

THE MYSTERIOUS NAVAL LANDING FORCES SWORD



by Bruce Pennington

Many hours are spent studying the earliest years of the Japanese sword and its progression through the centuries. We all know how badly the craft suffered after the The Sword Abolishment Edict (廃刀令, Haitōrei), of March, 1876, and of its resurrection after Western-style swords showed their weaknesses during the Russian and Chinese conflicts of the early 1900's. Japan's push into China, in an effort to "unite the seven tribes" throughout Southeast Asia, and the ensuing second world war, revitalized that industry eventually producing as many as 2 million swords by 1945. But once again, it all came to a screeching halt September 2, 1945 when the war ended. Hundreds of thousands of swords were collected by the occupying forces. Sword producing factories were shut down. Yet, one remained. It is possible the blades they made were the last war-blades made by the nation of Japan.

For several decades, these anti-rust steel blades have circulated among collectors in their strange mixed-service fittings. Richard Fuller, in his 1997 edition of "Japanese Military and Civil Swords and Dirks", page 138, postulated they were "post-war assemblies, perhaps using surviving surplus blades and modern hilt/scabbard fittings." Collector theories ran from Naval Landing Forces, Marine Landing Forces, late-war piece-together, and post-war assemblies.

The reasons for the consternation are numerous. The overall look seems to be Navy – black lacquered saya and black canvas same', with gold-gilded metal fittings. The tsuba is black and rounded. But a closer examination reveals the metal fittings are Army in design.



Navy

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Army



Navy

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Army



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Army



Navy

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Army

The round tsuba has the general shape of a Navy tsuba, but it is steel, not brass, like a naval tsuba should be. Army tsuba are steel and more uniform in shape. The tsuba in question are also distinctly thinner than either Army or Navy tsuba.



Navy

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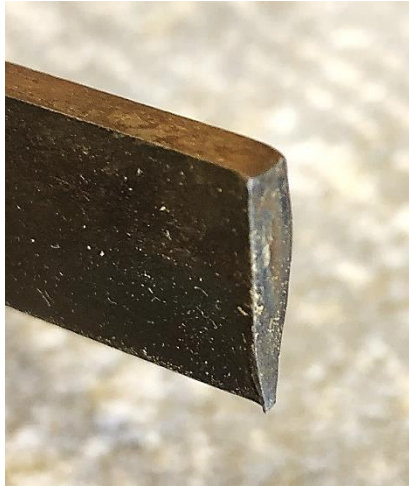
Army



Another peculiar issue is the one-piece fuchi/seppa:



The blades are all stamped with the Toyokawa Navy Arsenal anchor in a circle, and are made of the anti-rust steel used by the arsenal throughout the war. Most are mumei, but a few are signed. No dates on any of them. Many have rough, unfinished nakago jiri, others are finished.



“Inaba”



The blades themselves are as well made as any other Toyokawa war blade.

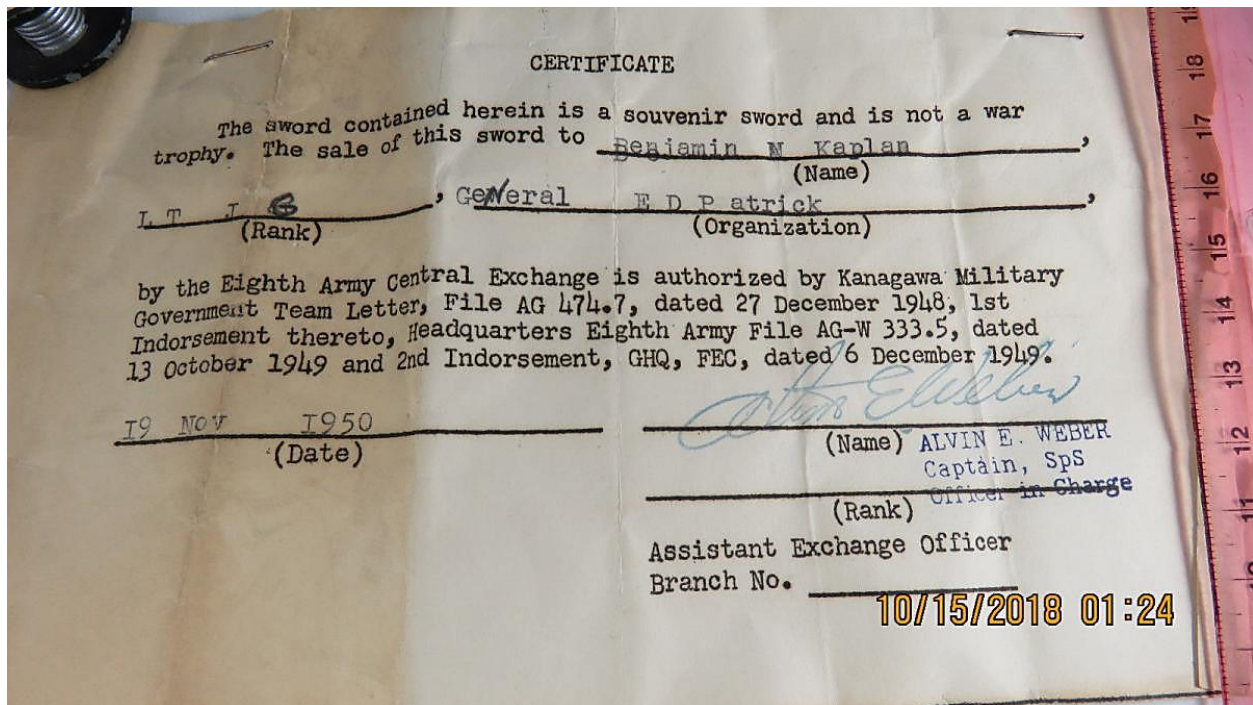


All observed swords (The term *gunto* doesn't work as *gun-to* means Army Sword, and these aren't army swords!) are like carbon-copies, with little variation, as if they came off an assembly line. All have matching assembly numbers and were obviously made as a unit (dispelling the theory that they were pieced together from left-over parts). They are also pristine in condition, as if they had never been carried.

Nothing about this sword is right for a WWII military sword, yet they were clearly Japanese made. So, they remained a mystery until December of 2018, when a member of the Nihonto Message Board (NMB) found one being auctioned that came with a brown sword bag and a bring-back certificate.



Notice that it calls the sword a "souvenir" not a war trophy, and says that it was sold to Lt J.G.



Patrick by the 8th Army Central Exchange. The letter is signed by the Assistant Exchange Officer dated 19 Nov 1950. For those unfamiliar with Army terms, the Post Exchange, or PX as it is called today, is like a military Walmart. This was a significant find! It means the 8th Army PX was selling these as souvenir swords five years after the war was over. This confirmed the personal experience of another forum member who had previously bought 4 of these from returning Korean war vets, each one in a brown sword bag, who said they bought them from The Japanese Sword Company.

The Chief of Staff had outlawed bring-back war trophies in 1946. So, it was unlikely that the Army PX would be selling actual war weapons and getting around the rules by simply calling them "souvenirs."

The next big break came in September 2019 when a forum member brought a link to several WWII documents collected by Stephen Thorpe. One of the documents records a meeting at the Tenzoshan Works, a sword manufacturer for the Toyokawa Navy Arsenal. It shows that the Army PX had contracted for 8,000 souvenir swords!

GHQ, SCAP
CIVIL INFORMATION AND EDUCATION SECTION

REPORT OF CONFERENCE

Date of Conference: Monday, September 9, 1946

Place of Conference: Tenshozan Works, Kamakura

Present: (Show organizations or agencies with which individuals are connected.)

Mr. Shintaro Yao, Manager, Tenshozan Works
Mr. Toshio Ishii, Secretary, " "

Subject: Contract with PX for Sale of Swords

Report of Discussion:

Mr. Yao, who states that he had a contract with the 8th Army PX to deliver for sale by them of some 8,000 swords, is understandably worried because the PX has cancelled the contract.

According to his statement, Army postal authorities caused this cancellation by refusing to allow swords, which they labeled "war trophies" to be mailed home. Since these swords were made after the end of the war, however, they are not war trophies.

A possible solution to the impasse may be found in suggesting to the PX that they issue a certificate with swords sold, to the effect that such swords have been purchased in the PX and are legitimate souvenirs. They would not then conflict with existing postal regulations.

This is the only sword factory now operating in Japan. Arts and Monuments Division previously deemed it wise to keep one such factory open, primarily for use in repair of old swords which are works of art. Unless the contract is reinstated, the factory will have to close down.

(Use plain paper for additional pages if necessary.)

Reported by C.F.G.

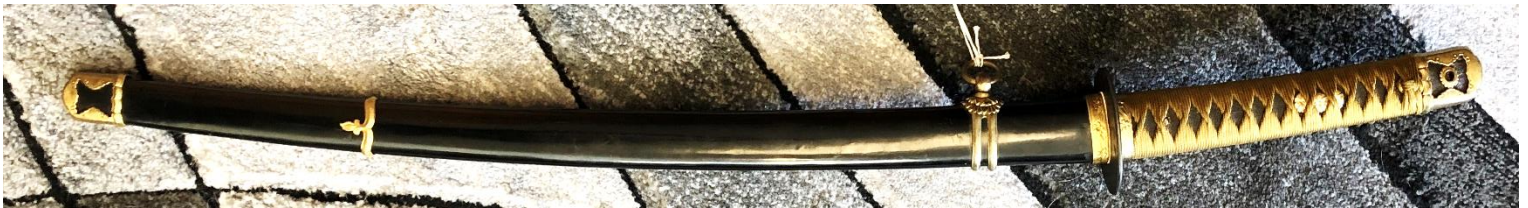
Approved _____
Division Chief

(Complete in duplicate. Forward original to Executive Office. File a copy in Division.)

P
(SWORDS)

More follow-up documents were uncovered showing the sequence of events. Prior to the meeting discussed above, Tenzoshan had delivered 2,650 swords (along with 1,200 “daggers”), but SCAP prohibitions against manufacturing weapons derailed the PX order. No one told Tenzoshan, though, so they continued to produce the remaining 6,097 swords. Investigators sided with Tenzoshan and a waiver was produced allowing the swords to be sold as souvenirs. A total of 8,747 of these were made.

So, we now know that this strange sword was specifically made by the “only sword factory now operating in Japan” and was made after the war. During the post-war occupation, several



factories were intentionally kept open to keep Japanese industry alive for the reconstruction. The Tenzoshan factory was one of those. So, these swords were made as souvenirs. But unlike other post-war souvenirs, unlike the fake swords we see, these are beautiful works of art made by quality craftsmen. Even in defeat, the pride and honor of the Japanese sword maker is undiminished.

It is still a Japanese sword and deserves respect as the last gasp of the craft at the end of the war. It is a sad end to a magnificent history of Japanese war swords. In a sense, though, it might be considered the first of the new breed of swords that would come alive a few years later -- swords made simply for their beauty and not for war.

“... in the end the cherry blossoms have fallen and the grand expectations have come to a heated and abrupt halt. But after all is finished our honor and our dignity is retained for generations to come.” J.C. Stroud, NMB

Sources:

Bob Coleman, Wehrmacht-Awards.com, Japanese Militaria Forum, <http://www.wehrmacht-awards.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=59>

Stephen Thorpe, Nihonto Message Board, Articles, “NT and IAO list and sword documents by US Gov 1945-1950”, <http://www.militaria.co.za/nmb/forum/57-nt-and-iao-list-and-sword-documents-by-us-gov-1945-1950/>

PaulG, Wehrmacht-Awards.com, Japanese Militaria Forum, <http://www.wehrmacht-awards.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?f=59>

If you have more information on this topic, and/or corrections that should be made, please contact me at bw1977@gmail.com. This is a work in progress and we welcome anything that would expand our understanding of this sword, it's makers, and the process that brought it about.

DECLASSIFIED
Authority *NWS 975029*

9-4 ROUTING
A C/S G-4
D AC/S G-4
EXECUTIVE
PLANS & POLICY <i>hr</i>
OPERATIONS
CONST & FAC
TRANSPORTATION
SUPPLY
PETROLEUM
BUDGET
PERSONNEL
ADMINISTRATION

CONFIDENTIAL

400-32
X331.3
X332

Lt. Col. Fitch 26-6042

Sale of Japanese Souvenir Swords to Occupation Forces

22 NOV 1949

C/S

1. Basic is Eighth Army 1st Indorsement to letter from Kanagawa Military Government Team (Tab A), referring to CINCOPR for settlement of problem concerning 6,097 souvenir swords ordered through authority of Central Purchasing Office.
2. Basic communication also forwarded informal investigation conducted by CG Eighth Army (Tab B). The facts outlined in this investigation are essentially correct, and the salient facts are summarized as follows:
 - a. Based upon authorization from CPO, the Tenshozan Sword Factory was authorized by the Eighth Army Military Government Section, on 5 November 45, to manufacture 8,747 Samurai type swords (Tab B --- Exhibit A-2 --- Incls 8 and 10).
 - b. During the period 19 December 1945 - 13 April 1946, the Tenshozan Sword Company delivered 2,650 Samurai type swords and 1,200 daggers to CPO and received payment therefore.
 - c. Sale of souvenir swords by the Exchange Service was subsequently prohibited by SCAP on the basis that existing Far East Commission and SCAP policy prohibited the manufacture of arms in Japan. This prohibition was relaxed temporarily by SCAP letter of 5 November 1946, which permitted sale of swords on hand in the Eighth Army Exchanges, but forbid future procurement.
 - d. The Tenshozan Sword Company was not instructed to cease production of swords until November 1947; however, prior to that time (March 1947) the entire sword and dagger order had been manufactured. This resulted in 6,097 completed swords ordered, but not purchased by CPO and remaining on hand at the Tenshozan Sword Company, for which there was no authorized method of disposal. (Tab B -- Exhibit A-2)
 - e. On two occasions Mr. Yao requested an investigation or assistance from Eighth Army in disposition of swords held by his company but suspended in order that he could explore the possibility of disposing of these swords to private traders. However, on 27 September 49, he asserted that all his efforts had been unsuccessful, and requested further assistance in disposing of them. (Tab B -- Exhibits f-g-h)
 - f. Informal discussions between Eighth Army and Chief of CPO disclosed that CPO could not produce evidence indicating that the original requests for swords had been cancelled. Colonel Nordstrom of CPO stated informally that his office was obligated to the Tenshozan Sword Company, and suggested that CPO be given the opportunity to settle the matter at GHQ level.

(See JN. 93330)
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Lt. Col. Fitch 26-6042

Sale of Japanese Souvenir Swords to Occupation Forces

23 NOV 1949

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C/S

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Cont.

g. it was concluded that the Tenshozan Sword Company acted in good faith and manufactured subject swords on proper authorization, and it was recommended that the matter be referred to GHQ for settlement.

3. From the above it is apparent that the contractor should not assume any loss as a result of this transaction, and that CPO is obligated to purchase from the contractor the remaining swords on the original order. From informal contact with the contractor, CPO states that the remaining swords can be purchased for approximately \$6.50 each. The Eighth Army Exchange Liaison Officer with CPO indicates that the swords can be readily sold in the exchanges at a retail price of not more than \$10.00. By purchasing the swords at \$6.50, adding the CPO mark-up of 5% and the exchange mark-up of 20%, they could be sold at a minimum price of \$7.80

4. As a means for disposal of these items, it would seem appropriate in this case to permit CPO to purchase the remaining quantity of swords for resale in the exchanges, inasmuch as an exception to SCAP policy was made which allowed the sale of those swords already delivered to the exchanges under the same purchase order. This exception was based on the premise that the swords were considered to be souvenirs and not war trophies, as they were not used as weapons but actually manufactured after the termination of the war. Informal information from Eighth Army indicates that there is no objection to the sale of these items in the exchanges. It is believed advisable that occupationaires purchasing swords, who are not authorized dependent housing, be required to immediately mail swords so purchased to their homes.

5. It is therefore recommended that:

- a. CPO be authorized to procure only the remaining 6,097 completed swords.
- b. CG Eighth Army be authorized to offer these swords for resale in Eighth Army Exchanges.
- c. Occupationaires purchasing swords, who are not authorized dependent housing, be required to immediately mail swords so purchased to their homes.

2 Incls

- 1 -- Tab A
- 2 -- Tab B

Concurrences:

JA
G-1
FMG

E
G. L. E.

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HEADQUARTERS
KANAGAWA MILITARY GOVERNMENT TEAM
APO 503

AG 474.7

27 December 1948

SUBJECT: Japanese Souvenir Swords

TO: Commanding General
Eighth Army
APO 343
(Attn: Military Government Section)

1. Forwarded herewith for your consideration is a letter from the Tenshozan Works, Zaimoku Kamakura, Kanagawa Prefecture Honshu, reference disposition of Japanese souvenir swords.

2. Since these swords were made on an approved order from the Eighth Army Military Government Section during the period November 1945 through April 1946, they are bonafide souvenirs and cannot be considered as War Trophies. The cancellation of the purchase order by the Eighth Army Exchange Service has financially embarrassed the company manufacturing the swords.

3. It is believed that this stock of swords, now in the Kamakura factory of the Tenshozan Company, constitute a danger to the Occupation Forces, as they could be seized by subversive elements or used during labor disturbances.

4. Recommend the following action be taken to dispose of this stock of swords:

a. Dockside sale of souvenir swords to personnel departing for the Z.I. or,

b. Require the Japanese Government to purchase the swords for use as side arms or emblems of authority for the Japanese police officials. These emblems of authority would be similar to those worn by French or other European officials.

1 Incl:
Ltr Tenshozan
works, 20 Dec 48

/s/t/ F.B. PORTER
Colonel, FA, SMGO

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Authority: AUCS 975029

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AG-W 333.5 1st Ind
(27 Dec 48)

SUBJECT: Japanese Souvenir Swords

13 OCT 1948

HEADQUARTERS EIGHTH ARMY, APO 343

TO: Commander-in-Chief, Far East, APO 500

1. Forwarded herewith for your information and consideration is the report of an informal investigation conducted by this headquarters concerning a complaint made by the Tenshozan Works, Zaimoku, Kamakura, regarding the manufacture and sale of Japanese souvenir swords.

2. It is apparent that the Tenshozan Works completed the manufacture of the swords and daggers on proper authority and in good faith at the request of the Army Exchange Central Purchasing Officer, GHQ, FEC, and therefore the occupation forces would appear to have a moral obligation to consummate the transaction.

3. The Tenshozan Works twice requested that this investigation be suspended for periods of three months each in order that they might endeavor to dispose of the completed swords through other channels. The efforts of the manufacturer, however, were unsuccessful.

FOR THE COMMANDING GENERAL:

- 2 Incls
- 1. Ltr fm Tenshozan Works
- 2. Report of Investigation

W.H. DICKERSON
CWO USAF
POST R.O. GEN



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