

May 14th

On this day in 1952, two Japanese soldiers were captured on Saipan.

The day before, Felix Borja noticed produce missing from his farm at As Teo and then spotted a Japanese man disappearing into the jungle.

Borja immediately reported the incident to Saipan's civil administrator, Henry Hedges.

The following day, May 14th, Hedges along with Sheriff Jesus "Kumoi" Guerrero and several heavily-armed members of the Saipan Constabulary conducted a search of the rugged area around Borja's ranch.

After an hour of searching, the group found Toshiyoshi Ide and Toshiji Kamigawara hiding atop a jungle-covered pinnacle more than 50 feet above the ground.

The pair, both in their 30s, were soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army. They had lived in the area for eight years after surviving the bloody World War II battle for Saipan fought in the summer of 1944.

To avoid capture, the men hid during the day and went out at night once or twice a week in search of food and water.

Ide and Kamigawara caught freshwater eels, lizards, and land snails and collected breadfruit, papaya, tapioca, banana, and mangoes. They made sugar by crushing cane stalks and salt by evaporating sea water.

For amusement, the men reportedly caught and trained wild birds.

A search of their hideout revealed supplies of sugar and salt stored in bottles along with a small cooking stove made out of tin cans.

Other items included an engine magneto which they used to make fires, a collection of pots and pans, and tubes of shaving cream and toothpaste retrieved from U.S. military trash dumps.

Although thin and nearly naked, Ide and Kamigawara were in relatively good health. Hedges had them taken to the military hospital for observation before they were repatriated to Japan.

Ide and Kamigawara were the last wartime holdouts captured in the Northern Marianas. Twenty years later, Shoichi Yokoi, a Japanese army sergeant, was captured on Guam.

These men elected to remain in hiding long after the war's end in order to avoid the dishonor of surrender.

Learn more about local history during the 3rd Marianas History Conference which will be held on Saipan from 4-6 September.



Photo caption: Saipan holdouts Toshiyoshi Ide, left, and Toshiji Kamigawara debark a navy plane at Guam on their way back to Japan while U.S. military personnel look on (photo courtesy of the *Jamestown Post-Journal*).