

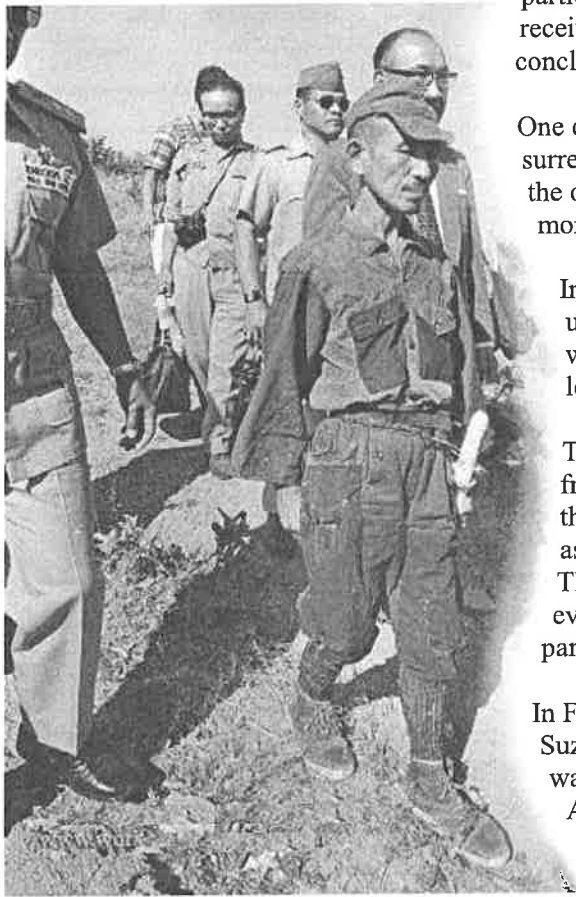
THE LAST JAPANESE SOLDIER TO SURRENDER

Hiroo Onoda was trained as an intelligence officer sent to Lubang Island in the Philippines. He was ordered to do all that he could to hamper enemy attacks as well as destroy the local airstrip and pier. His orders also stated that under no circumstances was he to surrender or take his own life – an order he carried out for 30 years.

When Onoda landed on the island, he linked up with a group of Japanese soldiers who had been there previously. Within a short time of the landing, all but Onoda and three other soldiers had either died or surrendered and Onoda, who had been promoted to Lieutenant, ordered the men to take to the hills.

In October 1945, they saw a leaflet which claimed that the war was over. However, they mistrusted the leaflet, since they had been fired upon a few days previous. They concluded that the leaflet was Allied propaganda, and believed that they would not have been fired on if the war was indeed over.

Towards the end of 1945 leaflets were dropped by air with a surrender order printed on them from General Tomoyuki Yamashita. Having already been in hiding for a year, and the only proof of the end of the war being this leaflet, Onoda and the others scrutinized every letter and every word on this piece of paper. One sentence in particular seemed suspicious; it said that those who surrendered would receive “hygienic succor” and be “hauled” to Japan. Again, they concluded it was an Allied hoax.



One of the four, Yuichi Akatsu, walked away from the others and surrendered to Filipino forces in 1950 after six months on his own. To the other three this seemed like a security leak and they became even more careful of their position.

In 1952 letters and family pictures were dropped from aircraft urging them to surrender, but the three soldiers concluded that this was a hoax. Shimada was shot and killed during a shoot-out with local fishermen in May 1954.

The second to last, Kinshichi Kozuka was killed by two shots from local police in October 1972, when he and Onoda stole and then burned the remaining rice that had been collected by farmers, as part of their guerilla activities, leaving Onoda by himself. Though Onoda had been officially declared dead in 1959, this event suggested that it was likely he was still alive and search parties were sent out, though none were successful.

In February 1974, Onoda met a Japanese college dropout, Norio Suzuki, who was traveling the world and had told his friends that he was “going to look for Lieutenant Onoda, a panda, and the Abominable Snowman, in that order.” Onoda and Suzuki became friends, but Onoda still refused to surrender, saying that he was waiting for orders from a superior officer.

Onoda surrenders to Philippine authorities in 1974 – 30 years after WWII.

Suzuki returned to Japan with photos of himself and Onoda as proof of their encounter, and in 1974 the Japanese government

located Onoda’s commanding officer, Major Taniguchi, who had since become a bookseller. He flew to Lubang in March 1974 informed Onoda of the defeat of Japan in WWII and ordered him to lay down his arms.

Lieutenant Onoda emerged from the jungle 29 years after the end of WWII, and accepted the commanding officer’s order of surrender in his uniform and sword, with his Arisaka Type 99 rifle still in operating condition, 500 rounds of ammunition and several hand grenades.

Though he had killed some 30 Filipinos on the island and engaged in several shootouts with police, the circumstances of these events were taken into consideration, and Onoda received a pardon from President Ferdinand Marcos.

Name _____

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1. What is most likely the meaning of “hamper” in the 1st paragraph?
 - a. Assist
 - b. Prevent
 - c. Build
 - d. Basket
2. Why do you think Onoda “ordered his men to take to the hills”?
 - a. In order to surround the American forces
 - b. So they could shoot down at Americans
 - c. For protection because they were the only ones left
 - d. To capture an airfield in the hills
3. Why did Onoda and his men think General Tomoyuki Yamashita’s leaflet was an Allied hoax?
 - a. The words seemed suspicious
 - b. The leaflet was in English
 - c. It was dropped from the air
 - d. It was written in crayon.
4. What happened to Onoda in 1959?
 - a. He got in a shootout with local fisherman
 - b. He was officially declared dead
 - c. He met a college dropout
 - d. He died in a shootout with police
5. What adjective best describes Onoda?
 - a. Lazy
 - b. Stubborn
 - c. Perceptive
 - d. Emotional
6. What does Norio Suzuki’s goal for his travels tell you about Onoda?
 - a. Onoda would be easily found
 - b. Onoda was an obscure person to most Japanese
 - c. Onoda would be difficult to find
 - d. Onoda was a myth and did not actually exist
7. Do you think a similar story could ever be about an American soldier?
8. What does Onoda’s story tell you about Japanese soldiers?

1. _____

2.. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____