

CAPTAIN WACHI

By Charles W. Tatum

Author's Note: The following is an excerpt from a letter written by Captain Wachi's daughter, Rosa Ogawa in response to my request for information regarding his service on Iwo Jima. And to his nation

July 14, 2006

Dear Chuck,

I'm in receipt of your letter of July 4. I'm indeed amazed at your spirited activities working on Dad's story for your website.

I regret to tell you that I'm an outdated technophobe still depending on my old civilization. In answer to your suggestion to add a few words for an epilogue covering Dad's trips back to Iwo Jima to recover the lost Japanese troopers, I'll try from the angle observed by me, his daughter.

When the termination of the war was declared on August 15, 1945, Captain Wachi was in Kagoshima, the southernmost part of Kyushu, as the commander of a suicide torpedo boat training base, training the young patriotic volunteer trainees to attack the enemy vessels with enough fuel for only one way.

After the demobilization of the base under the disarmament procedures of the Occupying Allied Forces, he was on his way home in October. At Kyoto he got off the homebound train to visit a monk at a Buddhist temple of the Tendai Sect. He told the monk of his determined intention to dedicate the rest of his life to mourn for the war dead, those lost on Iwo Jima in particular, and pleaded with the monk to qualify him to perform the religious rituals to pray for and console the deceased and to help with bereaved families. So deeply impressed was the high monk that he ordained Dad as a qualified Buddhist priest right then and there, on the condition that he'd pursue the profound philosophy of Buddhism and perform their rigid retreats later. So when Dad finally arrived home, he was wearing a Buddhist priest's habit instead of our familiar Navy uniform.

On his return he lost no time writing letters of petition to the GHQ of the Allied Occupying Forces for a permission to return to the bloody battle site on Iwo Jima to perform religious rituals to pay due respect for the patriotic deceased who had sacrificed their previous lives for the cause of their nation. When he was finally permitted in the mid-1950's to carry out his religious ritual as a Buddhist priest, he was overwhelmed when landing on the island to witness the countless, weather-beaten remains deserted in caves, under bushes and in the jungles. He was more shocked to find many bodies void of their heads.

However, he kept offering his prayers for the peaceful rest of the souls of the departed, tracing their tracks on the volcanic sand and creeping into the caves to pour water or sake, or smoking a cigarette as he had been asked by the bereaved families, to offer to their loved ones who must have ended their lives in extreme shortage of their needs.

On his return, Dad reported to the authorities his observation of the missing parts of the remains, but he didn't reveal the fact to the bereaved families so as not to shock them. Iwo Jima U.S. combatants of 1945 were not, under any circumstances, to remove the fresh heads from the dead bodies. During the Korean Conflict, though, those soldiers resting or healing on Iwo Jima had more time and the bodies had been decayed into skulls and bones. That was when some skulls had been removed from there as souvenirs of the victory of WWII.

After Dad's report, the Allied Forces stationed on Iwo Jima responded and sealed up the entrances to the caves where most of the remains had been destroyed with flame throwers. There were no further entrances into the caves, or removal of skulls. Later, however, this made it much harder for the Association of Iwo Jima members to bring home the remains of those sealed up in the fuming hot volcanic caves.

Once when Dad had returned to Iwo Jima, a high-ranking

officer said he was amazed at the maze-like caves dug into the volcanic island. He asked Dad what the Japanese troopers had done with all the rocks they had dug out of the caves, as nothing was observed from aerial reconnaissance. Dad answered they had dug more holes in which to hide all the rocks removed from the caves.

Thanks to Newcomb and Bill Ross, who were so generous and cooperative as to print Dad's appeal in the epilogue of their book to return remains back to their homeland, many relics from skulls, diaries, pictures, ID cards and such have been sent back to Dad's printed address so he could locate their bereaved families. After all these more than 60 years, however, and with Dad having already changed his habitat from here to eternity like many other Association members, it is getting hard for us laypeople to locate the bereaved families of the deceased or the original owners of various relics.

Such being the case, I hope you won't disclose my address on your website. Instead, if anyone is so thoughtful and cooperative as to return any of the old removed relics, write to the following address of the government agency that is responsible and returns to Iwo Jima twice a year, with a few other bereaved family members, excavating into the caves and jungles. They returned from Iwo Jima last month with the bones for ten more deceased. Please have them write to:

**Foreign Affairs Planning Division
Social Welfare and War Victim's Relief Bureau
Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare
1-2-2, Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8916, Japan**

I regret to tell you this, but remember I said before I was very much afraid that “the pen is mightier than the sword.” It was only this year one of my former students, who enjoys a large variety of reading, handed me a book saying, “I happened to pick up this book in a bookstore and came across the name of your father.” It was a book titled, “Na wo koso oshime, Iwo To” (Your Name should Be Honored, Iwo Jima) written by a prize-winning so-called documentary writer. The book was on the courageous fighters who fought the deadly battle under the command of General Kuribayashi. In one paragraph Dad's name is introduced as the First Garrison Commander to make the island the last fort to defend the mainland in 1944. According to the documentary writer's imaginative, erroneous and fictitious story, Commander Wachi was not satisfied and he was irritated when the Japanese forces brought in the last of what small force they had left. The Army, under General Kuribayashi, and the Navy, under Admiral Ichimaru, strategies contradicted that of Commander Wachi's and he was so offended as to hit his subordinate who had criticized Wachi's command. Wachi even pleaded with his former Naval Academy classmate, who was

working at the personnel department of the Navy Headquarters for his transfer back home to survive. It is an interesting and silly military story, don't you think?

The truth is when the last large number of Army and Navy personnel landed on the island they were in short of all their supplies and their vital water in particular. Dad had been in charge of all the properties and facilities left by the islander who had been evacuated to other, safer Bonin Islands. When the Army came to Dad asking for some implements installed on the deserted houses to collect all the natural precipitation for their vital water, Dad responded to the request as a matter of course. Then a Navy officer a few years ahead of Dad in the Academy came to Dad, reprimanding him for giving away such valuables to the Army instead of to the Navy. Dad retorted he had given them away on a "first-come, first served basis." Why fuss about such things depending on Army vs. Navy grudge at this time of national crisis? Their argument went on so fiercely that Dad finally raised his fist against his senior officer. In the military realm of hierarchy, hitting one's senior officer deserves a court martial in peacetime. Instead Dad was transferred back home to rest for a while to take care of his lung trouble that developed after he has been blasted away from the commander's post when a bomb hit. Coming home he looked very forlorn and he said it was the most unwilling, disappointing transfer in his Navy life, but he had never disclosed the fact until much later because

he had no intention of criticizing the senior officer.

With the reason above, I can't help getting skeptical about the document written by an imaginative writer, who didn't make a minute effort to research the facts. He is of the same age as I, having no war experience of his own. I am more disappointed that the returnees, mostly members of the Association of Iwo Jima (to which Dad had dedicated the latter half of his life) were the ones responsible for having provided this author with erroneous information. They had told me nothing about such a publication, and even told me nothing even after the book came to light until I was handed a copy by my student.

Such being the case, I have decided not to do any more with the Association of Iwo Jima. Dad has done enough for them. He had never appointed his successor nor had he ever handed down the responsibility to anyone. It was the end, which was the begging of the next life. So whatever anyone says, I don't care, I am trusting and respecting Dad for what he had done, believing in his principles, altruistically for the country, war dead, their bereaved families, his own family and friends of the world.

I'm sorry I got very lengthy, and I'm afraid I'm not responding very well to your request. I would like you to contact the government at the address I've given if anyone should be

cooperative in the return of remains or relics. Thank you. I'm enclosing some old pictures and papers. It's all up to you to discard any of them you don't need.

Love, peace and prayers,

Rosa Ogawa