

Thursday, Feb. 21, 2008

Japanese soldier's skeleton, diary discovered on New Guinea

SYDNEY (Kyodo) A complete skeleton of a Japanese soldier has been unearthed in [Papua New Guinea](#), found clutching his dog tag, diary and helmet to his chest.

The discovery, on the Kokoda Track, is extremely rare, a local tour guide operator who found the remains, Wayne Wetherall, said Wednesday.

It is believed to be the first time in 30 years a complete skeleton has been found on the narrow 96-km trail, the scene of several fierce battles fought between Japanese and Australian soldiers from 1942 to 1943.

"Occasionally, we will come across single bones, soldiers' boots, bullets, grenades and weapon pits. But to find a full set of [human remains](#) is very unusual because of the ravages of war and time, and the fact that most soldiers were buried in very shallow graves in a hurry," Wetherall said.

Directed by local landowners who believed they had seen some human remains, Wetherall and staff from his tour company, Kokoda Spirit, made the find in the central Mount Bellamy area on Feb. 10.

The group also found another two sets of boots nearby, making it likely the remains of at least two more soldiers are close by, Wetherall said.

The grave was dug at least 60 cm deep and the soldier carefully laid to rest, Wetherall said. "He had been placed on his side and had his personal belongings clutched close to his chest. Someone would have had a lot of respect to have buried this soldier, this warrior, in that way."

Given the location of the remains and the burial style, it is likely the soldier was killed in early September 1942, during the Imperial Japanese Army's early advance on [Port Moresby](#), Wetherall said.

Wetherall said he hopes the find will help bring closure to the soldier's family in Japan.