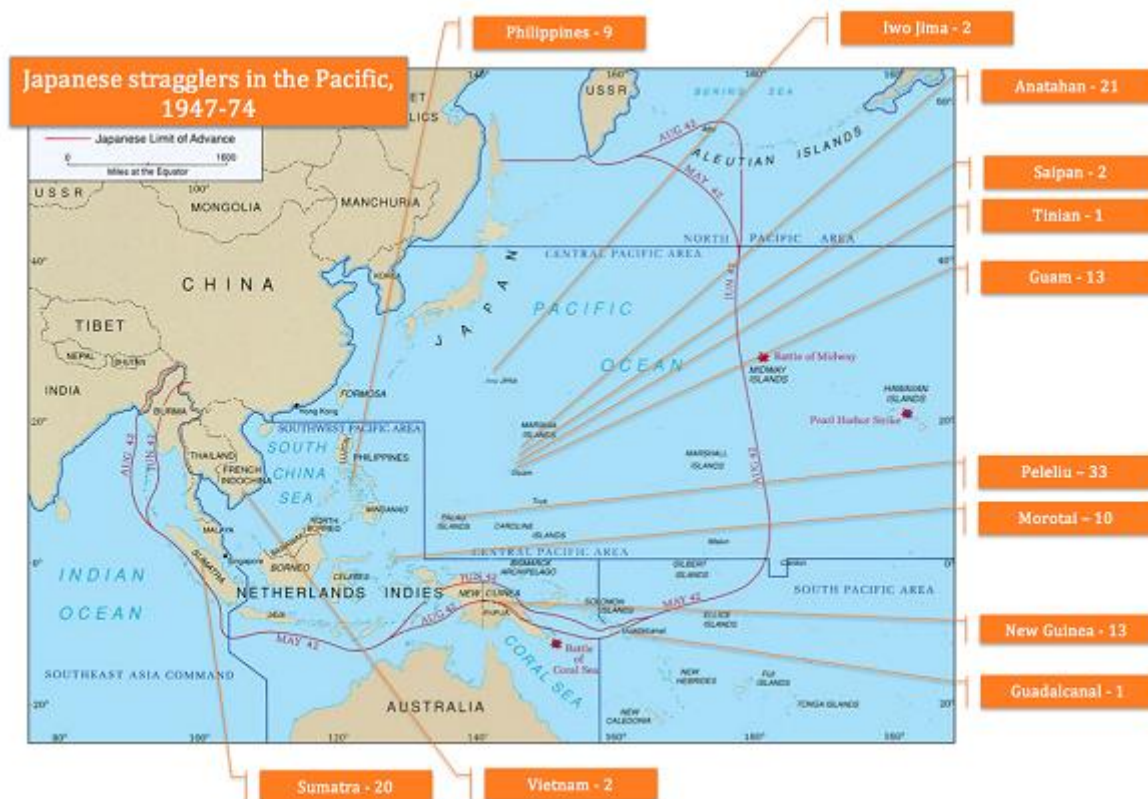


Onoda was thus properly relieved of duty, and he surrendered. He turned over his sword, his functioning Arisaka Type 99 rifle, 500 rounds of ammunition and several hand grenades, as well as the dagger his mother had given him in 1944 to kill himself with if he was captured.

Though he had killed people and engaged in shootouts with the police, the circumstances (namely, that he believed that the war was still ongoing) were taken into consideration, and Onoda received a pardon from President Ferdinand Marcos.

**Onoda returned home to Japan and received a hero's welcome. The rest of his story will continue later in this article.**

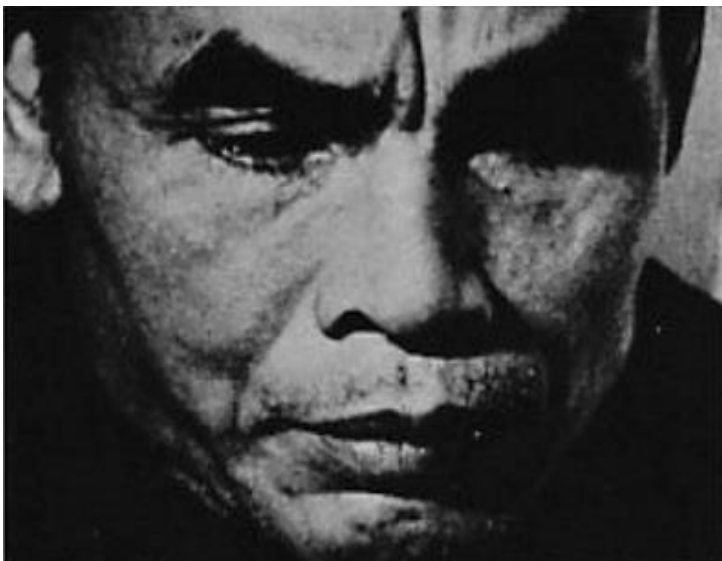
**Private Teruo Nakamura (中村 輝夫) Born 8 Oct 1919 Died 15 Jun 1979 at age 59**  
But first, it's time to tell you that Hiroo Onoda was not the last World War II Imperial Japanese Army soldier to surrender. The final straggler's name was Teruo Nakamura. He was a Taiwan-born soldier from the indigenous Amis tribe, who fought for Japan and did not surrender until late 1974. He is the last known Japanese soldier hold-out to surrender. He survived deep in the jungles of Morotai for 30 years after the end of World War II – becoming the last of more than 120 stragglers to be rounded up on various islands in Indonesia and the Pacific between 1947 and 1974.



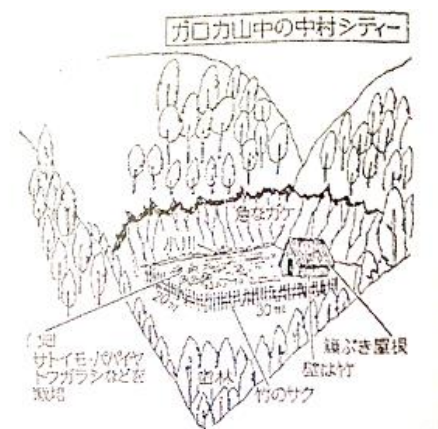
After the capture of the island, it appears that Nakamura lived with other stragglers on the island until well into the 1950s, while going off for extended periods of time on his own. In 1956, he apparently decided to relinquish his allegiance with the other remaining holdouts on the island and set off to construct a small camp of his own, consisting of a small hut in a 20 x 30-meter fenced field.



**Morotai Island in Indonesia**



**Teruo Nakamura**



**“Nakamura City” – a clearing in the Garoka mountains and the Taiwanese straggler’s home for almost a quarter of a century**

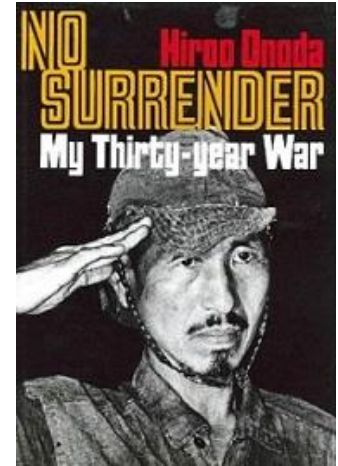
Nakamura's hut was accidentally discovered by a pilot in mid-1974. In November 1974, the Japanese Embassy in Jakarta requested the assistance of the Indonesian government in organizing a search mission, which was conducted by the Indonesian Air Force on Morotai and led to his arrest by Indonesian soldiers on 18 December 1974. He was flown to Jakarta and hospitalized there. News of his discovery reached Japan on 27 December 1974. Nakamura decided to be repatriated straight to Taiwan, bypassing Japan, and died there of lung cancer five years later in 1979. The Taiwanese Kuomintang government initially did not receive him well, because it considered him a Japanese loyalist. Nakamura just wanted to be left alone.

**Okay, why is Onoda famous and called “The Last Japanese Soldier”?** Because Teruo Nakamura was not Japanese. He could not even speak Japanese. Nakamura's repatriation and his perception in the Japanese public at the time differed

considerably from that of earlier holdouts, such as Hiroo Onoda, who had been discovered only a few months earlier and who was both an officer and an ethnic Japanese. As a private of a colonial unit, Nakamura was not entitled to a pension and thus received only a minimal sum of ¥68,000 (US \$227.59 at the time).

### **Later life of Hiro Onoda**

Onoda was so popular following his return to Japan that some Japanese urged him to run for the Diet (Japan's bicameral legislature). He also released an autobiography, *No Surrender: My Thirty-Year War*, shortly after his return, detailing his life as a guerrilla fighter in a war that was long over. The Japanese government offered him a large sum of money in back pay, which he refused. When money was pressed on him by well-wishers, he donated it to Yasukuni Shrine.



Onoda was reportedly unhappy being the subject of so much attention and troubled by what he saw as the withering of traditional Japanese values. In April 1975, he followed the example of his elder brother Tadao and left Japan for Brazil, where he raised cattle. He married in 1976 and assumed a leading role in Colônia Jamic (Jamic Colony), the Japanese community in Terenos, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil. After reading about a Japanese teenager who had murdered his parents in 1980, Onoda returned to Japan in 1984 and established the Onoda Shizen Juku ("Onoda Nature School") educational camp for young people, held at various locations in Japan.



**Onoda Revisits the Philippines**

Onoda revisited Lubang Island in 1996, donating US\$10,000 for the local school on Lubang. His wife, Machie Onoda, became the head of the conservative Japan Women's Association in 2006. He used to spend three months of the year in Brazil. Onoda was awarded the Merit medal of Santos-Dumont by the Brazilian Air Force on 6 December 2004. On 21 February 2010, the Legislative Assembly of Mato Grosso do Sul awarded him the title of "Cidadão do (Citizen of) Mato Grosso do Sul."

**Onoda was affiliated to the openly revisionist organization Nippon Kaigi, which advocated a restoration of the administrative power of the monarchy and militarism in Japan.**

**Onoda died of heart failure and complications from pneumonia on 16 January 2014 at age 91 at St. Luke's International Hospital in Tokyo. Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga commented on his death: "I vividly remember that I was reassured of the end of the war when Mr. Onoda returned to Japan" and he also praised his will to survive.**



**Onoda Before his Death**

**What do you think? Interesting?**

**I thought so!**

**As far as I can tell, the U.S. military didn't leave any stragglers after World War II.**

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