



COURTESY OF JOHN B. TUGGLE

A memorial will commemorate the deaths of three U.S. aviators who were shot down, tortured and executed by the Japanese Navy during World War II. The aviators — from left, Aviation Ordnanceman 1st Class Robert Tuggle Jr., Lt. Vernon L. Tebo and Aviation Radioman First Class Warren H. Loyd — appear in a 1944 photograph.

Finally at peace

Memorial commemorates U.S. aviators executed by Japanese

BY CHIYOMI SUMIDA

Stars and Stripes

Three American aviators are shot down over a tiny island off Okinawa and captured by the Japanese Imperial Navy in 1945.

They are dragged through the island's main village to the foot of a mountain and tortured. Navy pilot Lt. Vernon L. Tebo, 28, a high school teacher, and Aviation Ordnanceman 1st Class Robert Tuggle Jr., just 20 years old, are bound and gagged. Forced to kneel before two holes, they are beheaded.

The other crewmember, Aviation Radioman 1st Class Warren H. Loyd, faces an even harsher fate.

The 24-year-old is tied to a tree, beaten and stabbed by bamboo spears. Sailors under orders then use Loyd for bayonet practice.

Though it happened in the waning days of World War II 56 years ago, a U.S. Air Force technical sergeant and a Japanese professor are determined to make sure the aviators rest in peace.

A memorial dedicated to the aviators is scheduled to be unveiled on Ishigaki Island on Aug. 15, the 56th anniversary of the end of the war. It will be the culmination of a yearlong campaign by Takeo

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Air Force Tech. Sgt. Tim Wilson
353rd Special Operations Squadron,
Kadena Air Base, Okinawa

Shinohara, a professor at the University of the Ryukyus, and Air Force Tech. Sgt. Tim Wilson.

Shinohara worked with Ishigaki residents to erect a monument to honor the three aviators. Wilson, assigned to the 353rd Special Operations Squadron, Kadena Air Base, formed a volunteer group to raise money from Americans for the monument.

Wilson and the volunteers also located relatives and shipmates of the three slain men, who flew from the aircraft carrier USS Makassar Strait on the morning of April 15, 1945.



COURTESY OF TIM WILSON

The groundbreaking for the memorial at Ishigaki Island took place Memorial Day. The memorial is to be unveiled Aug. 15.

Many plan to fly to Ishigaki, 265 miles south of Okinawa, for the dedication of the monument.

“My hope is to see the three guys, young sailors, finally laid to rest,” said Wilson, 32, a native of Kankakee, Ill. “I

want to let their families and friends know that they died as heroes.”

Tebo, from Chicago; Loyd, of Long Island, N.Y.; and Tuggle, of Ranger, Texas, made up the crew. Their mission was to take aerial photos of the Japanese Imperial Navy's Ishigaki Airfield, a base for Japanese kamikazes.

During the mission, the U.S. aviators' aircraft was shot down. The three men parachuted into the water near the island and swam to a coral reef, where Japanese sailors quickly captured them.

The Imperial Navy on the island, overwrought from air raids by U.S. bombers a day before, took the three to their headquarters where they were interrogated, tortured then killed.

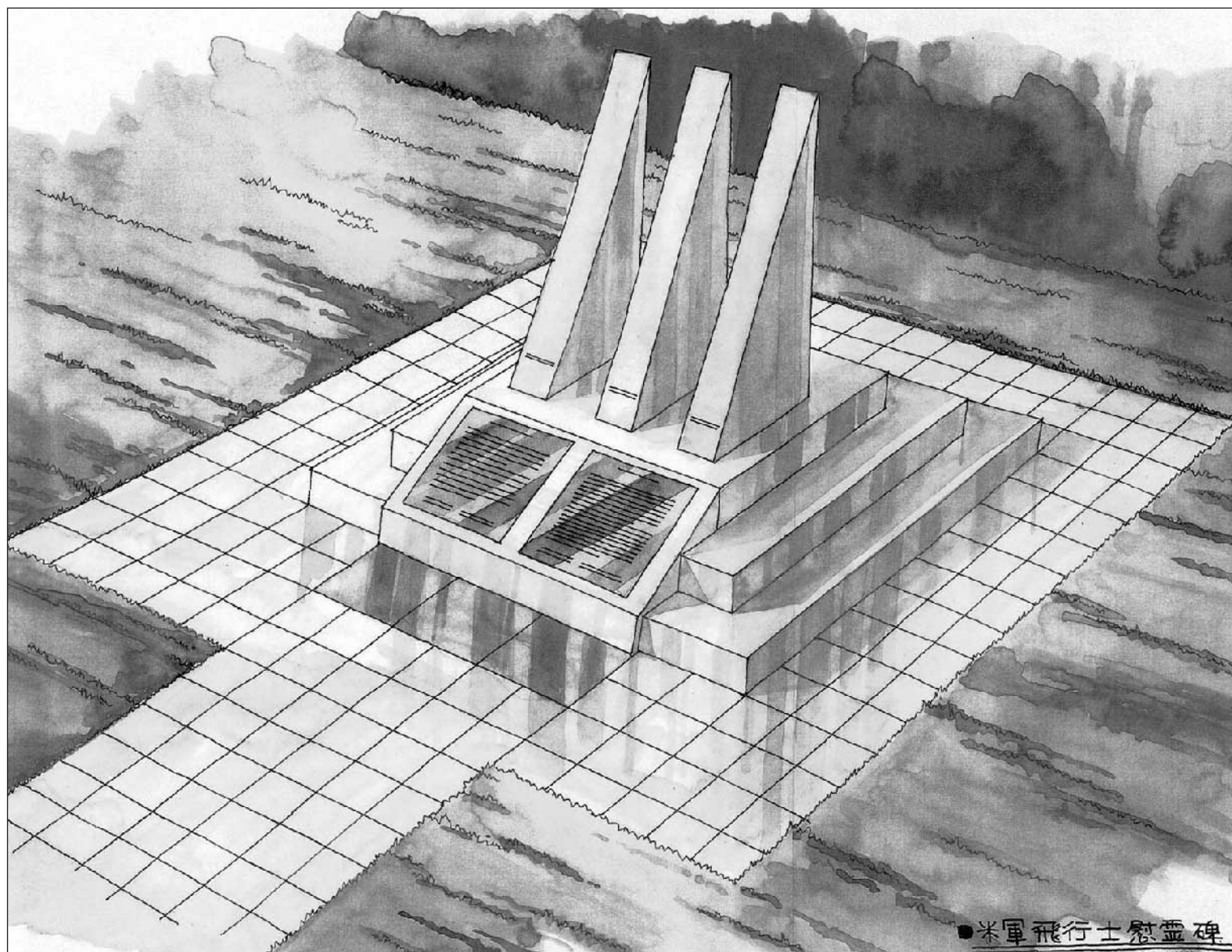
After Japan surrendered, the aviators' bodies were cremated in an attempt to destroy evidence of the killings. Their ashes were placed in cans and sunk to the sea bottom. The Imperial Navy ordered the 32,000 local residents to forget the incident.

Shinohara learned of the atrocious killings, recorded as the Ishigaki Incident, during his efforts to win compensation from the Japanese government for islanders forced to resettle in a malaria-infested mountainous area.

SEE MEMORIAL ON PAGE 4

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Takeo Shinohara
University of the Ryukyus



米軍飛行士慰霊碑

COURTESY TAKEO SHINOHARA

The 6-foot-tall monument will stand in a park overlooking Iriomote Island, near the ocean where the aviators’ ashes were sunk. The three triangles symbolize their spirits ascending to heaven. Three red tiles in front of the monument represent the blood they shed. The inscriptions are in English and Japanese.

MEMORIAL, FROM PAGE 3

“When I came upon accounts of this incident involving the American aviators, I didn’t know what to do because it was too cruel and ruthless,” he said. “Not knowing what to do, my first reaction was to try to make believe that I did not find it out. But I couldn’t.”

“It haunted me and I knew that I would suffer for the rest of my life if I did not take any action,” said the 60-year-old professor. Shinohara came up with the idea to build a monument, with help from Americans.

Shinohara called Stars and Stripes in March 2000 to make his wish known to the American community on Okinawa.

Wilson read an article about Shinohara’s efforts in Stars and Stripes and joined him in the campaign last year. He formed a volunteer group from the American community on Okinawa.

The group tracked down relatives and shipmates who have provided vivid images of the three fallen men.

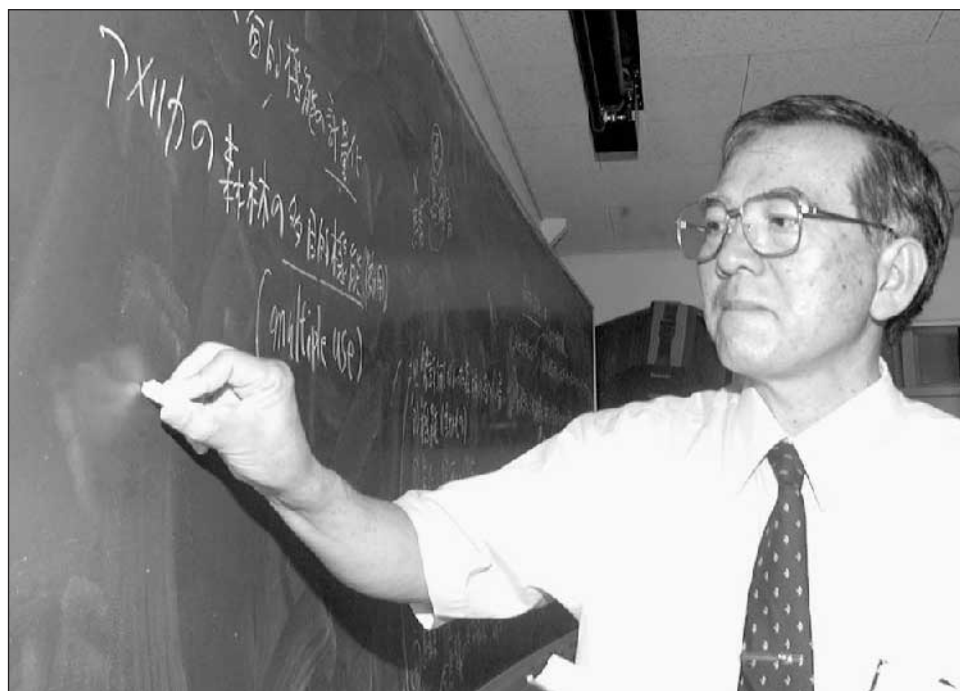
Loren S. Elliott, 78, of Arizona, one of the crewmembers of the USS Makassar Strait, said Tebo had a great singing voice.

“He sang several baritone solos at church services held on the hanger deck,” Elliott wrote in an e-mail to Stars and Stripes.

He also clearly remembers one particular night he worked with Loyd on the deck. “I got to know Loyd very well before the sun came up,” he said. “He talked about a fiancée that he had left behind.”

The executions were revealed in February 1947 when one of the Japanese sailors forced to take part in the killings wrote an anonymous letter to the U.S. occupation forces in Tokyo.

Forty-one Japanese sailors and soldiers



CHIYOMI SUMIDA/Stars and Stripes

Takeo Shinohara, professor at the University of the Ryukyus, lectures to his class. Shinohara has been a driving force behind the construction of a monument for three American aviators brutally killed during World War II on his home island, Ishigaki.

were sentenced to death as war criminals in connection with the incident. Later, some were pardoned and their sentences reduced. Seven men who played major roles were hanged.

“Dedicating a monument will properly put an end to the tragedy and it will heal the sorrow that people of Ishigaki have had for many years,” Shinohara said.

Wilson said the healing process is also about to start with family members of the three men in the United States.

“To talk about the incident had been a taboo for the family members for a long

time,” he said.

“But now that they are finding out what we and the people of Ishigaki are doing for their loved ones, they began to openly reminisce about their husband, brother or uncles.”

The committee’s next hurdle is to raise \$10,000, their share in the total cost of \$75,000, for the monument and a dedication ceremony. The committee has raised about \$5,000. Among the donations is \$1,400 from the eighth-graders of Yokosuka Middle School.

Fund-raising efforts are also under way

by the committee’s Ishigaki residents’ group. Their goal is \$65,000.

Shinyo Shikina, who leads the group, was 20 years old when he returned to his home island of Ishigaki a year after the war’s end.

“I heard about the incident when I came back to Ishigaki,” said Shikina, now 74. He said he at first could not believe the story because “it was too cruel and beyond my imagination.”

In April, about a month prior to a May 30 groundbreaking ceremony for the monument, Wilson flew to Ishigaki to choose the site.

“It was cloudy all day when I visited the island,” Wilson said. “But the moment I stood at the site by the beach, the clouds suddenly broke and the sun came out.”

It was as though the three aviators were smiling at him, said Wilson. “This is it!” he cried and chose the site.

The monument will stand on land overlooking Iriomote Island, near the ocean where the three men’s ashes were disposed.

“We, the people of Ishigaki,” Shikina said, “hope the three Americans rest in peace.”

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Wilson