



Sufin (left) and Tsai during the traditional Taiwanese-aboriginal ritual in Wewak.

# Group ritual brings back WWII spirits

By MALUM NALU

ALMOST 70 years after the end of World War II in Wewak in 1945, the spirits of Taiwanese aboriginal soldiers who lost their lives while fighting for the Japanese Imperial Army, have finally been sent home through traditional rituals.

It is little known and sad story of WWII in Papua New Guinea, that many of the Japanese soldiers were in fact Taiwanese.

The *Takasago Giyuntai* (Taiwanese Volunteers) were forcefully-conscripted into the Imperial Japanese Army, recruited from the Taiwanese aboriginal tribes during WWII because of their hunter-gatherer culture, and sent to the jungles of far-flung New Guinea to fight in a war that was not theirs.

Over the last three weeks, a Taiwanese academic and three other aboriginals, have been in East Sepik to follow the footsteps of their grandfathers, as well as conduct traditional rituals to bring back the spirits of the *Takasago Giyuntai* who lost their lives there.

Prof Futuru Tsai, an academic at National Taitung University in Taiwan, research student Yavaus Gling, artist Siki Sufin, and documentary filmmaker Siaman Zhang Yehai, concurred yesterday that they had achieved their special mission to retrace the footsteps of their grandfathers and bring their spirits with them back to Taiwan, as well as foster new bonds with the people of Wewak, East Sepik, and PNG.

They travelled from Wewak to Angoram by road, and then further up the Sepik River, where they cut down a tree and made a carving of a wing with the help of locals, which was later placed at the Japanese war memorial at Boys' Town in Wewak.

A traditional ritual was carried out at the war memorial in Wewak, in which the spirits of those who lost their lives during WWII, were asked to fly back to Taiwan.

Tsai estimates that of the more than 4,000 *Takasago Giyuntai* brought by the Japanese to fight in PNG, up to 3,000 lost their lives here.

Taiwan Trade Mission representative, Daniel Hu, hopes that PNG-Taiwan relations will be strengthened because of this WWII history.

Tsai's grandfather, Roeng, died two years ago aged 90, but his stories about WWII in PNG, which included that of starving Japanese being forced to eat human flesh to stay alive in the jungles, have always intrigued his grandson, who had already published his biography.

This is his second time in PNG, having first come here four years ago with his father and younger brother, to retrace Roeng's footsteps.

Tsai admitted that the story of the *Takasago Giyuntai* was one of the saddest in the WWII history of Taiwan, Japan, and PNG, and hopes that something positive will come out of his visit to Wewak and East Sepik.

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