

REPATRIATION OF OVERSEAS JAPANESE, 1945-1946

A Working Bibliography of MHI Sources

In accordance with the Potsdam Agreement, US occupation forces oversaw the disarmament and demilitarization of Japan, a task which was managed initially by the Japanese High Command and then later by a civilian-headed board. Ultimately, the army discharged 2.3 million men on the home islands and another 2.7 million overseas. The soldiers discharged overseas, as well as many other Japanese civilians working abroad, were to be returned to Japan, a monumental task.

This repatriation effort involved over 6 million civilians and servicemen. Additionally, another million-plus displaced foreign nationals (chiefly Koreans pressed into labor service) awaited return to their respective homelands. Moreover, they were dispersed throughout eastern Asia and the western expanse of the Pacific Ocean. The magnitude of this demographic relocation constituted one of the largest mass movements ever undertaken by oceanic transportation. It required some 400 ships to transport nearly all the repatriates by Dec 1946.

A few individuals and small groups among the overseas Japanese refused to surrender and became holdouts or "stragglers," eluding capture and repatriation for years and, in a few cases, even decades. An estimated 4,000 such stragglers remained at large by 1950. Also, a quarter-million Japanese still awaited repatriation from Soviet areas in 1950.

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