

30th January 2001

Dear Ms. Ronan,

I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart for sending my father's memento of the Rising Sun flag. I received notification on January 5th 2001, and after 56 years I was able to hold the flag and feel the warmth of my father.

I lost my father when I was one and a half years old, and I do not have any memory of him. I don't have any brothers or sisters and my mother raised me alone. My mother died six years ago, and in March this year, thanks to the kindness of your goodwill, I have gained the opportunity to hold a memorial service for my father and mother together on the commemoration of the seventh anniversary of my mother's death. This has indeed been a deeply emotional drama for me, which many other people may not come across in their lives.

The notification of my father's death came after the war on 27th August 1946. We were told that my father died somewhere around the Marianas Islands on August 2nd 1944, but the exact place was unknown. However, the fact that your father came across my father in Saipan in June 1944 is now understood, and for the first time, I know where my father died. If the flag had not come into the hands of your father, I would have lived my life without ever having known where my father died.

I would like to express my sincerest thanks to your father. I understand that your he is unwell now, but I trust that he is taking good care of himself.

Aomori Prefecture where I live, and the State of Maine have a friendly relations agreement. I believe this also has something to do with fate perhaps.

I must apologize for taking such a long time to write to you.

Again, thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

西川 寛

Hiroshi Nishikawa

P.S. I enclose a newspaper article that appeared in our local paper.

Headlines:

"The Memento of a Father who died in Saipan"

"A Rising Sun Flag Comes Home After 57 Years"

"From an ex-American Naval Officer to Mr. Nishikawa (Aomori)"

Photo Caption:

"Mr. Hiroshi Nishikawa looks at the Rising Sun flag, the only memento he has of his father"

Main Article:

A Rising Sun flag belonging to Mr. Toyotaro Nishikawa of Kawauchi Town who died in Saipan in 1944, was returned to his son who lives in Aomori City after 57 years by an ex-American naval officer who had brought it back to his own country.

Toyotaro died during the war when his son Hiroshi was just one year old. "I have no memory of my father. I only know what he looked like from photographs. I had no memento of him and now this is the only thing I have to remind me of him. Over half a century has passed and for the first time I now know the truth about the last days of my father's life" said an emotional Mr. Nishikawa.

It was a Mr. Arthur Wilding who belonged to the American ^{MARINES} Navy who had been in possession of the flag. He said the flag was in the pocket of a Japanese soldier who was underneath a building at the time the troops landed in Saipan around June 20th-24th 1944.

In Autumn last year, his daughter Ms. Melanie Ronan put in a request to the Japanese Consulate in Boston to find the family of the soldier. According to the results of an investigation by the Ministry of Health and Welfare, it became apparent from the Chinese characters written on the flag that the owner was Mr. Toyotaro Nishikawa. From that, it also came to be understood that Mr. Hiroshi Nishikawa, the Bureau Chief of the Greater Aomori Business Union is his son.

Ms. Ronan sent a letter along with the flag to the Consulate General and this was then handed over to Mr. Hiroshi Nishikawa via the Aomori Prefectural Government.

Toyotaro was drafted into the forces in March 1944 at the age of 33 years. That same year on August 2nd he was said to have died somewhere around the Marianas Islands in a notification that his family received on August 27th 1946.

The eldest boy died three days after being born, so Hiroshi is the only child left by Toyotaro.

"My father was in the Navy, so we heard that he died on his ship when it sank. Now I know more exactly when and where it was that he died, and I feel more relieved," said Mr. Nishikawa as he held the flag in his hands.

His mother Fuchie, also passed away six years ago and for a long time after the war would say "Maybe he is still alive, and will come home one day".

Mr. Nishikawa spoke heartily, "If only my mother were still alive today, I would have been able to show her the flag that my father had with him until his last moments. Now I want to hold a memorial service with this Rising Sun flag, and pray that my parents may both rest in peace.

Mr. Wilding, on the other hand, is now 75 years old and currently living in the State of Maine. Ms. Ronan expressed in her letter "My father regretted having brought the flag back. By being able to return the flag, finally he feels a weight has been lifted from his heart".

サイパンで戦死した父の遺品

日章旗 57年ぶり帰宅



父・豊太郎さんの唯一の遺品である日章旗を見つめる西川寛さん

元米兵から西川さん(青森)へ 「母に見せたかった」

一九四四年、サイパンで戦死した川内町出身の西川豊太郎さんの日章旗が、自国に持ち帰った元米兵から青森市に住む遺族のもとに五十七年ぶりに返還された。息子さんが一歳の時に父は戦死。「父の記憶は全く無く、遺影の父しか知らない。遺品もなく、これが唯一の形見。半世紀以上たつて初めて、父の本当の最期を知ることができた」と感慨深げだ。

日章旗を所持していたのは米海兵隊に所属していたアーサー・ワイルディングさん。四四年六月二十日か二十四日、隊がサイパンに上陸した際、ビルの下敷きになっていた日本兵のポケットに入っていたという。

娘のメラニー・ロナンさんが一昨秋、在ボストン日本領事館に遺族捜しを依頼。厚生省の調査の結果、旗にあった「西川豊太郎君」の文字から所有者が判明し、青森市中佃三丁目、青森地域広域事務組合事務局長西川寛さん(金心)が遺族と分かった。

ロナンさんは昨年十二月、日章旗に手紙を添えて総領事館に託し、これが五日、県を通して寛さんに引き渡された。

豊太郎さんは四四年三月、三十三歳で召集された。同年八月二日、マリアナ諸島方面で戦死したという通知書が四六年八月二十七日に届いた。

長男は生後三日で死亡したため、寛さんが豊太郎さんのただ一人の遺児。「父は海軍だったので、乗っていた船が沈没、死んだのではないかと聞かされていた。死亡した時期や場所などが分かり、ホッとしている」と日章旗を手に話す。

戦後しばらくは「もしかしらな生きて帰って来るかもしれない」とよく口にし

ていたという母フチエさんも、六年前に他界した。寛さんは「母が生きていたら、父が最期まで持っていた日章旗を手にすることができたのに」。日章旗を供養し、あらためて両親のめい福を祈りたい」としみじみ話した。

一方、ワイルディングさんは現在七十五歳でメイン州在住。ロナンさんは「父は日章旗を持ち帰ったことを後悔していた。返還できることで心の荷を下ろせる」と手紙に心情をつづっている。