



Over the target, Second Lt. Wada watches one of the PBJ's unload bombs on the Japanese HQ complex below. (Photo courtesy of USMC)

THE TURNCOAT'S RAID

OUR BOMBERS WERE LED BY A JAPANESE OFFICER

BY J. DAVID TRUBY

He was called the **Benedict Arnold of Mindanao**, a turncoat to the Empire of Japan. Yet few turncoats were as honorably and honestly motivated as Minoru Wada, a WW II Japanese prisoner of war, who voluntarily led an American air strike against his own military because of his belief that his actions would quickly end the war in an “ultimately humane” manner.

On August 10, 1945, Second Lt. Wada personally flew in the lead Mitchell PBJ 1-D, directing a force of VMB-611 bombers and VMF-115 Corsairs in an attack on the 100th Japanese Division headquarters, resulting in a total wipe-out of their target. This single raid is said to have effectively shut down Japanese strength in the Philippine Islands.

The U.S. Marine fliers pounded the headquarters and billeting area with fragmentation bombs, napalm, rockets and heavy machine-gun fire and official after-action reports noted that the target area was devastated, and the unit's commanding general, Kumakashi Harada, was killed in the raid.

The secrets persist

Details of Lt. Wada's involvement in this incident, plus information about the raid itself, are still smothered by a blanket of classified security, even today. Requests for information were answered with many details redacted, i.e., blacked out on the official documents. However, this much is known.

According to the late William Flynn, a retired university professor who was a Marine intelligence officer in the Pacific Theater and involved with mission debriefings, "Lt. Wada was a highly rated intelligence officer with the Japanese 100th division, a crack unit activated in Mindanao early in 1944. Their mission was to slow the U.S. advance at all costs."

Flynn continued, "Though this raid took place within a week of the war's end, we didn't know that at the time. Word of what they called 'The Super Bomb' back then, which were the atomic bombs, had not reached us in the Philippines.



Second Lt. Gordon Growden, a Marine combat correspondent, interviews Second Lt. Wada prior to mission takeoff. (Photo courtesy of USMC)

We were still hard at war. Plus, those Jap troops would have fought us to the last man.

"So, when we vetted Wada's information, our people went right after the 100th. But, we aimed for a knockout punch. We needed to locate their headquarters, their glass jaw, so to speak. That's where Minoru Wada came in like a gift from heaven."

His heart wasn't in it

Minoru Wada was an idealistic young officer in his mid to late 20s. He was a sharp intelligence officer with the 100th Division, according to intelligence briefing reports. He was a graduate of the University of Tokyo and of the Military Academy of Kyushi. Before he was an intelligence of-



The Lone Star Flight Museum's PBJ, over Texas City, Texas. The PBJ was flown by Keith Hibbett. Since the photograph was made, the airplane has been repainted to commemorate the "Tokyo Raiders" B-25 flown by Gen. Jimmy Doolittle and Col. Dick Cole of the famous Tokyo bombing mission. (Photo by Bill Crump)

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ficer, he'd worked in air transport. He was also very aware of where the so-called "secret HQ" of the 100th was located. According to Flynn, Wada told him he was very discouraged with the direction of the war. Flynn had interrogated Wada, who spoke little English. Their discussions were always with an interpreter.

"Several times, he told us he had never been convinced, despite all their propaganda, that his country should have started the global conflict they did. He was sick about the prison camp situations in Germany and Japan, and in those countries controlled by his military."

WADA'S DECISION WAS BASED ON THE SAME LOGIC, WHICH HAD LED PRESIDENT HARRY TRUMAN TO ORDER THE ATOMIC BOMBS TO BE USED AGAINST JAPAN'S TWO CITIES.

He told us he would do anything, even sacrifice his own life, to stop the war and bring ultimate peace to the people on the Japanese home islands," Flynn noted. "Lt. Wada said he feared America would destroy the home island (Japan) in retaliation for Pearl Harbor."

According to Flynn, Wada said that, "Their generals and admirals, the old, tough military professionals, forced this war on the Japanese people. The common Japanese person did not want war. Our people were horrified by the attack on Pearl Harbor. 'What must I do to end it?' he

asked me. He then said, 'We must end the war with the military and not by killing civilians.' He was adamant about that."

Flynn added that Wada felt strongly that massive American bombing and the ultimate invasion of the Japanese home island would be a disaster for all mankind.

Was it too good to be true?

There was skepticism, according to scuttlebutt partially reported in USMC logs. Some pilots and other officers thought Wada was lying about his background. One rumor claimed he was actually born in the U.S., had been trapped in Japan by Pearl Harbor, and deserted near war's end to get back safely to America.

According to Flynn, this was not true. The only thing Flynn and the other U.S. military intelligence officers were skeptical about was the way in which the Japanese officer had been captured. Their initial thought was that Wada might have been a plant to lead the Allies into a trap.

"I wasn't sure if he'd actually been caught in a legit fashion or if he let himself be taken prisoner. He was out with a Jap patrol, which was ambushed by one of our ground patrols and he was captured.

"The Mud Marine S-2 unit that held him didn't waste many minutes getting this Japanese officer up to us. LTC L. F. Maybach signed him over to us quickly. Lt. Wada was very cooperative. He surely was anxious to get the war over. He really felt strongly about that. In the end, he convinced

Through USMC interpreter Sgt. Charles T Imai, Japanese POW Second Lt. Minoru Wada explains the location and nature of the bombing raid's target, the hidden HQ of the 100th Japanese Division on Mindanao. Major Mortimer H Jordan, air strike coordinator, stands on the left, vetting the information being given to First Marine Air Wing bomber and fighter pilots. (Photo courtesy of USMC)



us that he was sincere.”

How do we best use him?

“The rest was easy,” Flynn said, “after we were sure he wasn’t nuts, a deserter with a clever story, or trying to lead us into a trap. We suggested the bombing raid, though; it wasn’t his idea.”

Part of the Marine master plan for the bombing raid was to test the young Japanese officer’s

lead bomber was flown by Marine Corps Major M.H. Jordan,” Flynn said.

This mission involved the Navy’s version of the Mitchell B-25. The Navy version had been commissioned in the USMC as the PBJ series. The bombers were from VMB-611 accompanied by four divisions of VMF-115’s F4U Corsairs.

According to intelligence estimates, all the Marines knew was that the headquarters units of the 100th Division were squeezed into the mountains near the Kibaw-Talomo Trail, in Mindanao’s Davao area. However, Lt. Wada knew the exact location of his unit among the rugged hills and tangled jungles below. He led the way without error and was right on target, according to the pilots who flew the mission.

“Major Jordan told the debriefing officers after the raid, ‘The Japanese officer put us zero on the target and we did the rest ... maybe overdid it.’

Below: The ultimate “Pappy” Gunn version of the classic Mitchell bomber this PBJ-1H is being readied for delivery at North American Aviation’s El Segundo Plant in 1945. (Photo courtesy of Stan Piet)

Left: Minoru Wada’s name is added to the passenger manifest for this PBJ bomber for the bombing mission, August 10, 1945. (Photo courtesy of USMC)



honesty and the depth of his sincerity.

Flynn noted, “We got the idea of destroying their chain of command by crushing the 100th Division HQ, thus making a helluva lot of troops homeless and leaderless. We put the idea to him of being a pathfinder for this bomber raid. Our Big Picture plan, of course, was to minimize any and all Japanese military power in view of what we all feared, our soon-to-be invasion of their home islands.

“At first, he was horrified at the idea of leading us into battle against his own people. But, we sold him on the value of killing a few soldiers to save the lives of so many thousands of innocent humans both Japanese and American.”

In a way, Flynn noted, Wada’s decision was based on the same logic, which had led President Harry Truman to order the atomic bombs to be used against Japan’s two cities, which had occurred prior to the Wada raid. Of course, at that time, neither the Marines on Mindanao or Wada knew of that event. So, the young Japanese POW agreed to direct the raid from the lead aircraft.

Mission’s on!

“As Lt. Wada didn’t speak English, we obtained a Marine NCO with Japanese language capability to go along with Lt. Wada, then mounted the mission. Gunnery Sgt. C.T. Imai acted as interpreter for Minoru Wada, who directed the pilot of the lead bomber to the specific target area. That





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Top: The B-25s specialized in low-level attacks at treetop level. This B-25 is hitting Japanese targets along the coast. The tremendous firepower that these gunships had enabled them to destroy most enemy positions with just one pass. (Photo courtesy of Warren Thompson)

Inset: In the waist of the lead Marine PBJ, Minoru Wada scans the mountainous Philippine terrain for familiar landmarks that will lead the aerial raid to success on 10 August 1945. (Photo courtesy of USMC)

The after-action photos showed the raid totally destroyed their command capability," Flynn noted.

"What was left of the Japanese divisional headquarters became stragglers, which meant the end of that unit as a fighting element," he added.

The man without a country disappears

A hero in one camp and a traitor in the other, Minoru Wada became an outcast, a man without a country. Yet, he was happy, according to William Flynn, because he had accomplished what he counted as important in his life, a major contribution to the end of the war. To keep its end of the bargain, the U.S. government protected him.

From that point on, Minoru Wada became a new person, with a new identity and an altered appearance to protect him from his past. Who or what he is and even where he went or if he is even alive, plus any other postwar facts about Minoru Wada remain classified, despite repeated Freedom of Information requests to obtain this

information.

Flynn had no idea what happened to Lt. Wada after the raid debriefing, saying, "He was taken away by intelligence people and I was told he would be put into a special program. I have no idea what that meant, beyond the relocation generalities."

Initial official contacts in May of 2009 with USMC about Lt. Wada and this mission, which included specific details, brought this response: "... no records were located responsive to your request."

In May of 2008, a man named Minoru Wada died at age 83, in Hawaii. His obituary listed him a Honolulu resident and a retired U.S. Army Civil Service employee. His age seems a bit young for him to be Lt. Wada, plus subsequent investigation showed that he was not.

Further research showed there is an Official Military Personnel File for a Lt. Minoru Wada, USMC, in the National Personnel Records Center. No further data were available due to privacy laws.

Today, more than 65 years after it happened, the saga of Minoru Wada remains a footnote in the USMC's historical archives; little more than a sheaf of blacked-out intelligence documents. The tantalizing, unanswered question remains, "What happened to this man—a traitor to Tokyo's military warlords, but a hero to so many more survivors of WW II?" †