

Japanese try to identify British POWs in secret pictures

By Julian Ryall in Tokyo

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2551289/Japanese-try-to-identify-British-POWs-in-secret-pictures.html>

British prisoners of war celebrating celebrating Christmas 1944 in Yoshima Camp, Japan Photo: Courtesy of Prisoners of War Research Network Japan

They are seeking to promote reconciliation by discovering more details of the wartime experiences of captured Allied soldiers.

The grainy images depict POWs celebrating Christmas 1944 in Yoshima Camp, which was attached to a coal mine in Fukushima Prefecture, 150 miles north of Tokyo, complete with a Christmas tree, a prisoner dressed as Father Christmas and Red Cross parcels.

Others are of wooden prison blocks and groups of soldiers captured in the Far East, with some dated after Tokyo announced its surrender on Aug 15, 1945. Japan marks the 63rd anniversary of the end of the war on Friday.

"Who took the photos is a mystery, but they were kept by the daughter of Neuchi Giichi, who worked as a translator of the camp," said Yoshiko Tamura, a member of the Prisoners of War Research Network Japan. She has been awarded an OBE for her work helping former POWs and their relatives to come to terms with their experiences.

"We went to the site of the camp in July as part of our research and, by chance, were introduced to Hiroko Kobayashi, the daughter of Mr Giichi," she added.

"We really want to know what happened in these camps, but all the official records were destroyed before the Allies arrived at the end of the war. There is information and sketches by prisoners who were held in many other camps, but nothing from Yoshima or the nearby Yumoto Camp."

Shortly before he died 30 years ago, Mr Giichi had entrusted the photos to his daughter but she had not recognised their significance.

The research has jogged the memories of elderly local people, who can recall the prisoners building a railway line for the mine and then leaving for repatriation on a train. Others still have cord from parachutes carrying medical supplies and food dropped to the prisoners after Japan's surrender.

A total of 3,526 Allied POWs died in Japan between 1941 and 1945, with more than 1,800 buried at the Yokohama Commonwealth War Cemetery.

Taeko Sasamoto, who founded the POW organisation in March 2002 and has also been awarded the OBE, said they hope to be able to put names to some of the men in the photos and share them with their relatives.

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Sendai-02-B

(FURUKAWA KYOGYO YOSHIMA TANKO) FUKUSHIMA-ken, IWAKI-gun, YOSHIMA-mura, KAMIYOSHIMA

14 Apr 1945 Jurisdictional control transferred from TOKYO POW CAMP 14-D to SENDAI POW CAMP. Established as Sendai-02-B.

Sep Terminated

"We think Mr Giichi maybe kept the photos secret because he feared he might be accused of being a war criminal if the occupation authorities found out he had been working in a POW camp," she said.

His daughter told researchers that he sometimes gave sick POWs goats' milk and eggs, as well as a goat that can be seen in some of the photos and apparently became Christmas dinner.

The Yumoto Camp was opened in March 1944 and the 246 POWs - including 101 Britons - were forced to work in a coal mine. Five miles further north, the Yumoto Camp held 567 prisoners, including Dutch, Canadians, Americans and 232 British soldiers.

The researchers are particularly keen to trace the relatives of a British major held at Yumoto after losing contact with his son when their Japanese contact living in London died last year.

A local historian quoted a former camp translator Takeo Yanai as having a vivid memory of a British major who was furious with the Japanese authorities at the end of the war for failing to provide his men with the medicine and food that would have enabled more of them to survive. Research indicates that 32 prisoners at the camp died, mostly from diseases such as beri-beri, pneumonia or chronic enteritis.

Yanai did not identify the major by name, but his rank suggests he is the father of a James Eric Bartlett, who the network is now trying to trace.

"We want to contact the families of these men, give them more information about their experiences and perhaps even identify them in these photos," said Yoshiko Tamura.

"We want to promote understanding and reconciliation between former POWs and Japan," she added.

"They are still sad and traumatised, while the Japanese side also suffered in bombing raids and the atomic bomb attacks. We should hold hands, walk together and make sure this history is not repeated."





















SENDAI P.O.W. CAMP No 2 JAPAN. 28/8/45









SENDAI P.O.W. CAMP NO 2 JAPAN. 28/2/45

