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### In the Shadow of Shuri Castle: The Battle of Okinawa in Memory

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In the Shadow of Shuri Castle: The Battle of Okinawa in Memory

A Thesis by

Blake Altenberg

Chapman University

Orange, California

Wilkinson College

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts-War and Society

May 2019

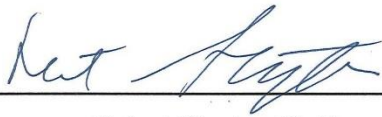
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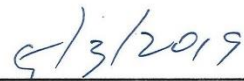
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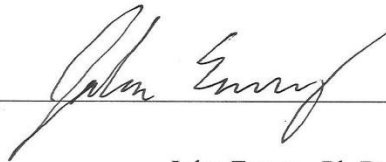
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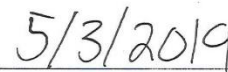
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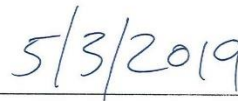
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May 2019

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## ABSTRACT

### In the Shadow of Shuri Castle: The Battle of Okinawa in Memory

by Blake Altenberg

The memory of the battle of Okinawa was shaped by politics. The memory of the battle for Okinawans emphasizes war crimes committed against them and the devastating impact that was inflicted upon their peaceful island. Their emphasis on sole victimization led to other Okinawan narratives being either downplayed or outright denied. To remove American bases off their island, gain recognition for Japanese atrocities plus reparations, the Okinawans portrayed themselves as a peaceful people that were the sole victims of the battle of Okinawa. The United States glossed over the crimes committed by the Japanese on Okinawa and Asia to use Japan as a bulwark against what they perceived as communist aggression in Asia. To solidify this new alliance, the United States promoted reconciliation instead of punishment. In doing so, they willingly forget atrocities committed by the Japanese against Asian nationals. Americans also remember the battle in conjunction with the dropping of two atomic bombs and to justify their morally superior position to the Soviet Union, promote a more complex picture of the decision to use the bombs. This included discussing how Okinawa changed the American leader's perspectives on a mainland Japan invasion. As a result, has become increasingly difficult to separate Okinawa and the bombs because of their temporal closeness. The Japanese tend to remember the battle as a heroic last stand and emphasize sacrifice to inspire future generations partly out of fear that Japanese youth have gone soft, ultimately demonstrating that Japan has not fully come to terms with her memory of the Second World War.

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## List of Abbreviations and Terms

IJA- Imperial Japanese Army

IJN- Imperial Japanese Navy

USMC-United States Marine Corps

USN- United States Navy

USA-United States Army

*Showa* Emperor- The posthumous name for Hirohito (1901-1989). In Japan, reigning emperors are referred to simply as “the Emperor.” In some East Asian cultures, the posthumous names are given to royalty or highly accomplished officials. Not to be confused with the *Showa* era.

*Showa* Period- Lasted from 1926-1989. Roughly translates to “period of enlightened peace/harmony.” The Japanese era naming is still used to this day. For example, Showa 19 means the 19<sup>th</sup> year of the Showa period, so 1945. The modern eras since the Meiji Restoration of 1868 are *Meiji*, *Taisho*, *Showa*, and *Heisei* (as of current emperor Akihito’s abdication on April 30, 2019).

Okinawan- The term I will use to address the indigenous people of the island of Okinawa and the other Ryukyuan islands. The indigenous people to these islands is known as the Ryukyuan people. However, for clarity’s sake I will be addressing the indigenous people of Okinawa as Okinawans. The Okinawans possess both similarities and differences with the Japanese in culture, dialect, and genetics. Some Okinawans identify as Japanese, others do not, and numerous debates surround the issue of Okinawan identity. Regardless, there is undoubtedly stark differences between the two cultures.

## Introduction: The Long Shadow of Okinawa

In June 1945, a young American Marine named Eugene Sledge felt relief that his ordeal on the Japanese island of Okinawa was almost finished. He described in emotional terms about the return to the American position behind the front; “Every day old friends returned from the hospitals, some hale and hearty, but others showing the effects of only partial recovery from severe wounds...but our relief that the long Okinawa ordeal was over at last was indescribable.”<sup>1</sup> Around the same time Colonel Hiromichi Yahara, a high ranked Japanese Imperial Army officer was captured by American soldiers and also expressed liberation that his time on Okinawa was over as well.

Yahara expresses a deeply personal reaction to the announcement of Japanese surrender while stationed on Okinawa, “No longer would I have a chance to participate in a decisive battle on mainland Japan, much less a life-or-death escape, or even resort to pointless suicide. After my long and anguished journey, I decided to live.”<sup>2</sup> These two quotes reflect the brutal nature of the campaign but differ in the context of liberation. Sledge remembers the respite of the battle in terms of reunification with fellow soldiers, but Yahara expresses a different kind of relief. Yahara is relieved from his expected duty to defend and possibly die for his country. The torment of his comments reflects both personal surrender and the Japanese lying down of arms. Thus, the termination of the Battle of Okinawa faded into history and memory.

The Battle of Okinawa in spring 1945 is often remembered as the final campaign of the WWII Pacific war, a last bleeding wound in a horror filled theatre of the bloodiest conflict in

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<sup>1</sup> E.B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa* (New York, NY: Random House, 1981), 342.

<sup>2</sup> Hiromichi Yahara, *The Battle For Okinawa* (New York, NY: Wiley, 1995), 188.

human history. The campaign for the island lasted eighty-two days and led to the deaths of some 12,500 Americans, 77,000-110,000 Japanese soldiers and 40,000-150,000 Okinawan civilians.<sup>3</sup> The Battle of Okinawa has become synonymous with the killing fields of the Pacific theatre during the Second World War (WWII). Due to the incredibly bloody and highly destructive nature of the battle, the memories have retained a significant place in the American, Japanese, and Okinawan popular consciousness of the Second World War. Marine E.B Sledge describes the battle in graphic terms, “The mud was knee deep in some places, probably deeper in others if one dared venture there. For several feet around every corpse, maggots crawled about in the muck and then were washed away by the runoff of the rain.”<sup>4</sup> The memory of a traumatic event, such as war, can impose a lasting impact on how various societies form their identity and how it shapes its policies and relations with other nations following the conflict. In other words, the memory of a traumatic event can shape policy and the identity of a people.<sup>5</sup>

Parties to a conflict either remember or memorialize events in different ways. It is rare that parties to a traumatic event recall the same exact same circumstances and outcome. The aftermath for the retention of the battle of Okinawa endures. Each party’s remembrance of key events and impact of the battle were shaped by outside forces. Memory shaping policy which can range from revisionist history to outright propaganda as drafted by government officials or even historians is not a universal concept. Each conflict is unique, and memory of the Battle of Okinawa was shaped by the policies instituted by the United States and Japan with the advent of the Cold War. The battle is often portrayed by both principal parties as a violent abyss that

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<sup>3</sup> Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Japanese Empire* (New York, NY: Random House, 1999), 71.

<sup>4</sup> E.B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*, 272-273.

<sup>5</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York, NY: Norton, 1999), 36.

brought out the worst in both the Japanese Army and American Armed Forces. However, the Okinawans remember and portray the battle in a different fashion. They remember the battle as a violent abyss, but with a different purpose. Okinawans use their incredible suffering during the battle as a political tool to garner support and leverage to solve their contemporary issues.

Memory can differ from reality and they can often clash regarding historical memory. Societies can manipulate past events to accomplish political goals. This includes portraying nations as heroes, villains, and victims. In portraying oneself as a hero, victim or positive actor in past events, an intense feeling of nationalism can occur, and this has been used for political purposes. Therefore, politics plays a major role in memory shaping. Some examples of this include forgetting events purposefully. Okinawans purposefully forgot some accounts of the battle in order to garner international support for their goals.

Memory was manipulated by politics on Okinawa for the three major combatants. American memory of the Okinawa campaign is clouded by the introduction of nuclear weapons. The Americans remember the Battle of Okinawa often in conjunction with the dropping of the atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the end of the Second World War.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, the direct and lasting imprint of the battle for Americans was also shaped by Cold War policies. These policies included military and economic support to rebuild Japan as an ally in the Pacific against communism. Japan was positioned as a bulwark against Soviet and Chinese Communism and viewed as a potential staging ground for an expected conflict. As such America instituted a policy of reconciliation and reconstruction. American political elites perpetuated the tale of a Japanese nation led astray by militants and now their

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<sup>6</sup> Richard B. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Japanese Empire*, 331.

civilian population needed guidance from a more “civilized” Western Power. To promote this reconciliation with Japan, the United States exhibited a form of “White Man’s Burden,” to which they utilize their knowledge and expertise to help rebuild a poorer or “lesser” nation. If the United States could help rebuild their former arch enemy Japan, Western Style Democracy would be showcased as the preferable form of government versus communism.

The United States desperately desired allies throughout Asia against perceived communist aggression in the region. American leader’s consistent message that Japan went awry with fanatical militant leaders and the collective Japanese population was guilty of being complicit. Culturally the framing of this message absolved the Japanese of individual responsibility and guilt for their war crimes throughout the Pacific. To many Americans, the Okinawa battle was a last desperate defense of a fanatical and determined enemy that solidified the United States’ decision to reluctantly use atomic weapons against Japan. To portray the United States as morally superior in direct contrast to the Soviet Union, early Cold War Era accounts of the battle whitewash the intense racial hatred that fueled the killing fields of Okinawa. American’s portrayal of her soldiers as heroes would have been complicated by their violent hatred of the Japanese. To do so, much of the hate that fueled some Americans was forgotten in favor of a depiction of patriotic, young Americans. Reality clashes with memory in America’s account of the Pacific War.

While parties to a traumatic incident may remember the event differently, they can share similar perspectives. The collective Japanese memory of the battle share traces of similarity with the American narrative. The battle is also portrayed in Japan as a violent abyss in which no nation emerged with clean hands. Japanese memory has accepted the American notion that the people of Japan were guilty of being steered afield by militant leaders. In acceptance of this

narrative, Japanese shed individual responsibility for war crimes in Okinawa and other battles and collective guilt for instigating the war. In short, the narrative can be summed up as if everyone is guilty, then no one is guilty. However, the Japanese also reminisce of the battle as a heroic last stand in the fight for their homeland. Some fanatical resistance fighters, such as the *Kamikaze* pilots and the *Lily Corps*, have been viewed or celebrated as national heroes in Japan.<sup>7</sup> They are often portrayed as tragic figures in this battle, but their duty to their people and nation, trumped their personal feelings or actions.

The indigenous Okinawan people view of the battle is one of tragedy, atrocity, and innocence. To portray the fight as a heroic last stand, Japanese historical accounts have overshadowed the Okinawan far dimmer narrative of the battle. The Okinawan people suffered incredible losses during the conflict, with an estimated half of the pre-war island population killed because of the battle.<sup>8</sup> The Okinawans remember the battle as a watershed moment in their history. The Okinawans believe they were sacrificed upon the altar of the nation as a last stand of the Japanese Imperial Army. It was not a unique sacrifice in Okinawa. Before and during the battle Okinawans were subjected to war crimes by the Japanese Army.<sup>9</sup> Okinawan leaders like to depict a singular narrative of their experience, when, experiences for Okinawans were very diverse. Starting at the end of the Second World War, the United States occupied Okinawa for several years and built a strategic military base that is still active after 70+ years. The base is incredibly unpopular in Okinawa but retains large support from both United States and Japanese

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<sup>7</sup> Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, (New York, NY: New York Review Books, 1994), 222-225.

<sup>8</sup> “The Basic Concept of the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum.” *The Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum*. April 1, 2000. <http://www.peace-museum.pref.okinawa.jp/english/index.html> (accessed December 5, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War* (New York, NY: Pantheon Press, 1986), 298-300.

governments.<sup>10</sup> In order to leverage better living conditions for Okinawans today; the strategy is to keep the memory of Japanese atrocities alive and have the Americans remove their base from the island. This mindset allows Okinawans to portray themselves as victims during the combat. In doing so, the main Okinawan narrative overshadowed the diverse experience of the survivors of the battle.

### **Historiography**

The historiography of the battle of Okinawa in memory is vast, but very limited in scope. Much ink has been spilled over the debate of Japanese war crimes in historical memory of East Asia. Writings on the recollection of the battle tend to be discussed in relation to Japanese carnage on Okinawa. Since the 1980's, there have been a number of volumes that dealt with either Japan's war guilt or her official accounts of the Second World War. Despite the difficulty today in obtaining first person accounts to document a volume dedicated to historical memory about many distinct cultures and languages, interest remains high in the topic. This can be traced to political tensions primarily between Korea, China, Vietnam, and Japan. Some have claimed the frictions arose from the horrific atrocities committed by Japan in the Second World War.<sup>11</sup> Yet, this emphasis on Japanese War crimes narrows the historical conversation by focusing strictly on one aspect of geopolitics. The Cold War and contemporary politics played a big role in shaping the memory of the Pacific War, an aspect neglected by historians.

The memory of the battle of Okinawa has been dominated in academic circles by Japanese and Okinawan memory. Since the battle was incredibly traumatic for noncombatants,

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<sup>10</sup> Takayoshi Egami, "Politics in Okinawa since the Reversion of Sovereignty," *Asian Survey* 34, no. 9 (September 1994): 840.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Buruma, *Wages of Guilt*, x.

conversation tends to be dominated with an antiwar and victim centered slant. Works written on the battle of Okinawa also tend to have discussion about the contemporary issue of American military presence on Okinawa. However, the emphasis on geopolitical impact has overshadowed an important first-person account – the soldier’s experience.

Due to this emphasis on civilian memories, soldier’s experiences are relegated to a narrower audience. Michael S. Molaskey in his book, *The American Occupation of Japan and Okinawa: Literature and Memory*, wrote briefly about the memory of the battle. However, he writes mainly from the civilian perspective and only as it relates to the occupation of the island.<sup>12</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook in their work, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, dedicate an entire chapter to Japanese and Okinawan memories of the battle of Okinawa. Yet, most of the memories are dictated by Japanese. Few of the interviewees were Okinawan civilians or soldiers.<sup>13</sup>

This emphasis on Japanese and Okinawan memory leaves out a crucial belligerent of the battle of Okinawa, which is the American soldier experience. American memories of Okinawa are often pushed to the wayside and little has been written on how they remember the battle. American soldiers were often the last to forgive and reconcile with the Japanese. Many armed forces personnel did not appreciate that their nation forgave and now aided and abetted the very country that caused so much bloodshed. Minimal accounts have been written on how the Cold War shaped the memory of the battle. The emphasis on Japanese war crimes and civilian

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<sup>12</sup> Michael S. Molaskey, *The American Occupation of Japan and Okinawa: Literature and Memory*, (Philadelphia, PA: Routledge Press, 1999), 1-3.

<sup>13</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1992), 354-367.



suffering during the battle leaves out many important aspects of understanding how societies come to remember trauma and how politics can shape it.

### **Methodology**

This paper will use primary and secondary sources from all three presented parties; the Okinawan, the Japanese, and the American perspective. This paper will provide evidence that memory can be shaped by politics. Outside events and forces can often shift the memory of events in the immediate years thereafter. Primary sources will include newspaper accounts, memoirs, movies, and art from the Cold War Era. Many national newspapers analyzed the battle of Okinawa on numerous occasions and prove invaluable to understand how American memory was fashioned. Moving from print to canvas and film, the battle of Okinawa has also been visually interpreted and portrayed in multiple art forms. Many Japanese, American, and Okinawans have produced works of art depicting the battle in movies, television shows, and historical fiction. American art illustrates the Battle of the Okinawa, but often in the form of political cartoons, unlike the Japanese and Okinawans who portray the event through various mediums.

### **Race and Reconciliation: The State of Post-War Japan and the Birth of Memory of the Battle of Okinawa**

Emphasis on reconciliation was one of the key policies that shaped memory of the Battle of Okinawa. On September 2, 1945, on the deck of the American battleship U.S.S. Missouri, the

Japanese formally surrendered to the allied forces.<sup>14</sup> With the formal surrender, the United States became the occupying power in Japan. The United States was now engaged in nation building to ensure conflict between the countries did not erupt again. Equally challenging was a new perceived threat to the United States had emerged in Eastern Europe and Asia. The Soviet Union sphere of influence was rapidly expanding throughout Europe, and the Western Allies were afraid other countries would soon fall to Communism. With the advent of the Cold War, the United States desperately needed allies in the pacific region and Asia. China was unreliable as it was in the midst of a civil war and Japan was in ruins after the Second World War, with most of her cities and industries destroyed.<sup>15</sup>

The United States had concluded an essential need to rebuild Japan to serve as fortification against Soviet Communism. When the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, Japan became an increasingly important bulwark against this perceived Communist aggression. The task of reconstructing Japan was daunting. 2.7 million Japanese military men and civilians had perished during the conflict. 4.5 million citizens and soldiers were wounded or gravely ill.<sup>16</sup> More than sixty major cities had been heavily bombed, which effectively destroyed most of the heavy industry base and living conditions throughout Japan had dropped dramatically. This did not include the loss of Japan's vast Asian and Pacific Empire, which greatly assisted Japan's economy for decades.<sup>17</sup> To convince the American public with their

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<sup>14</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 42.

<sup>15</sup> Takafusa Nakamura, *The Post –War Japanese Economy: Its Development and Structure*, (Tokyo, JP: University of Tokyo Press, 1981), 15.

<sup>16</sup> John W. Dower, *Japan in War & Peace: Selected Essays*, (New York, NY: The New Press, 1995), 121-122.

<sup>17</sup> Takafusa Nakamura, *The Post –War Japanese Economy: Its Development and Structure*, 15.

fresh memories plus physical and emotional scares to forgive and reconcile with Japan was a daunting challenge.

Promoting forgiveness and reconciliation between the United States and Japan was difficult. The Pacific theatre of the Second World War reinforced or developed ugly racial bigotry from both sides. The fighting was race-fueled and intense. Many Japanese had difficulties acknowledging defeat, let alone reconciling with the United States. In 1944 a Japanese magazine published an article titled, “The Bestial American People,” and contained the subtitle of, “Beat the Americans to Death!” The article went on to explain that Americans were absent of the Japanese virtues of goodwill, gratitude, and filial piety. It also described the racist American caricature of the Japanese people portrayed as monkeys or sub-human. To the writers, racism fueled the alleged American atrocities against the Japanese and made the Americans inhuman *oni*, roughly translated as Demons.<sup>18</sup> This kill-or be killed mentality fueled Japanese soldier’s imagination and the fighting rarely gave quarter to either side.

American soldiers racialized the Japanese as well, leading to further difficulties in reconciliation. One American sailor believed that even when the war was going well for the Americans that the Japanese, “...will have to be driven out of every little nook and niche and be hunted down like animals.”<sup>19</sup> This violent racial hatred was an underlying story for many Americans and Japanese through the end of the Second World War. Defeat can bring reflection and remorse. With the collapse of the Japanese empire, left-wing Japanese intellectuals and

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<sup>18</sup> John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race & Power in the Pacific War*, 243-244

<sup>19</sup> Bob [No Last Name] to his Family, Original Manuscript, September 11, 1944, 2014.008.w.r., Bob [No Last Name] Second World War Correspondence, Chapman University Center for American War Letters.

liberals began promotion of a formal peace movement that grew to a significant size by 1948. This peace movement portrayed the Japanese as a people led astray by their leaders and they themselves bore responsibility for, "...the fact that their intellectual ability was so weak as to be deceived, and they lacked the fortitude to repel or fight oppression."<sup>20</sup> Another critic named Abe Shinnosuke agreed that, "...the majority of Japanese must bear responsibility for having been stupid."<sup>21</sup>

### **American Occupation and the Beginning of Reconciliation**

The American political elites were quick to latch on to these explanations for Japanese actions during the Second World War. American leaders promoted this view in order to position the Japanese as viable allies against the Soviet Union. However, the task to convince the American people and other nations to reconcile with the Japanese was difficult. Joseph Stalin, premier of the Soviet Union, thought that the occupation of Japan was "too soft" and demanded that the Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Japan, General Douglas MacArthur, be replaced with a four-power commission to oversee the reconstruction and the punishment of the Japanese people.<sup>22</sup> The American people in 1945 tended to agree with Stalin regarding justice and punishment. In Gallup Polls, nearly a third of Americans polled wanted Emperor Hirohito executed, while the rest of the majority favored convicting him as a war criminal.<sup>23</sup> Media campaigns in the Soviet Union, Australia, and the United States raged against the retention of

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<sup>20</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 504-505.

<sup>21</sup> Abe Shinnosuke, *Ie No Hikari*, January 1949.

<sup>22</sup> William M. Leavitt, "General Douglas MacArthur: Supreme Public Administrator of Post-World War II Japan," *Public Administration Review* 75, no. 2 (2015): 315-324.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Harvey, *American Shogun: General MacArthur, Emperor Hirohito and the Drama of Modern Japan* (New York: Overlook Press, 2006), 331.

Emperor Hirohito, called for the deaths of the royal family and members of the Japanese government.<sup>24</sup> Some elected officials even went so far to demand the sterilization of all Japanese and called them “Savage Apes” and “Bestial Japs.”<sup>25</sup>

Despite the protest from domestic and foreign individuals, General MacArthur was not removed from his position and became the first foreign ruler and occupier in more than 2,000 years of Japanese history. He was a magistrate for nearly 83,000,000 people. Japan was a unique society to MacArthur. He described Japan as, “...something out of the pages of mythology.”<sup>26</sup> In his first week as the occupying ruler of Japan, he made it clear that he did not intend to keep Japan down, but prop it back up.<sup>27</sup> The desire to buttress Japan as a safeguard against communism was already of strategic importance to American leaders. MacArthur was directly tasked to curb the emergence of communism in Japan. Since the militaristic government had fallen, Japanese political prisoners had been released from prison. This included Japanese communists who were enemies of the militaristic government before and during the Second World War. Many of these political prisoners were now free to publish and spread their ideas. The Japanese began publishing works that even criticized the emperor, which would have been impossible before defeat.<sup>28</sup> The right-wing Japanese and the American government, however, saw these ideas as a threat to an economy and society in shambles.

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<sup>24</sup> Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences: General of the Army* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 280.

<sup>25</sup> Harvey, *American Shogun*, 331.

<sup>26</sup> MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 241.

<sup>27</sup> Courtney Whitney, *MacArthur: His Rendezvous with History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1956), 242.

<sup>28</sup> *New York Times*, September 29, 1945.

The spread of the ideals of Communism was a tenant of the Soviet Union, who were deeply mistrusted by many Americans as well as Japanese. The Soviet Union was a major problem that MacArthur and the Americans had to contend with the occupation of Japan. The Soviet Union demanded a Russian occupation zone on the Japanese island of Hokkaido. This was rejected by both President Harry Truman and MacArthur.<sup>29</sup> It was unacceptable to American leaders to have Soviet influence in Japan. With the emergence of the Cold War, the Americans feared that Japan would rapidly fall to communism as the nations of Eastern Europe experienced. Over the next several years, MacArthur and the American leaders in Japan would successfully stamp out any hint of communism in Japan.<sup>30</sup>

### **At Least They Aren't Red: The Beginning of the Whitewashing of Japanese War**

#### **Crimes**

In order to prevent the Japanese from falling under Soviet influence, the American government promoted reconciliation with the Japanese. The American elite began to portray the Japanese people and lower echelon soldiers in a more positive light. Any attempt to downplay or diminish the war crimes against American civilians and soldiers would have met heavy criticism but could whitewash the Japanese brutality in Asia and the Pacific. While some historians and journalists continued to research and document war crimes, the whitewashing of Japanese impact

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<sup>29</sup> Clayton D. James, *The Years of MacArthur: Volume 3: Triumph and Disaster, 1945-1964* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 13.

<sup>30</sup> William M. Leavitt, "General Douglas MacArthur: Supreme Public Administrator of Post-World War II Japan," 315-324.

in the Asia Pacific region was ultimately a success. Neither one word nor photographs of Japanese atrocities against other Asian nationalities, such as the Rape of Nanking massacre, appears in *The American Heritage Picture History of World War II*, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's memoirs, or in Henri Michel's *Second World War*. All these historical accounts published from 1959-1975 sold very well in the United States. The lack of a comprehensive discussion of Japanese war crimes suggests that the memory of Japanese war crimes began to vanish in the American public consciousness in exchange for an image of a foe that had been soundly beaten and was no longer a threat to American Democracy.<sup>31</sup> Even in later publications, journalist and historian Iris Chang could not find more than a paragraph on Japanese atrocities against Asian peoples in many popular single volume histories of the Second World War.<sup>32</sup>

To the American public, the view that the Japanese people had been misled by militant leaders and the whitewashing of Japanese war crimes allowed reconciliation to take place sooner. The occupation helped Americans develop some sympathy because they could see the ruins of the Japanese empire. The occupation also provided the Japanese an opportunity to see how Americans conducted themselves. The Japanese could see firsthand that Americans were not the beasts portrayed in war propaganda. A young Japanese boy described his first encounter with the Americans when the occupation began, "What would they be like? Suddenly it occurred to us, 'They must have horns!' We had images of glaring demons with horns sprouting from their heads. We were disappointed, of course. No horns at all. Later, schoolmates who'd bumped into

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<sup>31</sup> Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

them on the streets brought back chocolates. ‘Americans, they’re good people,’ they said, but I told them that couldn’t be true.’<sup>33</sup>

Likewise, American soldiers had to confront their existing beliefs. While they rode into Japan as conquerors, brimming with confidence and swagger, some soldiers began comprehending the Japanese in a more sympathetic light. When MacArthur and team first arrived in Tokyo, he ordered the staff to remove their guns before they disembarked. He thought that it would lessen the chance of being attacked and for good reason. Where they landed, at the Atsugi Airfield, it was once home to nearly 300,000 Japanese soldiers who were barracked there. The staff had reservations in complying.<sup>34</sup> As the Americans arrived unarmed, it greatly surprised the Japanese. The Japanese historian Kazuo Kawai wrote that the arrival was, “[a]n exhibition of cool personal courage, it was even more a gesture of trust in the good faith of the Japanese...From that moment, whatever danger there might have been of a fanatic attack on the Americans vanished in a wave of Japanese admiration and gratitude.”<sup>35</sup> Conversely since the Japanese did not attack the Americans who landed with MacArthur, the American occupation transition team viewed the Japanese as a reasonable people who could be “taught” American style Democracy.

MacArthur’s staff and the occupying forces saw the level of destruction and chaos in the aftermath of the war. The nation of Japan lay in ruins and many Japanese were on the brink of starvation. Soldiers began handing out sweets to children, perhaps out of sympathy for their

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<sup>33</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 469.

<sup>34</sup> William Manchester, *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964* (Boston: Little, Brown. 1978), 462.

<sup>35</sup> Richard B. Finn, *Winners in Peace: MacArthur, Yoshida, and Postwar Japan*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 8.



plight. Many of these children had lost much or all their family.<sup>36</sup> Compassion for the civilians ran up the chain of command and MacArthur himself even began to sympathize with the Japanese people. Despite his role in the defeat of the Japanese Empire, MacArthur helped solve the impending starvation crisis in the winter of 1945-46 by seizing army food supplies. When the Appropriations committee protested this action, MacArthur replied, “Starvation breeds mass unrest, disorder, and violence. Give me bread or give me bullets.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Okinawan Memory**

#### **The Continual Suffering of the Okinawan People in Post-War Japan**

Despite the sympathy for mainland Japanese citizens, the Okinawan people received little compassion from either the Americans or the Japanese. The Okinawan Island lay in ruins and it could not provide enough food or shelter to Okinawans who were returning to their homes. Conversely, there were far more Japanese that had not returned home at the end of the war. Millions of Japanese soldiers and civilians were still spread out in former Japanese territories.<sup>38</sup> However, these soldiers through the help of the Japanese bureaucracy and American government were able to return to their homes.<sup>39</sup> The Okinawans received little help. Before the battle, over a hundred thousand Okinawan civilians had fled to the main Japanese islands or elsewhere. Many of them were forced to leave, not out of goodwill by the Japanese, but more to remove those who

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<sup>36</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 72.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences*, 307.

<sup>38</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 54.

<sup>39</sup> William M. Leavitt, “General Douglas MacArthur: Supreme Public Administrator of Post-World War II Japan,” 315-324.

couldn't dig fortifications, tunnels or fight.<sup>40</sup> These refugees desired to return to Okinawa, but none were able to because of the lack of capacity on Okinawa to support a hundred thousand returnees.<sup>41</sup> The island had been reduced to rubble and was unrecognizable from its prewar state. One post-war British visitor said the island reminded him of the Somme during the First World War.<sup>42</sup>

### **Victims of the 'Typhoon of Steel': War Crimes Against the Okinawans in Native**

#### **Memory**

The lack of resettlement assistance was the beginning of a long, sustained anger against the Japanese government by the Okinawans. The Okinawan population had suffered greatly during the battle of Okinawa. The war crimes committed by both Japanese and American troops were numerous. For example, Okinawan civilians were used as human shields or had been forced to commit suicide by the Japanese. The contemporary government of Japan declares that these suicides were voluntary, however survivors of the battle disagree. One survivor named Kinjo Shigeaki describes how the term, *shudan jiketsu*, or group suicide played out. "...a sergeant gave out two hand grenades each to the members of the village youth organizations... They were directed to throw one grenade at the enemy and use the other to engage in *gyokusai* [giving up your life rather than succumbing to the enemy or falling into their hands]... It's often been argued that the military never actually issued orders to commit suicide, but that's beside the point. You must grasp here the relationship between the military and the residents..."<sup>43</sup> When it was

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<sup>40</sup> Alastair A. McLauchlan. "War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity on Okinawa: Guilt on Both Sides," *Journal of Military Ethics* 13, no. 4 (2014), 370.

<sup>41</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, 54-55.

<sup>42</sup> George Feifer, "The Rape of Okinawa," *World Policy Journal* 17, no. 3 (2000), 33-41.

<sup>43</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 364.

revealed that the Americans provided food and attempted to protect civilians who had surrendered in internment camps, it created deep mistrust and animosity between the Japanese authorities and Okinawan civilians. The thinking was if Okinawans had been allowed to surrender to the Americans than perhaps many more of them would have survived the battle.

The multiple lies perpetrated by Japanese authorities caused great harm to many on Okinawa. A young Okinawan woman named Yoshiko Sakumoto recalls of being greatly upset by the lies the Japanese military. They were regaled with stories of great victories by the Japanese, and then she describes the emotions she and other Okinawans had of surprise and dismay by the arrival of the American fleet off the coast of Okinawa, “The ocean was crowded with a colossal number of ships that stretched north from the Naha area. They [the Americans] had surrounded our island. We could tell right away they weren’t Japanese ships...Wasn’t the Japanese military aware of them? Why weren’t the *kamikaze* fighters attacking them?”<sup>44</sup>

The propaganda about military victories were not the only singular action that angered Okinawans after the war. The Japanese government authorities stationed on the island were unusually cruel and demeaning to the Okinawan populace. If there existed a hierarchy on the island, native Okinawans were often treated little better than a prisoner of war. The Japanese military drafted civilians regularly for dangerous work such as guard duty at cave entrances, carrying supplies to and from positions, and scavenging for food for Japanese soldiers. The Japanese were assigned to protect the Okinawans, but often behaved like roving bandits pilfering personal effects, heirlooms, and food. Many Japanese military personnel displayed little

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<sup>44</sup> Yoshiko Sakumoto Crandell, “Surviving the Battle of Okinawa: Memories of a Schoolgirl,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 12, no. 2 (2014).

sympathy about the lives of the Okinawans. However, some soldiers such as a former Japanese Imperial soldier of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Army on Okinawa, were greatly saddened by how he and his comrades treated the Okinawans by stealing civilian's food at every opportunity, "Even now, I still feel so sorry for them."<sup>45</sup> There is also extensive recollections of how Japanese soldiers would shoot their own men and civilians who moved to surrender to American soldiers.<sup>46</sup> The Okinawans second class treatment in their own homeland directly impacted, their memory to view the Japanese in a negative light.

Inhumanity has neither boundaries nor select nationalities. The Americans also caused great terror for the populace and guilty of war crimes against the Okinawan population. While Japanese occurrence of sexual assaults was much greater than the Americans, it was not uncommon for American combatants to use rape as a weapon of war. Culpable soldiers were often fueled by their racial hatred and some saw no distinction between Okinawans and the Japanese. Historian Yuki Tanaka recounts that in the early days of the battle before fighting intensified, a group of Marines cleared out an entire Okinawan village but found no traces of Japanese soldiers. They began "hunting for women" by dragging women out of air raid shelters and in hiding places throughout the village.<sup>47</sup> An American military report provides evidence that rape was not uncommon among its soldiers. The report stated that 1,754 misdemeanor cases were investigated by military authorities, of which 30 were for rape or attempted rape. However,

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<sup>45</sup> Alastair A. McLauchlan. "War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity on Okinawa: Guilt on Both Sides," 370.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

<sup>47</sup> Yuki Tanaka, *Japan's Comfort Women: Sexual Slavery and Prostitution during World War II* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 111.

there were also far more accusations of sexual assaults that did not end in a conviction.<sup>48</sup> Since rape was vastly underreported during the Second World War, there were far more rapes by American soldiers that went unreported. American soldiers sometimes shot Okinawan civilians who surrendered because they thought they were Japanese troops trying to lure them into a trap and American pilots strafing Okinawan civilians who wandered aimlessly was a regular occurrence.<sup>49</sup> An American soldier summed up the situation best when he stated that the Okinawan people were, "...friendly...nice...people [but in return] we were unusually cruel to them."<sup>50</sup>

Yet, the Americans were often remembered by survivors as displaying better character than the Japanese. An Okinawan survivor of the battle remembered the first time she saw Americans, "For the first time I saw Americans up close. What a strange race with noses two or three times bigger than ours, and blue eyes! What made their eyes that color and their hair golden, I wondered. The soldiers were white and black, and some of them looked Japanese...What kind of country was America, anyway"<sup>51</sup> The memory of meeting the Americans for the first time in many Okinawan memoirs is one of curiosity rather than disgust. Many Okinawans were amazed that Americans they met bore no semblance to what the Japanese had described. Historian George Fieffer summed up the situation best, "The Japanese military who called the Americans beasts, were themselves more beastly."<sup>52</sup> Since the Okinawan

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<sup>48</sup> Alastair A. McLauchlan. "War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity on Okinawa: Guilt on Both Sides," 365.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 367.

<sup>50</sup> Laura H. Lacey, *Stay Off the Skyline: The Sixth Marine Division on Okinawa-An Oral History* (Washington DC: Potomac, 2005), 75-76.

<sup>51</sup> Yoshiko Sakumoto Crandell, "Surviving the Battle of Okinawa: Memories of a Schoolgirl."

<sup>52</sup> George Fieffer, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1992), 463.

populace was lied to about what would happen if they fell into American captivity, the Japanese were portrayed in a much different light than American soldiers.

The Japanese in Okinawan memoirs in contrast were depicted as coldhearted, ruthless, and unsympathetic. This depiction has been carried on to subsequent generations. An Okinawa writer and descendent of a survivor named Medorima Shun, described the Japanese in his fictional account of the battle as much worse than the Americans. In one scene a baby cries out in the cave and receives a stern reprimand from a Japanese soldier. The civilian group ends up helping soothe the child, but the incident brings to mind the many Okinawan accounts of the Japanese killing of infants during the battle in order to keep silence.<sup>53</sup> One Okinawan citizen named remembers in the postwar period of when his mother guided a Japanese veteran of Okinawa about twenty years after the battle, “Whenever my mother said, ‘A soldier died here,’ ... He would then bring his hands together, bow his head in prayer, and sob. ‘Fifty-nine villagers died here, including the village notables-the mayor, deputy mayor, and school principal,’ ... ‘Is that so?’” was his only comment. It was such a minimal response...How could he take the news so lightly?”<sup>54</sup> An Okinawan petition made to then Japanese prime minister, Ikeda Hayato states that, “...In World War II, [Government of Japan] made Okinawa lose close to 200 thousand lives and all of its assets...This responsibility is clearly on the Government of Japan.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Medoruma Shun, *Walking the Street Named Peace Boulevard: A Collection of Medoruma Shun's Early Short Stories* (Tokyo, Kage Shobo, 2006), 97.

<sup>54</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 476.

<sup>55</sup> Shinji Kojima, “Remembering the Battle of Okinawa: The Reversion Movement,” *Social Process in Hawai'i* 42, (2007) 152.

To the Okinawan citizens, the memory of their sacrifices was quickly forgotten by the country they had bled and died for in their own homeland. The forced group suicides were remembered by the Japanese as necessary sacrifices for the greater good. To the Okinawans this was unacceptable. They would continue to live with the memory of their dead as innocent martyrs with financial benefits. An Okinawan grumbled that, “In addition to the rent and subsidies for the military bases here, a great deal of money is paid to Okinawans in survivors’ annuities-payments to the families of the war dead. That money has been supporting our island. It’s an unhealthy way of living. We are dragging along the war even now. We are living off the dead.”<sup>56</sup> The Okinawans have not been fully able to escape their past, their dead loved ones and move on. The Okinawans are stuck with reminders of their past. Due to the American base on the island backed by the government, their anger against the Japanese burns even greater. The Japanese government’s stance of support for the American base or at the very least, the lack of effort to remove the base from the island, helped change the Okinawan perception of the Japanese to a far more negative stance.

The Okinawans sacrificed much for the Japanese. They died by the tens of thousands. It has been estimated that nearly one quarter or half of the island civilian population died during the battle.<sup>57</sup> During the battle atrocities became widespread among Japanese troops. With supplies becoming less available soldiers were ordered to fend for themselves. This meant that they forcibly seized food and supplies from the native populace. One Japanese soldier lamented that, “...the people of Okinawa helped us, but all we did was steal their food.” Another Japanese

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<sup>56</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 477

<sup>57</sup> Shinji Kojima, “Remembering the Battle of Okinawa: The Reversion Movement,” 146.

soldier described the raiding parties that were formed to procure supplies forcibly by raiding the locals. He bluntly states, “We were just a pack of highway thieves.”<sup>58</sup>

Despite both sides committing many atrocities against the native population, the Japanese were the most responsible for the vast amount of civilian deaths on the island. They had complete control over the populace and could have done more to protect the civilian population. To the residents of Okinawa, the word of the military leaders was law. Civilians were under in some form of a psychological grasp on the populace, who would do just about anything instructed by the military leaders. The fact that the Okinawans were ordered to die for a country that now refused to help resettle them on their own island was a source of great anger. They had been sacrificed by the thousands and lied to by their military leaders who told them if they fell into American hands, a fate worse than death awaited them.

The Okinawans began to resent their sad fate and began to depict themselves as passive victims of the Japanese government. Even after the war they were not always considered Japanese. When the issue of implementing an American base on Okinawa arose, General MacArthur reassured the American public that the Japanese would be fine with a base there, “[t]he Japanese will not be opposed to America keeping Okinawa because the Okinawans are not Japanese.”<sup>59</sup> The resentment against the Japanese continued to grow and culminated in an attempted assassination of then Crown-Prince Akihito in 1975.<sup>60</sup> To the Okinawans, the royal family symbolized militarism and their oppression at the hands of the Japanese. The blame for

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<sup>58</sup> Alastair A. McLauchlan. “War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity on Okinawa: Guilt on Both Sides,” 370.

<sup>59</sup> “Okinawa.” *Pacific Stars and Stripes*, May 7, 1947.

<sup>60</sup> “Okinawa Memory: Japan.” *The Economist*, May 16, 1992, 38.



the war was thrust upon the *Showa* emperor by many Okinawans. Since thousands of Okinawans had died in the name of the *Showa* emperor, the would-be assassins rationalized revenge as appropriate if one of the royal family should die at their hands.

### **A History of Oppression: The Pre-War Japanese Suppression of Okinawan Culture and its Impact on Okinawan Memory**

The anger of the Okinawan populace seared against the Japanese much more easily because of prewar and historical suppression of native Okinawan culture and the historical discrimination against them. Okinawa was once a sovereign nation known as the Ryukyu Kingdom. Historically, the kingdom was riddled with poverty and its people were fairly pacifist and it was often a target for Japanese, European, and Chinese imperialist ambitions.<sup>61</sup> When the American Commodore Perry arrived in the 1850's, Okinawa had been a part of Japan for nearly two hundred years, but was allowed to keep its king until 1879, when he was forced to abdicate.<sup>62</sup> The forced assimilation was furthered by the Chinese defeat in the First Sino Japanese war of 1894-1895. After the Chinese were defeated in the war, the Japanese became the supreme influence on Okinawa.<sup>63</sup> Despite their forced assimilation, Okinawans kept their native culture alive, often with horrific consequences. During Japan's fifteen-year war in Asia, acts of legislation by the Japanese ministry of the Interior (*Naimusho*) enacted laws to ban native

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<sup>61</sup> Danielle Glassmeyer, "The Wisdom of Gracious Acceptance: Okinawa, Mass Suicide, and the Cultural Work of Teahouse of the August Moon," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 96, no. 4 (2013), 404.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.

<sup>63</sup> James E. Roberson, "Memory and Music in Okinawa: The Cultural Politics of War and Peace," *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 17, no. 3 (2009), 686.

shamanism in Okinawa and the Japanese Okinawan dialect.<sup>64</sup> These shamans or *yuta*, were hunted down, incarcerated, driven into hiding, and in some cases executed. *Yuta* were accused of supporting draft-dodging and perceived to be a threat to Japanese authority on the island. These shaman hunts or *yutagari* were not very effective, as these *yuta* adapted to the new laws, practiced their beliefs and rituals in hiding, and remained an important part of Okinawan culture.<sup>65</sup> However, the Japanese authorities did succeed in greatly angering parts of the native population.

The war time suppression of *yuta* were part of the continued discrimination of the Okinawans. Due to these actions and those previously described brought for the cumulative impact of the Japanese seen in a far more negative light postwar than the Americans. The Japanese routinely discriminated against the Okinawan people in law and taxation. Okinawans were often neglected by the Japanese government through hostile trade arrangements, absurdly and high taxation. The population received little, if any, assistance during natural disasters, and suffered from lack of educational opportunities. The Japanese justified their actions in part by linking their physical appearance to racial inferiority. The Okinawans tended to be shorter and have darker skin and spoke a dialect that was very different from mainland Japan. This made it much easier for the Japanese to discriminate against them.<sup>66</sup> However, the anger against this treatment boiled over. The Okinawans began remembering Japanese war crimes far more vividly than American war crimes. The Americans were viewed as an odd enemy, one that was always

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<sup>64</sup> Matthew Allen, "The Shaman Hunts and the Postwar Revival and Reinvention of Okinawan Shamanism," *Japan Forum* 29, no. 2 (2016), 218-220.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 219-220.

<sup>66</sup> Miyume Tanji, *Myth, Protest, and Struggle in Okinawa* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 24-28.

present, but faceless during the battle. The Japanese in contrast were remembered by survivors as violent overlords.

**Blood, Iron, Gender, and Patriotism: Child Soldiers and Student Nurses in  
Okinawan Memory**

One of the most noted aspects of the battle of Okinawa is that the Japanese employed Okinawan students as nurses and soldiers. Over 220 female high school students and 18 teachers from the Himeyuri schools in Okinawa were employed as nurses during the battle. They became colloquially known as the (Princess) Lily Corps and served the entire duration of the battle and nearly 80% of them perished from disease, suicide, and being caught in the crossfire.<sup>67</sup> The male equivalent was known as the Iron and Blood Imperial Corps and recruited boys from throughout Okinawa. The unit consisted of over 1,000 boys aged 14-17 years, although some were slightly younger. They were tasked with defending their home island. The Iron and Blood Imperial Corps was essentially destroyed during the battle. Over half would die in the battle from suicide, suicide bomb attacks against American tanks, and in guerilla operations.<sup>68</sup>

The experiences of both student groups were dreadful and have impacted memories of the battle for the Okinawans and Japanese. Of the two groups, the Lily Corps also known as the Student Medical Corps, received the most attention in Japanese and Okinawan film and literature. The reason being that these girls were innocent daughters from elite families and would make for a captivating depiction. The teachers who served as nurses were students of the

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<sup>67</sup> "Understanding Himeyuri." Himeyuri Peace Museum. 2006. Accessed March 08, 2019. <http://www.himeyuri.or.jp/EN/war.html#contents>.

<sup>68</sup> George Fiefer, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, 464-469.

Himeyuri teacher's college and were also members of rich families.<sup>69</sup> Their schooling was so strict that even talking to a boy earned a quick expulsion. Many of the girls would meet their fate in what would become known as the "Cave of the Virgins," which was hardly an exaggeration. The Americans eventually discovered the location of their cave and ordered the people inside the cave to come out. When they were met with silence, the Americans cleared it out with a flamethrower, killing almost all of them.<sup>70</sup>

These girls made for captivating characters in Japanese literature and film after the war. Countless works have been created to depict the student nurses. Even as recent as 2006, a new play was written about the girls' experiences during the battle.<sup>71</sup> The famed *manga* creator Shigeru Mizuki in his work, *Showa*, possessed a silent reverence for the Lily Corps. In the panels before the depiction of the nurses, Mizuki discusses the hope and prayers of Okinawans and Japanese that the famed Japanese battleship *Yamato* would come and save them. He then proclaims that the battleship was sunk before it even reached Okinawa. In the panel above this grim statement, he depicts the student nurses as hapless victims of the battle of Okinawa. The two women he draws are blindfolded and soaked in blood, similar to Western countries who would blindfold their execution victims. In direct contrast to the darkness surrounding them, the girls are in all white almost angelic state. In portraying these virtuous young women as angelic

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 183

<sup>71</sup> Seana K. Magee, "U.S. Playwright Hopes Himeyuri Drama Sheds Light on Okinawa Battle," *Kyodo News International*, June 30, 2006.

beings who suffer, Mizuki depicts these girls as martyrs for the peace, a view that has continued into contemporary Japan and Okinawa.<sup>72</sup>

With literature, films, plays, and even documentaries being devoted to these women, their impact on the memory of Okinawa is impossible to ignore. One American anthropologist asked 630 people in Okinawan cities the first word that comes to mind when someone mentions the battle of Okinawa. 90% of those surveyed answered Himeyuri.<sup>73</sup> The impact these girls had on memory can scarcely be ignored. However, their suffering was not unique to the Okinawan population. Yet, the service and experience of the Lily Corps tends to take precedence over ordinary Okinawan men and women's experiences due to their youth, familial position, and the fact that many of them died during the battle.

While the girl's sad episode was no better or worse than other Okinawan women's experience during the battle, they did manage to still help many wounded Japanese soldiers. One Japanese soldier watched the treatment his friend received from one nurse, Ruriko Morishita. He observed her working to free his wound of maggots and remembered her faces as, "...an angel in the midst of hell."<sup>74</sup> The Lily Corps was forced to serve under horrific circumstances with little supplies to help the soldiers they were treating. By 1945, supplies were becoming very scarce due to American submarine's increasing effectiveness in destroying the Japanese merchant and shipping fleet. This meant that little food and even fewer medical supplies were making it

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<sup>72</sup> Shigeru Mizuki, *Showa: 1944-1953, A History of Japan* (New York: Drawn and Quarterly, 2014), 225. See Appendix 3-4.

<sup>73</sup> Linda Angst, "Gendered Nationalism: The Himeyuri Story and Okinawan Identity in Postwar Japan," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 20, no. 1 (May 1997), 103.

<sup>74</sup> George Fieffer, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, 187.

through to Japan, let alone Okinawa.<sup>75</sup> Despite this, the Lily Corps endured these hardships and managed to save quite a few Japanese lives.

However, the conditions they faced were daunting. The caves they treated wounded soldiers were overcrowded, often at twice or three times capacity and spread of disease became commonplace. To make matters worse, there was no cross ventilation for air and the smell was so bad that many nurses disobeyed the rule that they were only allowed outside to get supplies. Many girls went outside during a brief lull in the shelling and strafing just to catch a breath of fresh air.<sup>76</sup> As the battle wore on, conditions rapidly deteriorated. The wounded became so numerous that it was impossible to treat them all. Those soldiers who helped drag comrades off the battlefield were often forced to wait outside because there was no room for them on the cave floor. These men were often subjected to American strafing and shellfire while they waited in line to get treated. Many wounded soldiers died before even reaching the caves due to bleeding out or being killed by shellfire.<sup>77</sup>

Despite the never-ending line of wounded streaming into the cave entrance, the Lily Corps remained faithful to their duty. Many were driven by patriotism, despite being Okinawan and sometimes viewed as a lesser people. Due to their service to the Japanese wounded, they were treated much better by Japanese soldiers compared to other Okinawan women. Rape and sexual violence against them were non-existent. Some nurses of the Lily Corps were so fiercely patriotic that they even derided soldiers who spoke of defeat and in some cases even reported them

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<sup>75</sup> Clay Blair, *Silent Victory: The U.S. Submarine War Against Japan* (Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2001), 360, 552, 816, 878.

<sup>76</sup> George Fieber, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, 185.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

for suspected patriotism. This talk typically came from soldiers after they amputated their limbs or were resigned from duty due to wounds. Nurse Ruriko Morishita remembered that soldiers felt comfortable talking to her about defeat because she was not a member of the military staff. They told her that Japan couldn't win because they had seen American material strength and firepower firsthand. Morishita scolded them, "You're just talking like that because you've been hurt a little. You'll be better soon and come to your senses." She also remembered telling members of the Japanese military staff, "We'd better watch that one [Japanese soldier]. It's his mind." Due to her fierce devotion to victory, soldiers nicknamed her "Miss Victory Day."<sup>78</sup>

The Iron and Blood Imperial Corps received far less recognition for their actions during the battle of Okinawa. Despite the unit suffering heavy casualties and being consisted of teenage boys, they typically do not appear in many histories of the battle of Okinawa whether it's from an American or Japanese perspective. Alastair McLaughlan, a researcher of the battle, does not mention the group in his article on war crimes on Okinawa. Neither does Colonel Yahara who was the Japanese staff officer partially responsible for the fortification system on Okinawa. Notwithstanding being well over 1,000 strong, they nary receive a mention in many single-volume works on the battle. These child soldiers were forced to defend their home island even when the battle was over.

Despite Okinawa being declared "secure" on June 22, 1945, thousands of soldiers, sailors, and conscripted Okinawans tried to carry on the conflict without surrender. Many still considered themselves ordered to carry on the fight.<sup>79</sup> One young member of the Iron and Blood

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<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>79</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 367.

Imperial Corps, Ota Masahide remembered the day he realized the war was over and began to recognize the differences between Okinawans and Japanese. His worldview was changed dramatically when other groups of conscripted Okinawans discussed their harassment by Japanese soldiers, “I thought the day I finally left the cave was September 23, actually, it was October 23. Nearly four months had passed since Ushijima committed suicide... We thought we were just the same as the Japanese, that we’d fought together as one. Now, though, Okinawan soldiers...talked about how terrible it was, how they’d been bullied...For the first time I began to be awakened to differences in our cultures...”<sup>80</sup>

While the Lily Corps received a memorial and a museum with photographs depicting each of the fallen, the Iron and Blood Imperial Corps receives little to no mention in discussions about the battle. While some more in-depth histories of the battle make mention of the group, hardly any academic work has been published on this group of young men. This is due to politics and forcibly forgetting. It was incredibly unethical for the Japanese to recruit such young soldiers, yet many of them proved to be exceptional soldiers and devoted to the cause. They resisted the Americans even when the battle seemed over. Masahide remembered when a group of Japanese prisoners and American soldiers came to ask them to come out of the cave and surrender, “This must be fake!” Many of the group exclaimed, “We shouldn’t go out unless we get real, solid proof of defeat!”<sup>81</sup>

The fact that some of these young Okinawan soldiers fought with fanaticism against the Americans is not a narrative that Okinawans like to present themselves. They depict all

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<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 371-372.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.



conscripted soldiers as incredibly reluctant, but to the contrary some of them fought with equal ferocity and determination of a Japanese soldier. Essentially, the Okinawans were trying to downplay the fanaticism of some of their soldiers because it does not fit well into their depiction as the Okinawans as the sole victims during the battle. The overarching objective is to portray the narrative as primary sufferers of the battle and emphasize their continued oppression at the hands of the Japanese. The political and economic struggle to gain recognition for their sacrifices from the Japanese government and press them for removal of American bases from the island. The Lily Corps story fits into the narrative.

Political scientist Laura Sjoberg presents a plausible theory as to why these women were remembered far more than the child soldiers. Gender plays an important role in memorializing these girls. Sjoberg states that throughout history women in war were often considered what she calls “beautiful souls.” The beautiful soul narrative essentially states that women were always passive, peaceful, and innocent victims in war and the narrative reinforces their supposed weakness and helplessness. However, this contradicts the historical narrative as women were always active participants in nearly all military conflicts throughout history.<sup>82</sup> Yet, the beautiful soul narrative still sells with the public and the fact that these girls were noble daughters that were cut down in their prime helps reinforce the victimhood of the Okinawan public.

These young nurses saved countless Japanese soldier’s lives and sacrificed so much for their own people. The fact that the people these girls represented are still being oppressed by the Japanese, is an important chronicle that could tug at the heart strings of the international

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<sup>82</sup> Laura Sjoberg, “Women Fighters and the Beautiful Soul Narrative.” *International Review of the Red Cross* 92, no. 877 (March 2010), 53-55.

community. The Himeyuri Peace Museum dedicated to these girls is steadfast to promoting peace and to sharing their story on the global stage.<sup>83</sup> In doing so, the memorialization could invoke an international response for reconciliation that could pressure the Japanese into addressing Okinawan grievances.

## **The Discrimination Continues: Okinawa, Textbooks, and the Fight for Reparations,**

### **Remembrance, and Recognition**

While the battle ceased on Okinawa, the discrimination did not. The Okinawans continued to suffer from discrimination and the Japanese government has not acknowledged its role in war crimes on Okinawa. This lack of acknowledgement leaked into Japanese history textbooks, much to Okinawan's chagrin. To make matters worse, the constant presence of American troops reminds Okinawans that they are second class citizens. Over time, the memory of Okinawan participation and resistance during the battle faded due to politics. The Okinawans began portraying themselves as sole victims caught in the battle known as a "Typhoon of steel." This depiction of the Okinawan people as the solitary prey originated with a political goal, the removal of the multiple American installations on Okinawa.

The American bases on Okinawa have been a controversial issue ever since the occupation of mainland Japan ceased in April 1952. In 1972, the Americans agreed to return the Ryukyu Islands to the Japanese government. However, a clause was included that granted the America 20-year leases on their military bases. There are 43 bases throughout the isles, which covers 92 square miles and includes nearly 30,000 military personnel. Most of the American

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<sup>83</sup> "Understanding Himeyuri." Himeyuri Peace Museum. 2006. Accessed March 08, 2019. <http://www.himeyuri.or.jp/EN/war.html#contents>.

bases in Japan are on the Ryukyuan Islands, including Okinawa. The Okinawans feel they do not enjoy the full economic benefits for housing the majority share of American military installations. America is the largest employer on the islands, yet account for only 5% of income in the prefecture. The minor economic impact of the bases contributes to a standard of living and wages in Okinawa which are lower than the main islands of Japan. Ultimately, the main support for the bases on Okinawa come from the Okinawan landowners who earn much from the American military presence on their lands.<sup>84</sup>

While the primary target of this grievance are the Americans, the Japanese government has been uncooperative or vague in assisting the Okinawans to either remove or relocate the American bases. In an address commemorating the 73<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the battle conclusion, Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, stated his intention to assist in moving the bases from Okinawa.<sup>85</sup> However, this speech was not well received by the Okinawan people. He has promised to remove the bases on multiple occasions and yet fails to deliver a timeline or plan. Furthermore, he did not acknowledge Japanese war crimes or Japan's role in the suffering of the Okinawan people.<sup>86</sup> The Okinawans blame the Japanese for the American presence on their island. When the island reverted to Japanese control in 1972, some thought that the American base would be removed as well. It was not, and many Okinawans were angered that the Japanese

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<sup>84</sup> "Okinawa Memory: Japan." *The Economist*, May 16, 1992, 38.

<sup>85</sup> "Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Memorial Ceremony to Commemorate the Fallen on the 73<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the End of the Battle of Okinawa." *State News Service*, June 23, 2018. Academic OneFile, [http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A544537785/AONE?u=chap\\_main&sid=AONE&xid=6dfcb6de](http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A544537785/AONE?u=chap_main&sid=AONE&xid=6dfcb6de). Accessed 22. Jan. 2019.

<sup>86</sup> "Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Memorial Ceremony to Commemorate the Fallen on the 73<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the End of the Battle of Okinawa." *State News Service*, June 23, 2018.

did not maintain a harder stance against American military presence on Okinawa. To top it all off, the continual denial or lack of acknowledgement of war crimes committed by Imperial soldiers against the Okinawan populace further angers the island's population.

The Japanese government has attempted to either downplay or deny claims that the Okinawans were forced to commit suicide. In 2008, nearly a hundred thousand Okinawans gathered to protest the Ministry of Education's revision of historical textbooks. The Ministry of Education asserted that accounts of Okinawan villagers being told by Imperial Army soldiers to commit suicide were, "highly debatable," despite volumes of evidence that support the occurrence of forced suicides.<sup>87</sup> One Okinawan woman recalled that a Japanese soldier told her, "Please have the good grace to kill yourself to avoid being caught."<sup>88</sup> Another woman named Masako Shinjo remembered a Japanese soldier who encouraged her to commit suicide, "I found what remained of my first-aid bag and put into it an explosive handed to me by a soldier. He said I should use it on myself if I was about to be captured by the Americans."<sup>89</sup> The 70-year legacy of American bases on Okinawa is a constant reminder of the battle for the Okinawans. To them, it symbolizes their oppression at the hands of the Japanese. Since the largest American base in Japanese territory is on Okinawa, the populace believes the Japanese government is once again trying to exploit the natives. The past, present and future geopolitical issues in Asia make highly unlikely that the United States will remove their bases from Japanese soil.

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<sup>87</sup> Justin Ewers, "Okinawans Protest Schoolbook Revisions Downplaying Army Role in Suicides," *World War II* 22, vol. 9 (2008), 15-16.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Masaki Shinjo Summers Robbins, "My Story: A Daughter Recalls the Battle of Okinawa," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, no. 8 (2015), 13.

Due to its strategic location, bases on Japanese soil are perceived as invaluable to the Pentagon and top brass in the American military. The modern-day tensions over territory in the South China Sea and rise of the Chinese Navy makes it less likely that American bases would be reduced or entirely removed. Due to present and likely future circumstances, the Okinawans must rely on presenting themselves as passive victims during the battle. If the Okinawan populace can garner sizable international support, they can potentially force the removal or at least the relocation of the bases. Continuing to teach generations about the horror of the battle and the continued economic and cultural suffering of the innocent native peoples may at some point cause an outcry large enough to force political change.

Many Okinawans were active fighters in the battle, some willingly, while others were not. Japanese Colonel Hiromichi Yahara describes how he and fellow senior officers conscripted Okinawans to fight in the battle, “We still had considerable force, but they were not battle ready. Our various support and maintenance forces and the conscripted civilians had lost most of their arms and equipment. Since they could not perform their regular duties, all we could do was put them directly onto the battlefield.”<sup>90</sup> Americans attested to Okinawans serving as troops or laborers. E.B. Sledge recalled his first encounter with the Okinawan civilians the day after landing with the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division. He noticed the lack of young men among them, “We encountered some Okinawans—mostly old men, women, and children. The Japanese had conscripted all the young men as laborers and a few as troops, so we saw few of them.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Hiromichi Yahara, *The Battle For Okinawa*, 75.

<sup>91</sup> E.B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*, 211.

The memory of sole victimhood is present in numerous Okinawan memoirs of the battle, despite evidence to the contrary in Okinawan resistance long after the battle war over. In her memoir, Yoshiko Sakumoto, depicted Okinawan life before the war as peaceful, idealized, and undisturbed even during the war. She briefly mentions forced assimilation by the Japanese, but likewise states that Okinawan traditions was still adhered to. Another Okinawan woman, Masako Shinjo, fondly recalled Okinawa before the war, “In the years leading up to World War II, I was still living the life of child. For New Year’s festivities, Yoshiko Nesan would dress me up in a pretty silk kimono and with other children I would go around to receive money or gifts.”<sup>92</sup> These idealized versions of Okinawa lack the tremendous oppression and horror was brought by the Japanese in antebellum Okinawa. These recollections give the impression that Okinawan’s were a peaceful people until war came to their shores. In order to sell the passivity of the Okinawans, the antebellum period had to be displayed as such.

However, Sakumoto’s description of weapons training during school contradicts this idealized antebellum Okinawa, “Befitting a nation training for war, girls [in the sixth grade] learned how to use a shafted axe called a naginata [roughly equivalent to a halberd] at school...”<sup>93</sup> Despite the rather tranquil description of Okinawa before the war, they were being trained to fight in case of an invasion. Sakumoto put her training to use as she actively resisted both the Japanese and Americans. She avoided American units and ran from Japanese patrols

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Yoshiko Sakumoto Crandell, “Surviving the Battle of Okinawa: Memories of a Schoolgirl.”

who tried to force her to reinforce their anti-aircraft positions.<sup>94</sup> However, later in her memoir she reinforces that she and her family were passive victims.<sup>95</sup>

This depiction of Okinawans as dupes is a political move. If Okinawans are presented as the only hapless victims of circumstance during the battle, it would be much easier to garner international sympathy and support for the removal of the American bases on the island. It would be much more difficult to accumulate pity if Okinawans were part of a collective victimhood. The American bases on Okinawa represents much more than an annoyance of having a foreign power on the soil. To the Okinawans, the base represents a past they cannot move away from and a legacy of mistreatment by the Japanese government. Memorials on the island of Okinawa reinforce the notion that they were the sole victims. While there are memorials to the Japanese and American dead, there are far more memorials to the Okinawan dead.<sup>96</sup> In order to achieve their political goal, the Okinawans pushed memories of resistance and other narratives about the battle to the wayside.

The Okinawans resisted both Japanese and Americans during the conflict. Some continued even after the island had been declared secure by the Americans. Stragglers, such as Okinawa resident Ota Masahide, continued the fight even after the war was over and the Japanese surrendered on September 2, 1945. He explains, “I thought the day I finally left the cave [on Okinawa] was September 23<sup>rd</sup>. Actually, it was October 23<sup>rd</sup>. Nearly four months had

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> “The Basic Concept of the Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum.” *The Okinawa Prefectural Peace Memorial Museum*. April 1, 2000. <http://www.peace-museum.pref.okinawa.jp/english/index.html> (accessed December 5, 2018).

passed since [General] Ushijima committed suicide.”<sup>97</sup> The Japanese forces finally capitulated five days after the instrument of surrender was signed. However, stubborn armed resistance to the “good guys” does not sell very well with the international community as victimhood does. These memories of resistance and fighting alongside the Japanese were pushed away in favor of a narrative of victimhood. As a strategy it would help achieve their goals of greater acknowledgement from the Japanese government of their war crimes, to achieve reparations in the form of greater government assistance, and removal of the American bases on the island.

### **The Light of the World: Okinawan Tourism, Revisionism, History, and “Peace Tours”**

After the Second World War, Okinawa began to create a narrative of the devastating impact physically and psychologically to the island. This strategy evolved or was just developed as opportunistic plan by Okinawan leaders to now emphasize Okinawa as a monument to peace. Leaders began telling narratives of how the Okinawans had a history of peace, respect for human life, and upholding other’s human dignity. They desired the island to become a role model of peace throughout the world.<sup>98</sup> This was an easy sell to many Okinawans because of the island’s history of clever diplomacy.

Okinawa historically had to be diplomatic rather than militarist because of its location and neighbors. It traded with Japan, China, Korea, Vietnam, Siam, and other Asian kingdoms

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<sup>97</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 371.

<sup>98</sup> Gerald Figal, “Waging Peace on Okinawa,” *Critical Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (March 2001), 37-38.



throughout its history.<sup>99</sup> The Okinawan kingdom never generated sufficient wealth and therefore could not support a large standing army. In the face of larger and more powerful kingdoms in China, Korea, Mongolia, and Japan attempting armed resistance was tantamount to suicide. Yet, they did occur, most notably with the Ryukyuan kingdom's conquest and consolidation of the many surrounding islands from around 1300-1400 CE. There was also a major conflict against the Japanese Satsuma clan around 1600 CE.<sup>100</sup> Despite several conflicts with the Japanese, Mongols, and Chinese, Okinawa throughout its history was relatively stable. However, the discords did have an impact on how the native population viewed foreigners.

After several clashes with the Japanese Shimazu clan and the Ming Dynasty of China, the Okinawans began to become increasingly hospitable to foreigners.<sup>101</sup> This hospitality was noted by a British missionary on Okinawa who observed the treatment Okinawans gave famed American, Commodore Perry. They were scarcely alarmed when Perry and his black ships arrived, instead politely asking that the British missionary to go out and greet him in a friendly tone.<sup>102</sup> The Okinawan elite after WWII began presenting this episode as evidence that Okinawans were always peaceful. One pamphlet from the Peace Museum emphasized that the Okinawans were a nation that abhorred violence. It stated that during what they deemed as a golden age of Okinawan trade from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century was a time, "... when men from the tiny kingdom of Ryukyu traveled without weapons, armed only with words,

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<sup>99</sup> Hamashita Takeshi, "The Intra-Regional System in East Asia in Modern Times," *Network Power: Japan and Asia* ed. Takashi Shiraishi, Peter J. Katzenstein (New York, Cornell University Press, 1997), 115.

<sup>100</sup> George H. Kerr, *Okinawa: The History of an Island People* (North Clarendon, VT, 2011), 83-105.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 115

<sup>102</sup> William Leonard Schwartz, "Commodore Perry at Okinawa: From the Unpublished Diary of a British Missionary," *The American Historical Review* 51, no. 2 (Jan 1946), 262.

consideration, and good nature, and maintained peaceful relations with peoples throughout East and Southeast Asia.” The pamphlet mentioned that this history of peaceful trade and conduct with other nations was present in every Okinawan’s spirit.<sup>103</sup>

Okinawan leaders manipulated their history to present themselves as a “Fortress for Peace.”<sup>104</sup> Instead of demonstrating a more complete story of their history with the numerous wars fought against other Asian kingdoms, the Okinawans instead opted for presenting themselves as a people that were always peaceful until the Japanese and Americans fought on the island in 1945. This narrative that every Okinawan as a pacifist, gentle soul reflects the post war representation of Okinawans as the sole victims of the battle. If every Okinawan in the battle was a “gentle soul,” then the horrors the Japanese and Americans inflicted upon the native population become more abhorrent to the international community and would hopefully incite a response that would pressure the governments in both Washington and Tokyo to come to a reasonable agreement about the political and economic situation on Okinawa.

Scholars have noted this radical emphasis on amity in n Okinawa and various “peace” tours have been created. There are various excursions available throughout the island in which tourists and students from mainland Japan can meet with survivors of the battle and hear their stories.<sup>105</sup> These tours have gained international recognition and the Okinawan message has spread to the global stage. Many times, Okinawans have cooperated with other national groups or ethnicities for promotion of peace. One such world tour garnered international acclaim. In 1998, an expedition that included Native Americans, Okinawans, Ainu, and Japanese went from

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<sup>103</sup> Gerald Figal, “Waging Peace on Okinawa,” 42.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 41-44.

touring the battlefield of Okinawa, to memorial sites in the United States, eventually making way to New York City. The tour ultimately ending at the United Nations building in New York. They urged the United Nations to drop their weapons and instead arm themselves with instruments.<sup>106</sup> The tourism industry has played a crucial role in fostering the idea of Okinawa as a promoter of peace. Despite calling them, “peace tours,” they differ little from historical battlefield tours. It almost became an obsession for many Okinawans in the post-war era. Japanese Scholar and long-time Okinawan resident, Ishihara Masaie noted this obsession with peace calling it a, “distinctive philosophy of peace [*heiwa no shiso*].”<sup>107</sup>

However, he notes this victimization becomes dangerous, due to known Okinawan complicity and various participation in Japanese colonial aggression. One Okinawan soldier who was interviewed by historian Steve Rabson was proud of his wartime service in the Second Sino-Japanese war and he eagerly described the units he was assigned to and his experiences there.<sup>108</sup> Another Okinawan soldier who was stationed in China named Oyakawa Takayoshi described how one of his fellow Okinawan soldiers tormented the locals, “[he] picked out a man and a woman at random, and ordered them to come with him... Later he told us laughing, that he’d forced them to copulate.”<sup>109</sup> This is eerily similar with the Japanese narrative of the Second World War and contradicts some of the Okinawan goals.<sup>110</sup> If the Okinawans do not acknowledge their complicity with the regime and Japanese colonialism, it is similar to Japanese

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<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

<sup>108</sup> Steve Rabson, “The Okinawan Diaspora in Japan at War.” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 11, no. 1 (October 13, 2013). <https://apjpf.org/2013/11/41/Steve-Rabson/4008/article.html>

<sup>109</sup> Oyakawa Takayoshi, *Footprints: Recollections of Oyakawa Takayoshi* (Osaka, Matsuei Insatsu, 1995), 34.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 41

denial of war crimes committed against the Okinawans. The Okinawans would be refuting the historical record, a thing that they have accused the Japanese of doing.

The twin towers of peace promotion and peace tourism have shaped the narrative of the battle and Okinawan history. Okinawan leaders believed that it was their responsibility to promote peace and reconciliation because of the past events on the island and the continued discrimination by the contemporary Japanese government. However, in promoting their island as a “fortress for peace,” they have downplayed or denied Okinawan complicity with the Japanese regime before and during the battle of Okinawa.

### **In Summary: Okinawans and Memory**

Ultimately, Okinawan memory of the battle today and in future generations will be shaped by contemporary politics and events. The current economic and political situation in Okinawa remains a challenge for the natives. The Okinawan people on average earn significantly less than their mainland Japanese counterparts and capital investment in their island does not match the main islands of Japan. They continue to house the over whelming amount of American forces stationed in Japan. The proximity in physical space of a large foreign military base and number of soldiers has created past and current tensions with the Okinawan natives. Some American soldiers have committed acts of sexual violence and the natives are also in danger of being victims in American military accidents, of which there have been quite a few.<sup>111</sup> It remains a visible reminder of the lasting consequences of an event almost 75 years ago.

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<sup>111</sup> Glenn D. Hook, “The American Eagle in Okinawa: The Politics of Contested Memory and the Unfinished War,” *Japan Forum* 27, no. 3 (2015), 299-320.

To address these grievances, the Okinawans created a singular narrative of the battle in which they are the sole and lasting victim. They hoped that telling this narrative would garner international support and sympathy for their struggle against Japanese discrimination and American bases on the island. One of the ways they accumulate international empathy is through use of peace tours and remembrance of the war dead. The belief of sole victimization was meant to leverage the Japanese pre-war oppression of Okinawans and their culture coupled with numerous war crimes committed against them... In promoting this victimization, they downplay or ignore the complexities of individual Okinawans during the battle, essentially denying them agency. Many Okinawans were reluctant conscripts, but others fought with the equal fanaticism and determination of Japanese soldiers. Due to these individuals complicating the narrative, Okinawans have downplayed these memories of fanaticism. In downplaying these memories, the Okinawans become the sole victims of the battle in native's minds.

### **American Memory**

#### **Mud, Beasts, and Blood: The American Memory of the Ground War on Okinawa**

Americans tend to remember the battle of Okinawa as an abyss. No side emerged with their hands clean and everyone's morality waivered. The war made monsters of all. The fighting was particularly intense on Okinawa for many reasons. While Iwo-Jima was annexed by the Japan in 1861, Okinawa had a much closer history with the Japanese due to historic relations between the two. Iwo-Jima was important to the Japanese and their mythology, but Okinawa was even closer to the main islands of Japan. Simply put, Iwo-Jima was uninhabited and further away

than Okinawa.<sup>112</sup> The Japanese had a much more sentimental attachment to Okinawa. They considered the Okinawans their people, and Okinawa a part of their territory.

The Americans were pitted against an opponent who was well prepared, disciplined, knew the terrain well and used it to their advantage. The Japanese had over a year to prepare for an invasion and used this time to solidify the island into a fortress. The coming fight was to be a fierce one. It was Japanese territory and each soldier understood that to defend their homeland, they were expected and wanted to fight much harder. Colonel Yahara understood his mission. He did not expect to live through the forthcoming conflict. Yahara was ordered to delay the American advancement as long as possible while the defense of the main islands could be prepared. The grind out strategy was to inflict so many casualties that war weariness would set into the American Military leadership and public opinion. The stalemate would preclude America to agree to an armistice with some favorable terms to the Japanese.<sup>113</sup> Under the direction of the commander of the Japanese 32<sup>nd</sup> Army, General Mitsuru Ushijima and his senior staff officer, Yahara, the Japanese abandoned the reckless assaults that had cost the Japanese so many lives. The Japanese also opted to put up lighter resistance in the north, where it was much harder to defend.<sup>114</sup>

However, the Japanese set up an enormous fortified area in the southern part of the island. Caves, tunnels, pill boxes, plus concrete bunkers were fortified and constructed before the Americans landed. The corridor which separated the Nakagami district in the south from the adjacent Shimajiri district was incredibly narrow. The ability to move large numbers of troops

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<sup>112</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan, 1944-1945* (New York: Vintage, 2007), 247.

<sup>113</sup> Hiromichi Yahara, *The Battle for Okinawa*, 9-15.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-15.

through that corridor was nearly impossible so the Americans could not use their numerical advantage in the fight. Yahara also directed much of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Army's artillery to defend the southern part of the island, many of them were large caliber guns.<sup>115</sup> Over time nearly 100,000 Japanese troops crowded into one of the narrowest defensive perimeters of the war. At certain points, the corridor was no more than three miles wide, making maneuver warfare impossible. Air support and naval gun fire became next to useless. This defensive line became known as the "Shuri Line" and it would become synonymous with death, terror, and exhaustion for the Americans fighting on the island.<sup>116</sup>

The American invasion of Okinawa codenamed "Operation Iceberg" was the largest amphibious invasion in the Pacific War. Nearly 183,000 men were prepared for the initial landings, reinforced with tens of thousands of support personnel.<sup>117</sup> At first, the fighting seemed to be going well for the Americans. In approximately 18 days, American forces had seized most of Okinawa, however, when they came upon the dreaded Shuri line, progress grinded to a halt and the battle was waged in capture of yards.<sup>118</sup> The constant artillery bombardment from the Japanese was so fierce that the U.S. XXIV Corps often received over 14,000 shells in a 24-hour period. The Americans could not leverage their numerical advantage to the fight as the territory simply allowed a finite number of troops. The commanding U.S. Army officer on the island, General Buckner, realized the only way to capture Okinawa was frontal infantry assaults. The emphasis on this tactic was much to the anger and dismay of his fellow senior officers who

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<sup>115</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan*, 377-378.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 377.

<sup>117</sup> Roy E. Appleman, James M. Burns, Russel A. Gueler, and John Stevens, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (New York: Skyhorse Publishing, 2011), 26.

<sup>118</sup> George Fieffer, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, 234-235.

wanted to opt for another amphibious assault to bypass the Shuri line. The advantage offered by air support, naval gunfire, and armor was negated by the terrain, the fortifications, and the vast amount of artillery. Each cave, tunnel, pillbox, and bunker had to be cleared out, one by one.<sup>119</sup> Ultimately, it was up to the individual soldier to clear the Japanese positions out.

The fighting among the Shuri line was intense, methodical, exhausting, and deadly. An American named Bob Green was part of an armor unit that fought on Okinawa. The terrain was difficult even for tanks and they were often the targets for artillery fire. On one occasion Green was forced to help his officer in another tank. Emerging from the tank he rode in, Green described a scene of penetrating fighting along the Shuri line, “We waited as another GI carefully climbed on top of this rock and... suddenly swung what looked like a small backpack down beneath the rock...and there was a ground shaking explosion as the composition-C explosive...went off...a stock soldier carrying a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR) came forward...he sprayed a clip of bullets into the aperture and quickly stepped back as another GI...hurled a grenade into the opening.”<sup>120</sup> This style of fighting, also known as “Blowtorch and Corkscrew,” became a hallmark of fighting on Okinawa. The blowtorch referred to the flamethrower and the corkscrew was explosives. Both were used effectively to clear out fortified Japanese positions.<sup>121</sup>

The fighting was close quarters and intense. Killing often occurred at close range. One of the hallmark American ways of fighting on Okinawa became known to the Japanese as *hoi*

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<sup>119</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan*, 377.

<sup>120</sup> Bob Green, *Okinawa Oddysey: A Texas Rancher's Letters and Recollections of the Battle for Okinawa* (Albany, Texas: Bright Sky Press, 2004), 127.

<sup>121</sup> Roy E. Appleman, James M. Burns, Russel A. Gueler, and John Stevens, *Okinawa: The Last Battle*, 253-257.



*umanori kogeki*, roughly translated as encircling horse-riding attack. The Japanese feared this tactic. While a group of Americans concentrated fire at a cave entrance to keep the Japanese defenders inside, another group would climb above the entrance, as if mounting a horse. When the Japanese would try to run outside of the caves the Americans above the entrance would shoot them. Colonel Yahara described these tactics as dreaded by the Japanese and they did much to attempt to counter it. Nothing seemed to work well.<sup>122</sup> Despite the effectiveness of this American tactic, the Japanese fought back with equal ferocity. The casualty rates mounted and coupled with mud and rain brought scenes of horror right out of the First World War's Western Front. Decomposing bodies, leveled buildings, rats, and maggots were common sights among the battlefield of Okinawa. The description of the horror this fighting brought is present in E.B. Sledge's memoir, "The stench of death was overpowering. The only way I could bear the monstrous horror of it all was to look upward away from the earthly reality surrounding us, watch the leaden gray clouds go scudding over, and repeat over and over to myself that the situation was unreal-just a nightmare...But the ever-present smell of death saturated my nostrils. It was there with every breath I took."<sup>123</sup>

To the soldiers on Okinawa it seemed they could never escape the violence and destruction on land. Sledge looked longingly to the sky because it seemed only there was it free of the horrific conditions surrounding Okinawa. The Americans were trapped on an island away from both the Japanese main islands and United States. To soldiers like Sledge and Green, Okinawa was remembered as almost a separate world where honorable ordinary men did horrific deeds they would never have fathomed in civilian life. To them, Okinawa brought out the worst

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<sup>122</sup> Hiromichi Yahara, *The Battle for Okinawa*, 64-65.

<sup>123</sup> E.B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*, 273.

in many a soldier. This was reflected in the television miniseries, “The Pacific.” In one scene, Sledge and his fellow marines are dug in on a hill surrounding a small village. Japanese soldiers fatefully launch a frontal assault against their position and promptly massacred except for one wounded soldier, who the Americans find alive. Sledge begins shooting to finish off the last soldier, further wounding, but not quite killing him. He begins to grow visibly frustrated and draws his unregistered side arm and ultimately kills the soldier. Sledge’s officer approaches; angry that he ignored orders to cease fire and used a sidearm to finish the soldier off. Sledge replies to the officer’s rebuke that, “We were sent here to kill Japs, weren’t we? So, what the hell difference does it make what we use to kill them? I’d use my goddamn hands if I had to!”<sup>124</sup>

The set designs chosen for the film reflect the American memory of Okinawa. There is practically no color except for brown and red, mud and blood which were synonymous with Okinawa. While the film’s depiction of Peleliu (another infamous island battle fought the previous year) had some element of color and humanity, Okinawa does not. The battle is depicted as a nightmare for the soldiers who previously fought on Peleliu as they become harder to recognize physically and emotionally with mud and blood covering their faces. Veteran soldiers who had seen significant fighting before were beginning to crack. One of Sledge’s veteran comrades, known as Snafu, snaps one evening and begins to curse and swear loudly. Despite Snafu being a veteran of Cape Gloucester and Peleliu, his exhaustion begins to show. He yells one evening about how he’s tired of not having enough men to make these frontal assaults against Japanese positions and of the mud and casualty rates. From there the situation continues to deteriorate. Actions by fellow Marines that previously horrified Sledge on Peleliu became

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<sup>124</sup> *The Pacific*, Episode 9, “Okinawa,” Bruce C. McKenna and Tim van Patten, aired May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2016, on HBO.

numb to him on Okinawa as shown to his indifference when Japanese were killed by the dozens.<sup>125</sup> The war made beasts of them all. The soldiers are depicted as determined to win by any means necessary. Morality was damned for the goal of victory.

Morality was not the only character trait the almost isolated environment changed. The mental state of soldiers fighting also began to degrade. The slow progress, the rough terrain, the constant shellfire, and the close quarters fighting took its toll on the soldiers fighting on Okinawa. Cases of shell shock and combat exhaustion appeared by the thousands. Marine Corps General O.P. Smith watched a doctor treat a Marine in whose foxhole a mortar round had landed, “No man could have portrayed fear as this man did. He kept gurgling, ‘Mortar, mortar, mortar.’ The doctor asked him what he was going to do now. He replied: ‘Dig deeper. Dig deep.’ The doctor told him to go right ahead and dig. The man got down on his knees and went through the frantic motions of digging...”<sup>126</sup> A man in another hospital, who had been recommended for a commendation, was overcome by guilt because he had killed so many Japanese and he couldn’t take the fighting anymore. The combat fatigue rate for the battle was extraordinarily high and many soldiers suffered from it.<sup>127</sup>

Despite many men’s mental state cracking, graphic horrors of this battle were little known initially to the American public. The war in Europe had ended and Americans thought the Japanese would easily capitulate after their main ally, Germany had fallen. They were wrong. After press accounts appeared about the horrors of Okinawa waves of anger and bitter criticism

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> James H. Hallas, *Killing Ground on Okinawa: The Battle for Sugarloaf Hill* (Westport: Praeger, 1996), 204.

<sup>127</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan*, 385.

appeared in the United States. To many civilians it was inconceivable that all the material advantage they possessed amounted to naught on the battlefields of Okinawa. The terrible outcome of a battle thousands of miles away was driven home when the casualties began to rapidly mount. The parents of a man killed on Okinawa wrote a letter branding his officers as murderers for abandoning their son. A father of a wounded soldier was angered that his son did not receive adequate training before being sent into combat. The father believed his son would not have been wounded if he had better training. A Marine officer received a scathing letter from one of his Marine's widows who now had five children without a father. She ended the letter with, "I hope you're satisfied!"<sup>128</sup>

Unfortunately, the composite American view of the battle became increasingly overshadowed by the war ending in Europe, much to the dismay of the men fighting on the island. Many on the American home front were eager to let the horrors of the Second World War cease. The fact that American soldiers were still engaged in a horrific battle with such high casualties as victory seemed so close warped the view of many Americans about continued need of "the good fight." The rate of combat exhaustion, descriptions of the landscape and battle information shocked many on the home front. The battle became synonymous with destruction, violence, and waste. To many exhausted Americans, it was a battle they would rather forget. Okinawa became almost a footnote in major documentaries and popular books about the war. The battle is constantly glossed over in lieu of discussion of either fire bombings of Japan or the atomic bombs used against Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

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<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

American memory of the battle was also shaped by reconciliation. Over time the American public began to actively forget the fierce determination with which Japanese fought the battle. Americans later began to relish stories of soldiers who forgave their enemies, such as prisoners of war who forgave their Japanese captors. The dominant theme for many Americans who remember Okinawa became forgiveness and reconciliation. Post war American leaders believed they needed allies against Communism and therefore had to sell the idea of forgiveness and reconciliation of enemy nations to the American public. Propaganda art immediately after the war reflects this strategy. The September 1945 issue of the Marine magazine, *Leatherneck*, has a cover that depicts the once fearsome Japanese “gorilla” now as a harmless little monkey in a Japanese uniform on a Marine’s shoulder, who is smiling widely.<sup>129</sup> While the magazine cover reflected American racist views of the Japanese, it also depicts them as a harmless entity that can be “trained” to be civil. This sent a message to the American public and military service personnel that the Japanese no longer needed to be feared and hate against them can cease because they are now relatively harmless creatures.

Certainly not every American agreed with this message of reconciliation and forgiveness. Many American veterans of Okinawa railed against forgiving and forgetting. They were greatly angered by the atrocities they witnessed on many of the Pacific islands against them, prisoners of war, and the native populations. These veterans retained these gruesome memories and often were understandably reluctant or outright resistant to pardon the Japanese. E.B. Sledge expresses anger at Japanese textbook revisionism and refused to forgive. He expressed no hesitation there would have been a “Rape of Nanking” in American cities if the

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<sup>129</sup> Please See Appendix 1-2.

Japanese had not been defeated. He writes angrily, “There is no ‘mellowing’ for me-that would be to forgive all the atrocities the Japanese committed against millions of Asians and thousands of Americans. To ‘mellow’ is to forget.”<sup>130</sup>

William Manchester also realized that to exonerate the Japanese is incredibly difficult. Manchester, an Okinawan veteran himself revisited Guadalcanal in 1978. A native of the island named Jacob Vouza, who served with the Marines during the Battle of Guadalcanal, expressed confusion when Manchester requested to meet with a former Japanese officer. Manchester is puzzled by the man’s reaction until he meets the former Imperial officer, “The following morning I call on Captain H. Honda in his office...he was old enough to volunteer for the Kamikaze corps in 1945. He was turned down...The sad truth is there can never be peace between men like this man and men like me; an invisible wall will forever separate us.”<sup>131</sup> Forgiveness was difficult for many veterans of the Pacific theatre.

Since the war was fought with such bitterness and racial animosity, hatred lingered even many decades after the conflict ceased. While many soldiers never forgave the Japanese, their memories of animosity and disgust with Japanese War crimes were ignored by many Americans in favor of a narrative of reconciliation. American elites believed that they needed Japan to face down a new enemy, Communism. The American narrative essentially states that the Japanese had been misled by their militant leaders and the vast suffering of the civilian population was a result of this decision. The Japanese people were not to blame, but the culpability rested with the

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<sup>130</sup> E.B Sledge, *China Marine: An Infantryman’s Life after World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 159-160.

<sup>131</sup> William Manchester, *Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980), 206.

Japanese government and military leaders, the *zaibatsu* conglomerates, who helped feed the Japanese war machine, and the Japanese bureaucracy.<sup>132</sup>

This narrative was being sold soon after the war ended. The Japanese Imperial family and staff helped sell this narrative to save the life of the *Showa* emperor. Frank L. Kluckhohn and Hugh Baillie interviewed Hirohito through prewritten question. He received a reply written in English by Shidehara Kijuro who translated. Kluckhohn asked him, "...whether [Hirohito] had intended for his war rescript [of December 1941] to be used as General Tojo had used it-to launch the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor which brought the United States into the War."<sup>133</sup> Later, Kluckhohn replied that, "he [Hirohito] had no intention of having his former war rescript employed as former Premier Hideki Tojo had used it when Japan launched her sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. He said he expected Tojo to declare war in the usual, formal manner, if necessary."<sup>134</sup> In doing so, Hirohito was shed of all personal responsibility and the blame of the war shifted towards the Japanese militarists under Tojo. However, Hirohito was hesitant to do so as he valued Tojo greatly.<sup>135</sup> Despite the emperor clearly having complicity in the prosecution of the war, the United States and the Imperial house were successful in passing the blame from the Emperor onto the Japanese militarist leaders. This narrative and explanation of how the Japanese were tricked into going to war was slowly accepted by the American public.

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<sup>132</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 20-26.

<sup>133</sup> Herbert Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (New York, Harper Collins, 2016), 546.

<sup>134</sup> Frank L. Kluckhohn, "Emperor for Peace: Says he thinks Japanese can Rebuild their Lived to Avoid Future Wars." *New York Times*. September 25, 1945.

<https://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/107157895/78252645DBEA4202PQ/1?accountid=10051>

<sup>135</sup> Herbert Bix, *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*, 546-547.

Overtime, the racial hatred of the Japanese began to fade. The Japanese war crimes in Okinawa were increasingly downplayed or glossed over for more “important consequences”. The People’s Republic of China led by Mao Tse Tung was founded in 1949, just four years after the end of the Second World War. This was the same year that the Soviet Union tested its first atomic weapon. Communist states were increasingly seen as enemies of the United States and the rest of the free world. As a result, the American public tended to ignore the atrocities committed against their former Chinese allies. Eastern Europe had fallen to Communism and China was now a Communist state. The United States felt as though she was running out of possible allies in Asia. When the Korean War broke out in 1950, Japan became increasingly important for launching military expeditions into Asia. Japan became a major bulwark and base for launching expeditions into Korea and ultimately, Vietnam.<sup>136</sup> In order to use Japan as a forward base of operations into Asia, the American public reconciled with Japan in order to stand against perceived Communist aggression. To achieve this reconciliation, Japanese war crimes against the Okinawan people were downplayed and the veteran’s stories of bitterness and hate were pushed out of the American narrative of the battle.

**A Utilitarian Response: The Atomic Bombs, Planning for the Invasion of the main Japanese islands, and the threat of Communism**

While Okinawa tends to be overshadowed by Iwo Jima and the end of the war in Europe, it is often recalled in American recollections in conjunction with the dropping of two atomic bombs. The collective memory of island battles which included Okinawa is commonly cited as a point of justification for atomic weapons against mainland Japan. Furthermore, numerous

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<sup>136</sup> John W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat*, 199.



American single volume histories of the Second World War state that circumstances on Okinawa directly led to discussions of dropping the atomic bombs, but actual descriptions of the battle itself being relegated to mere paragraphs. Adherents of the American narrative believe that determined Japanese defense on the island and willingness to sacrifice their own civilians made landings near suicidal. One naval historian commentated that, "...the reward of the Okinawa survivors would be landing on the main island of Honshu....After the battle of Okinawa, U.S. forces faced approximately 2,350,000 armed men on the Japanese main islands as well as a civilian population determined to defend its homes...if the Japanese 32<sup>nd</sup> Army with around 100,000 men could inflict such high casualties, then the cost in men, material and civilian deaths would be too steep..."<sup>137</sup>

This historian's article was a mere six pages long in regard to how the Japanese were able to hold out so well for so long. Yet, the author still discussed the American leader's decision-making process vis-à-vis use of the atomic weapons. The specter of the controversy which still surrounds dropping of two atomic bombs is present in most American writings in regard to Okinawa and is simply too large to be ignored. It's become nearly impossible for American historians to separate the two since Okinawa had an unmistakable impact on the blueprint for Operations Neptune and Downfall, plans for invasion of the main Japanese islands.<sup>138</sup>

The dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki seemed to go against the American myth of, "the good war". The debates and politics which encompassed use of these weapons have affected American memory of the Battle of Okinawa. The proponents of the myth

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<sup>137</sup> Richard S. Lee, "Japanese Success at Okinawa," *Naval History* 30, no. 3 (2016), 56-61.

<sup>138</sup> Alexander Burham, "Okinawa, Harry Truman, and the Atomic Bomb," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 71, no. 3 (1995), 377.

of the good war state that Americans fought a just conflict that was mostly free from atrocity. However, deployment of the atomic bombs and firebombing of Japanese and German cities complicates that narrative. The atomic bombs impact was undoubtedly horrific. They caused vast amounts of destruction to people and historic architecture in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The generational impact to survivors of the bombs and destruction of pieces of Japanese heritage, such as ancient architecture continues to haunt the good war myth. Proponents of the good war myth needed to justify the use of these horrific weapons and many chose the Battle of Okinawa. To them, Okinawa was a microcosm of what would've happened with an invasion of mainland Japan... However, proponents of this myth are not alone in discussion of Okinawa and decision to use the atomic bombs.

Most American veterans of Okinawa agreed with dropping of the atomic bombs. To many veterans, the bombs saved their lives. An American veteran who was on Okinawa named Austin Aria and his comrades discussed fears for the invasion of mainland Japan. "We hated the Japs, but nobody had the slightest desire to go there and fight them because the one thing we knew was that we'd all be killed. I mean we really knew it. I never used to think that...But there was no question about the mainland. How the hell are you going to storm a country where women and children, everybody would be fighting you?...I don't think anybody who hasn't actually seen the Japanese fight can have any idea of what it would have cost."<sup>139</sup> Another veteran of the battle agreed with Austin Aria's sentiments, "I lived through Okinawa somehow, but the great battle of the mainland lay ahead. How long could my luck hold? Then the dropping

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<sup>139</sup> George Fieffer, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, 566.

of the A-bomb put a brand-new light in my life. I'd be going home, after all. And I did!"<sup>140</sup>

Veterans of Okinawa tended to care little about the moral implication of the bombs.

In many memoirs of Okinawan veterans, the bomb came as a relief. E.B. Sledge recalls in his memoir an announcement of the atomic bomb use and subsequent surrender of Japan while still on Okinawa, "On 8 August, we heard that the first atomic bomb had been dropped on Japan. Reports abounded for a week about possible surrender. Then on 15 August 1945 the war ended. We received the news with quiet disbelief coupled with an indescribable sense of relief. We thought the Japanese would never surrender."<sup>141</sup> The soldiers who had fought the Japanese on Okinawa and other islands had little sympathy for them. Veterans believed that the Japanese were fierce and savage fighters who would fight to the last. They tended to not care about the morality of thermonuclear bombs or debates which surrounded its use. They all dreaded the coming invasion of mainland Japan. The fact that atomic bombs were dropped, and the war ended soon after led many American veterans of Okinawa to rationalize it as a necessary evil. Whether or not the decision was right or contributed to the Japanese surrender mattered little to these veterans. All they knew was the war was soon over after the bombs were used. To them, the bomb became a savior and allowed them to go home.

However, continued defense of the use of atomic weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki emerged during the Cold War. After the war, the American government attempted to display themselves as morally superior to the Soviet Union as means to prevent more countries from falling under the communist sphere of influence and to attract allies to their side. The debate and

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<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 566.

<sup>141</sup> E.B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed*, 343.

complexities which surrounded the atomic bombs and surrender of Japan did not arise immediately, but soon found its way into the popular narrative of the war. The fact that the United States had used atomic weapons on a civilian population and the Soviet Union had not, was a sore point for some American leaders. To justify use of the atomic bomb, Americans were encouraged to think deeply about the decision-making process.

The relatively quick reveal of the decision making process in early single volume histories of the Second World War demonstrated eagerness of American leaders to present their side of the story.<sup>142</sup> This narrative that included the multifaceted choices and conclusions that went behind the attacks, including the fact that on Okinawa 100,000 Japanese troops inflicted high casualties on the American invaders and the fact that nearly all those troops had been annihilated.<sup>143</sup> While this narrative didn't settle the existential debate about the bombs, it provided a more complex narrative that was understandable on an international scale and more importantly explained American actions to potential allies. The United States was able to continue to portray herself as the morally superior, more humane alternative to communist rule. Without discussion of the ferocity of the battle of Okinawa and its effects on American decision making, the justification for using these weapons would have been incredibly difficult.

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<sup>142</sup> Richard D. Frank, *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire*, 242-250.

<sup>143</sup> Thomas M. Huber, "Japan's Battle of Okinawa, April-June 1945," *Fort Leavenworth Papers* 18. (1990), 119-120.

**Targets of the Divine Wind: Kamikazes, The American Navy, and American  
Memory of the War at Sea**

American sailors on the ocean faced many terrors like soldiers and marines on the island and they too had great difficulty in forgiveness and reconciliation with the Japanese. However, their experiences due warrant and deserve special attention, primarily because of the sheer number of ships lost and immense casualties despite no major surface naval action around Okinawa. The memory of the Battle of Okinawa at sea is dominated by the terror wrought by kamikaze pilots. These *kamikaze* (Japanese translation for divine wind) pilots flew at such low levels that radar could not detect them plus proper preparation for the attacks was difficult because the American Navy had few ways to avoid the planes when they got close. The only way to prevent these attacks was to hit the Japanese planes before they got too close.

There had been several navy and army fliers who launched isolated suicide attacks before, but on Okinawa it was a concentrated effort and there were far more *kamikaze* attacks.<sup>144</sup> The Japanese Navy and Army began coordinating attacks on Okinawa against American ships and infantry units. *Kamikaze* attacks occasionally were enacted against American ships in conjunction with Japanese Army counterattacking American infantry units along the Shuri line.<sup>145</sup> Americans on the home front were unaware of the existence of the *kamikaze* attacks until late April 1945, coinciding with the beginning of the aerial firebombing of Japan. This was done to prevent the Japanese from evaluating the effects of the *kamikaze* attacks.<sup>146</sup> If the Japanese

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<sup>144</sup> John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945* (New York: Random House, 1998), 568.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 699

<sup>146</sup> Denis Warner and Peggy Warner, *The Sacred Warriors: Japan's Suicide Legions* (New York: Avon, 1984), 114, 224.

knew these attacks were extraordinarily effective against the American Navy, they would have certainly continued to use them.

However, the American sailors off the coast of Okinawa knew firsthand that the effects were devastating because ships were being hit frequently with many being greatly damaged or sunk. Air cover for the American Navy and Army was carrier based because the airfields on island were still in range of Japanese artillery.<sup>147</sup> This meant that combat air patrols were restricted to several dozen fighters at a time. During the early phases of the fight for Okinawa, American fighter pilots were stretched incredibly thin and could not cover the massive fleet properly. Starting on April 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945 the Japanese launched a massive succession of strikes. The first attacks numbered over 700 planes, of which 355 were used as *kamikaze* attacks. On that day alone, 17 American ships were sunk or scrapped because of the attacks.<sup>148</sup> The results were devastating to the American Navy. Nearly one in five of the *kamikaze* pilots hit their target ship and many of them inflicted major damage, terrorizing American seamen.

The devastation to the American Navy was great, despite the size of the fleet anchored off the coast. During operations around Okinawa, ten big suicide attacks were launched. Nearly 1,465 aircraft were designated for *kamikaze* attacks, while conventional air attacks constituted 4,800 planes. *Kamikazes* sunk 27 ships and damaged 164, while conventional air attacks sank one ship and damaged 63 others. *Kamikaze* attacks had nearly a ten times greater success rate than conventional air attacks.<sup>149</sup> American sailors felt helpless against these attacks because the

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<sup>147</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan*, 387.

<sup>148</sup> Paul J. Chara, Jr. and Kathleen A. Chara, "Survivors of a Kamikaze Attack: PTSD and Perceived Adjustment to Civilian Life," *Psychological Reports* 99, (2006), 971.

<sup>149</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan*, 393.

Japanese planes were flying outside of the range of their radar and often didn't see the plane until it was close enough to strike. Despite storms of anti-aircraft fire and cover provided by American planes, it was not enough to stop the onslaught of attacks.

Thousands of American sailors were being killed or maimed by these attacks, conventional or otherwise. One sailor graphically described his reactions to these attacks regarding a nearby destroyer which had been greatly damaged in an attack, "Bombs and shells and even a suicide plane had plowed into her. Her entire superstructure was a mangled mess of melted steel except for the bridge and radio shack. She was crying and bleeding like a dog set upon by a pack of wolves. She needed blood... her men were burned, shot, cut, torn and shocked."<sup>150</sup> Another sailor on the U.S.S. *Luce* describes the horrific incident when they saw the *kamikaze* planes circle the ship. He was on a 20mm gun turret and his buddy was trying to say something when the ship was hit, "His lips were moving-I had the earphones on-and I didn't know what he was trying to say...Then the explosion came...a piece of metal flew by and decapitated him. Just like that, his head fell off at my feet. I looked down...and I believe his mouth was still trying to tell me something. His body was still up, holding onto that magazine for what seemed like thirty minutes..."<sup>151</sup>

The gore and scenes of destruction were common depictions in memoirs of sailors anchored off Okinawa. No aspect of the sinking of a ship by a *kamikaze* attack was romanticized. These sailors realized that unfortunately while the war in Europe was wrapping up, the conflict

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<sup>150</sup> James Orvill Raines, *Good Night Officially: Letters of a Destroyer Sailor* (New York: Westview Press, 1994), 162.

<sup>151</sup> Ron Surels, *DD552: The Story of a Destroyer* (New York: Valley Graphics, 1994), 130.

in the Pacific seemed far from over. There was still the potential need for invasion of the main islands of Japan. Many soldiers and sailors felt that they would not survive the attack.

The *kamikaze* attacks struck and damaged much more than the ship itself. It affected soldier's morale and solidified their hatred of the Japanese. The first sailor describes the destroyer as a living, breathing entity echoing many other sentiments by naval men. Many other sailors had great attachment to their vessels, their ships represented more than their strength and fighting prowess, it also represented their home and family. It was a source of their pride as a unit. The suicide attacks by the Japanese pilots hurt their morale greatly. The fact that they were still vulnerable to such attacks despite great advantages in technology, training, and manpower, affected their psyches... Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder became common among victims and witnesses to *kamikaze* attacks. Sailors were trapped on ships they viewed as steel-coffins as casualty rates for sailors soared.<sup>152</sup> Many American sailors also viewed the attacks as further proof the Japanese were savages and they would all have to be killed before the Japanese would surrender. This view of the attack as cowardly contributed to the hatred the Americans had for the Japanese. They horrified many on the home front and further convinced the American public that the Japanese were inhuman. The Saturday Evening reported on the attacks, "For sheer horror value, the *kamikaze* dive is equaled only by American rocket barrages and by the Beelzebubian belching of flamethrower tanks."<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Paul J. Chara. Jr. and Kathleen A. Chara, "Survivors of a Kamikaze Attack: PTSD and Perceived Adjustment to Civilian Life," *Psychological Reports* 99, (2006), 971.

<sup>153</sup> William L Worden, "*Kamizake: Aerial Banzai Charge*," Saturday Evening Post. June 23, 1945. <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=0cb67dbd-2828-4153-95bf-eec62d0ad21f%40sdc-v-sessmgr06>



Due to the sheer number of casualties when victory seemed in grasp, American sailors became further enraged at the Japanese. The sailors felt the Japanese were on their last legs, as the Imperial navy had essentially been destroyed at the battles of Leyte Gulf and the Philippine Sea. After these twin battles, the Japanese Navy had only few good ships left, save the infamous *Yamato*.<sup>154</sup> The fact that these pilots were willing to commit suicide to temporarily stave off defeat was further proof to American combatants that the Japanese were inhuman and all of them had to be exterminated. This hate began to seep into the American public consciousness and solidified stereotypes of the Japanese. To many sailors, the attacks cemented a hatred of the Japanese that would never cease for many.

As stories of *kamikaze* attacks began to surface, perceptions of the Japanese became even more negative and calls for the annihilation of Japan as a nation and people became more public. A poll conducted on American Sailors and GI's reveals a stark amount of deep-rooted hatred for the Japanese as a nation and race. A U.S. Army poll in 1943 indicated that almost half of all GIs believed that would need to kill all the Japanese before peace could be achieved. Subsequent polls taken by the Navy and public opinion polls on the home front in 1944 and 1945 confirmed a similar sentiment.<sup>155</sup> Elliot Roosevelt, the American President's son and confidant, told a close friend, Henry Wallace, in 1945 that the United States should continue bombing Japan, "until we have destroyed about half of the Japanese civilian population."<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 52.

<sup>155</sup> William J. Blakefield, "A War Within: The Making of Know Your Enemy-Japan," *Sight and Sound: International Film Quarterly* 52.2 (1983), 130.

<sup>156</sup> Henry A. Wallace, *The Price of Vision: The Diary of Henry A. Wallace, 1942-1946* (New York: Houghton Mifflin), 448.

While some of these views were private, many officials publicly called for the extermination of the Japanese people as war dragged on in 1945. Politician and American ambassador to the Philippines, Paul V. McNutt, told an audience in April 1945 that he favored, “the extermination of the Japanese in toto.” When asked to clarify what he meant, the race or the Japanese military, he confirmed the former because, “...I know the Japanese people.”<sup>157</sup> Vice Admiral Arthur Radford stated that, “the Japanese are asking for an invasion, and they are going to get it. Japan will eventually be a nation without cities—a nomadic people.”<sup>158</sup> While supporters of moderation and reconciliation did exist, as the war dragged on and reports of the *kamikaze* attacks surfaced, these voices became increasingly drowned out in favor of a fire and brimstone approach.<sup>159</sup>

The high casualty rate for sailors and perceived savagery of the Japanese was employed as an explanation of the decision process for the use of the atomic bomb. In addition, the seeming refusal of the Japanese to surrender and their effective use of more primitive weapons, such as basic explosives was a key explanation in the decision-making process for using the atomic bomb. The reasoning went that if poorly trained pilots could do such devastation to the American fleet far away from the main islands, then how would it fare against pilots who did not have to travel far to reach American ships anchored off the main islands? Furthermore, Japanese pilots could be trained even more quickly and sent out in greater numbers.

The American naval ships were not the only entity at risk if struck by *kamikaze* pilots. The US Army invasion was entirely dependent on the Navy for support. The Navy supplied the

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<sup>157</sup> *New York Times* (New York City: New York), April 6, 1945, 5, and April 14, 1945, 10.

<sup>158</sup> *Time* (New York City: New York), August 4, 1945, 28.

<sup>159</sup> John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy*, 55.

troops ashore with vehicles, supplies, and air cover. If the Navy failed to support any assault on land, the potential invasion of Japan would fail, costing many American lives. These fears of an Armageddon like annihilation of the American Navy coupled with fears of massive casualties as a result of a ground assault against the main islands were an important explanation presented to the international community at the outset of the Cold War. While planning for Operations Neptune and Downfall were complex, the explanation and reveal of naval challenges allowed the United States to depict a more complex picture of the decision-making process, like rationalization of the army's issues with the invasion of the main Japanese islands. The depictions of the military risk the ground invasion posed to the navy allowed the United States to justify its stance of moral superiority to the Soviet Union.

### **The Sinking of the Leviathan: The Destruction of the Japanese Battleship *Yamato* and American Memory**

The memory of the Battle of Okinawa began early on for the Navy. The sinking of the battleship *Yamato* became a way for American military elite to restore the morale of the Navy and to build upon their glorious history as they sunk both of the largest battleships ever built. During the battle of Okinawa, the American Navy had high casualties despite no major surface fleet action leading to lower morale after the battle. One sailor recalled how sailors dreaded the attacks and how the *kamikaze* made even veteran sailors nervous, "Those *kamikazes* scared the hell out of people."<sup>160</sup> With no large Japanese ships to engage, the sailors felt more like idle targets against the *kamikaze* pilots. The American Army and Marine Corp could point to the

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<sup>160</sup> Jerome H. King, USN (Ret.), January 13 1998 by Paul Stillwell, USNHI OHC, vol. 1, pg. 107.

seizure of the island as a moment of glory in their annals, but the Navy felt as though she was helpless during the battle. The Navy therefore began to promote the sinking of the Japanese battleship, *Yamato*, as a major naval victory during the Okinawan campaign, despite the ship being sunk south of the Japanese island of Kyushu instead of Okinawan waters on April 6, 1945.<sup>161</sup>

The battleship *Yamato* was an incredible feat of naval engineering and one of the largest warships ever built. The destruction of the ship was presented as a major victory in the Okinawan campaign to restore morale and pride which had been strained during the battle. While the sinking of the *Yamato* was a tactical rather than a decisive victory, sailors still needed a morale boost after suffering incredible casualties among their ranks. Therefore, the demise of *Yamato* is depicted in many memoirs and histories of Okinawa as a major victory for the American Navy. Even in early post-war Army and Navy official histories, the sinking of the *Yamato* was depicted as a major victory for the Navy.<sup>162</sup> The Saturday Evening Post reported on the tough fight the Navy had on Okinawa. The author discussed the American losses, but then states, “As a contrast [to American losses] American planes in the same period [of the battle of Okinawa] accounted for the *Yamato*, two light cruisers, five destroyers, five destroyer escorts, four large freighters, one medium freighter and twenty-eight small freighters in the same area...”<sup>163</sup> The author does not bother to point out the names of the other Japanese ships, but he

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<sup>161</sup> William H. Garzke and Robert O. Dulin, *Battleships: Axis and Neutral Battleships in World War II* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 65.

<sup>162</sup> Roy E. Appleman, James M. Burns, Russel A. Gueler, and John Stevens, *Okinawa: The Last Battle*, 99-101.

<sup>163</sup> William L Worden, “*Kamizake: Aerial Banzai Charge*,” Saturday Evening Post, June 23, 1945. <http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=0cb67dbd-2828-4153-95bf-eec62d0ad21f%40sdc-v-sessmgr06>

makes a point to include the *Yamato*. This emphasis on the importance of the ship was a morale booster to not only the navy, but those on the home front as well.

While sinking of the ship itself did not change the strategic naval situation in the Pacific, it was not easy task to submerge the beast. American pilots would recall the difficulty to hit *Yamato* because of her astonishing speed and even then, the Japanese behemoth could take many hits by American planes.<sup>164</sup> *The Yamato* was an enormous battleship and a major point of pride for not only the Japanese Navy, but the nation as well. She was constructed under strict secrecy and against the naval limitation treaties at the time. *Yamato* possessed the largest caliber guns ever put on a warship, 45 Caliber Type 94, 18.1 inch naval guns, which were able to launch shells over 26 miles.<sup>165</sup> She and her sister ship, the *Maish*, were also the heaviest warships ever built, weighing over 72,800 tons each. Even in contemporary Japan, the ship is still viewed as the pinnacle of Japanese naval engineering and a marvel of a warship.<sup>166</sup>

The Americans knew that the Japanese took great pride in the *Yamato* and American Navy pilots had attempted to sink her in previous engagements, but the ship was able to avoid destruction until Okinawa.<sup>167</sup> The *Yamato* was tasked with leading a naval task force that was to defend Okinawa to the last. The commander, Vice-Admiral Seiichi Ito, was instructed to beach the *Yamato* after doing significant damage to the American fleet. The sailors onboard were then

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<sup>164</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle For Japan*, 394-396.

<sup>165</sup> Ian Johnson and Rob McAuley, *The Battleships* (New York, MBI Publishing, 2000), 123.

<sup>166</sup> David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1881-1941* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1997), 298, 378.

<sup>167</sup> William H. Garzke and Robert O. Dulin, *Battleships: Axis and Neutral Battleships in World War II*, 58.

instructed to sharpen their bayonets to join the infantry for the fight on the island.<sup>168</sup> The American commander of the Fast Carrier Task force, Admiral Mac Arthur, caught wind of her movement towards the island through reconnaissance planes and allied submarine messages. He sent out a massive force of naval pilots to intercept the Japanese reinforcements, instead of protecting the ship from *kamikaze* pilots. It was a massive armada comprised of nearly 300 planes. This task force was larger than the Japanese had sent for the attack on Pearl Harbor.<sup>169</sup>

The weather on the day of the attack was poor, and rain caused some planes to lose their way. Communication between aircraft became difficult. One pilot from the *Essex* joked later that, “We looked like a giant crop of blackbirds hunting for Farmer Ito’s granary.”<sup>170</sup> A few hours into flight, the American planes spotted the Japanese task force. The first wave of American fighters struck with multiple bombs and torpedoes, but she still did not go down. Subsequent attacks were poorly coordinated, and pilots began independently picking targets, with the American Avenger torpedo bombers aiming for the *Yamato*. Despite the bombing onslaught, the ship did not list and maintained way.

However, the fate of the ship was sealed. Finally, after a couple exhaustive hours of fighting and constant strikes *Yamato* rolled over and part of the ship exploded.<sup>171</sup> An American pilot called it, “The prettiest sight I’ve ever seen. A red column of fire shot up through the clouds and when it faded *Yamato was gone*.”<sup>172</sup> While the naval aviators were engaging the Japanese

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<sup>168</sup> Mitsuru Yoshida, *Requiem for Battleship Yamato* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1999), 10.

<sup>169</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle For Japan*, 394.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>171</sup> Mitsuru Yoshida, *Requiem for Battleship Yamato*, 118.

<sup>172</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle For Japan*, 398.

task force, a *kamikaze* struck an American ship killing 72 men and wounding 82 others. This seemed to matter little to the naval aviators. When a part of the naval task force sent to intercept the Japanese fleet, Air Group 9, returned to the carrier *Yorktown*, they began to sing, “*Yamato* been a beautiful BB, but BB, you should see yourself now!”<sup>173</sup> The operation was a success, costing the Americans just ten planes and twelve men killed. It was a veritable turkey shoot, but the naval aviators were proud of their achievement.

The sinking of the *Yamato* is portrayed as the last ship in the Japanese arsenal and thereby collapse of the Japanese Navy, however, this was not the case. Various Japanese ships still existed, and they would manage to sink other Allied ships before the war ended.<sup>174</sup> The Japanese Navy by then was no longer the dominant power in the Pacific, even before sinking of the *Yamato*. Even if the *Yamato* Task Force had managed to reach Okinawa and the American fleet, they would have been annihilated by a sheer number of American ships anchored off the coast of Okinawa. Ultimately, the sinking of the ship did not give the Americans and their allies virtual control of the Pacific theatre, they already possessed it before Okinawa. The annihilation of the task force was a small tactical victory.

However, countless books and articles about the Okinawan campaign include this success story. The script began with sailors who fought during the Okinawan campaign became disheartened at the sheer number of ships sunk and the thousands of casualties inflicted upon them. The days of surface action in the Pacific theatre seemed to be gone and the incredible strategic naval victories of Leyte Gulf and Philippine seemed so far away. They believed and

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<sup>173</sup> Russell Spurr, *A Glorious Way to Die: The Kamikaze Mission of the Battleship Yamato* (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2010), 311-322.

<sup>174</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan*, 399-400.

were told by top brass that the Japanese military could no longer inflict serious damage on the American fleet. They quickly found out they were wrong when *kamikazes* managed to hit their ships with an alarming success rate.<sup>175</sup> The Navy needed a propaganda piece they could point to boost the morale of the sailors and the civilians at home who were weary from the constant reports of the horrors of the *kamikaze* attacks. They found this in the sinking of the *Yamato*. Americans knew that the Japanese had great pride in this battleship.<sup>176</sup> Time magazine proudly reported about the death of the Japanese Navy over the four years of conflict, “The 45,000 ton *Yamato* was blown to bits after by carrier aircraft after a foolish sortie in the East China Sea...”<sup>177</sup> Despite the inaccurate reportage of the weight of the battleship, the tone used in the article is one of pride in how the American Navy shattered the Japanese navy’s “sea lords” hopes and dreams and proudly proclaiming the Japanese navy was a former shell of its former self.<sup>178</sup> The war was not quite over when the article was written and it was used as a morale booster to continue the conflict that many Americans expected to never cease.

To restore the American Navy’s pride, the naval elites began to promote sinking of the *Yamato* as a great success of strategic importance, when, it changed little in the outcome of the Pacific War. Historian Max Hastings writes that, “The Destruction of the *Yamato* was a mere sideshow...”<sup>179</sup> Despite this, it remains present in many major works about Okinawa. Ultimately,

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<sup>175</sup> Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War: 1931-1945* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 145-146.

<sup>176</sup> John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire*, 695-696.

<sup>177</sup> “Death of a Fleet,” *Time*. August 13, 1945, vol. 46 (7).

<http://eds.a.ebscohost.com/eds/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=31a28bba-c7e7-4f39-907a-b4a11e9f43fd%40sdc-v-sessmgr06&bdata=JkF1dGhUeXBIPWlwLHVpZCZzaXRIPWVkey1saXZI#AN=54766641&db=edb>

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan*, 399.



need for the American Navy to restore the morale of its men, to secure a place in naval history and prepare them for invasion of the main Japanese islands, they announced the sinking as a victory of utmost importance.

### **American Memory in Summary**

Ultimately, American memory of the battle of Okinawa was shaped by political forces. The battle is remembered to have brought out some of the worst in soldiers fighting on the island. Depictions in American film show the soldiers as physically and morally stretched to their limits. The war made both sides act on animalistic instincts because it was a culmination of virulent hatred that had been fermenting for years. The slow progress of the fighting and high casualties angered many soldiers and civilians who desired to see the war end quickly... The war in Europe was over and victory seemed in grasp and many on the home front wanted the scourge of war to pass away. Fighting such a fierce battle with so many soldiers dying when the war seemed just about over was unacceptable to many Americans.

The need for moral justification of being the first nation to develop and use a nuclear weapon also shaped the memory of the Battle of Okinawa. Okinawa for the Americans was an incredibly violent battle that revealed possible problems that could be encountered with an invasion of the main Japanese Islands. However, the American decision to show and tell of the horrors of the battle postwar and the decision-making process for Operations Neptune and Downfall, led to Okinawa being remembered as a violent abyss which left little room for arguments against the utilitarian decision to drop the bombs. The battle for Okinawa and the decision to drop the atomic bombs have become intertwined and nearly impossible to separate.

## Japanese Memory

### The Slaughter of an Army: The Japanese Memory of the Battle of Okinawa on

#### Land

Japan has a unique view on the Battle of Okinawa. While many leftists and pacifists condemned the rashness of their leaders for leading them into confrontation, Okinawa retains an important place in the Japanese narrative of the Pacific War. Despite leftists and pacifist's condemnation of the war as a stupid and futile endeavor, some Japanese romanticize the battle as a heroic last stand. These Japanese hold the conflict as a remarkable last defense of their nation that was performed under extraordinary circumstances with no food, outnumbered in personnel, and with lack of naval and air support.

The Japanese ground forces on Okinawa fought a determined battle that resulted in the annihilation of the Japanese 32<sup>nd</sup> Army. Nearly 110,000 soldiers were killed during the battle.<sup>180</sup> Despite being greatly outnumbered in men and material, the Japanese put up a successful resistance that bogged Americans down on Okinawa for three months, giving the main Japanese islands significant time to prepare for an invasion. The Japanese soldiers who died in the fighting were remembered in a far better light than those who died fighting on mainland Asia and the dead are listed by name on the Memorial for Peace on Okinawa.<sup>181</sup> The destruction of the 32<sup>nd</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Ted Tsukiyama, "Battle of Okinawa," *The Hawai'i Nisei Story: Americans of Japanese Ancestry During WWII* (2006). [http://nisei.hawaii.edu/object/io\\_1149316185200.html](http://nisei.hawaii.edu/object/io_1149316185200.html)

<sup>181</sup> Okinawa Prefectural Government, "Number of Names Inscribed as of June, 2017." <https://www.pref.okinawa.jp/site/kodomo/heiwananjo/heiwa/7812.html>

Imperial Army on Okinawa has become synonymous with sacrifice at the end of the Second World War.

The Japanese empire knew the strategic importance of Okinawa and desired to hold it at all costs.<sup>182</sup> American air strikes on the island of Turk in February 1944 convinced Japanese leaders that the United States would attempt to seize Okinawa sooner or later.<sup>183</sup> The battle plans drawn up for the island played a large part to the successful Japanese resistance. The Japanese leadership had no illusions about the upcoming battle as time wore on. The Americans would enjoy air and naval superiority during the forthcoming battle. Colonel Yahara provides valuable insight on high command attempts to mend the issue of total American air supremacy, “Defense of the Ryukyus, accordingly, was faithfully based on the principle of top priority for air power. But as the days passed and the gap between American and Japanese air power widened, differences of opinion arose between air and ground forces about the actual condition of the air arm.”<sup>184</sup>

The air power priority meant that all promising officers of field rank were inclined to be transferred to the air corps. Yahara admitted that because of this, the best officers were left to the air force, while the army and navy tended to get the rest.<sup>185</sup> Despite these issues, the Japanese managed to fight remarkably well on Okinawa. One American soldier remembered that how, “The Japanese soldier was a remarkable man. On Okinawa, he fought-and how he fought! Not with air cover whatever and amazingly little support. His resilience and endurance were

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<sup>182</sup> Thomas M. Huber, “Japan’s Battle of Okinawa, April-June 1945,” 1-2.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>184</sup> Hiromichi Yahara, *The Battle For Okinawa*, 4-5.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

tremendous.”<sup>186</sup> Another soldier in the 4<sup>th</sup> Marine regiment agreed that, “We fought hard on Okinawa, maybe harder and better than any Americans before. But would we have won without our enormous superiority in numbers, firepower and supplies, our control of the air, our ability to replace men and equipment? If the Japanese say that’s what licked them, I think they’re right. We didn’t win because our fighting men were superior; the Japanese were as good or better.”<sup>187</sup>

The Japanese soldier fought a brilliant defensive battle on Okinawa. The battle of Okinawa was unique in that the way the Japanese fought resembled the defense-in-depth tactics that were developed by the Germans during the First World War, but was updated to oppose modern tanks and aircraft. Trenches, bunkers, and other fortified positions were installed so that troops could fall back to a continuously stronger position. Officers began to train their men for every conceivable situation. Troops were drilled to contest landing points, night attacks on bridges were practiced, staff at all levels studied positions and discussed strategy. It was no longer relegated to high command. Junior officers now had a say in strategy, Artillery units even practiced bombarding beach heads with live shells. When news arrived about the fall of Leyte to the Americans, morale and confidence waivered. Through rigorous drilling and training, the men and officer’s confidence were somewhat restored. Tactics were also modernized. Japanese light infantry was previously trained to infiltrate, maneuver, and use close combat to their advantage. The fall of Leyte made the Japanese change their tactics. They had assumed the American fleet would be destroyed offshore and the troops on the land would mop up those who had managed to land, the fall of the Philippines made Japanese staff officers reevaluate their plans.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> George Fiefer, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, 44.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>188</sup> Thomas M. Huber, “Japan’s Battle of Okinawa, April-June 1945,” 11-13.

The doctrine of the Japanese Army had shifted dramatically in later years of the war. Despite Allied depictions of being rigid and inflexible, the Japanese were very fluid in how they changed tactics and strategy in the last couple of years of WWII. The Imperial Japanese Army doctrine, for example, stated that there should be no more than six miles of front per division. However, originally the plans on Okinawa had the two and a half divisions of the 32<sup>nd</sup> army, covering 36 miles of land. Colonel Yahara concluded that the only way to defend the island would be to station the bulk of defense in the southern half of the island, where the front would be narrowed greatly. For the most part, his defensive doctrine was followed effectively. The Japanese used their light infantry commendably against European colonial garrison and Chinese troops, but it was next to useless against concentrated firepower.<sup>189</sup> In order to rectify this disadvantage, the Japanese dug in and created fortified areas and switched their Army Doctrine from offensive to defensive and exercised this to great advantage against the American troops.

The fighting experienced by Japanese soldiers was incredibly intense with whole units annihilated. This utter devastation of military personnel made the long and successful resistance an astonishment feat in itself. Even if a Japanese unit received high casualties, they could still mount a successful defense. In the early phases of the battle, many Japanese units took incredible fatalities and still managed to mount a somewhat successful resistance so that other units could fortify their position. Some, such as Captain Kouchi Ito's Battalion of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, had three-hundred casualties out of six hundred in the first two days.<sup>190</sup> The demise of his unit was the same as countless others on Okinawa. While Ito's unit had prepared for months by digging a series of tunnels and trenches, they were ordered to hold a position in shallow foxholes. They

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<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

<sup>190</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan*, 381.

had not expected the Americans to emphasize strikes there, so little effort was utilized to fortify the defensive positions.

Throughout the island, Japanese soldiers were dying at ten times the rate of American troops with the situation rapidly in deterioration. Ito's unit experienced firsthand the Imperial Army's woes on Okinawa. The mortar section of Ito's Battalion used over a thousand rounds of ammunition in twenty-four hours during a few hours of fighting on April 27<sup>th</sup>.<sup>191</sup> The rapid fire of these mortars consumed most of their ammunition and the main Japanese islands could not resupply them, especially after the sinking of the *Yamato* and her convoy. Merchant ships were sunk by American subs at an astonishing rate due to poor defense of the Japanese merchant fleet, so reinforcement or resupply was out of the question.<sup>192</sup>

This meant that ammunition was rapidly becoming scarce and American tanks were now approaching their defensive position. The only two anti-tank guns Ito's Battalion possessed were destroyed within hours of the fight after taking fire from heavy American bombardments. Despite these horrendous losses, Ito's Battalion managed to hold their position. When the American tanks arrived, some of his men were given a mine or shell to perform a suicide bomber role... Ito solemnly shook the hands of the soldiers assigned to this suicidal mission. A favorite of the captain, Sgt. Kaoru Imai, ran after an American tank, clutching a mine, but was unable to reach the tank before being spotted... The tank turned its turret and fired, making Imai disappear

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<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>192</sup> David C. Evans and Mark R. Peattie, *Kaigun: Strategy, Tactics, and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1887-1941* (Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2012), 445-446.

instantly. Ito's soldiers became increasingly dispirited because the soldiers had known each other for many years prior to the battle.<sup>193</sup>

Other Japanese soldiers had similar terrible circumstances during the battle. One Okinawan officer, Captain Shumen Hokama, volunteered for front-line service in the Imperial Army, he was one of the youngest Imperial officers at a mere nineteen years of age. On April 27, he and his six-hundred-man battalion were ordered to hold a section of Maeda Ridge, a critical position on Okinawa. Most of his men had never seen combat and were ordered to stem a well-coordinated American tank-infantry assault that cost the Japanese most of Maeda Ridge. General Ushijima, commander of the Japanese 32<sup>nd</sup> Army on Okinawa, had sent a terse order to the 24<sup>th</sup> division, which included Hokama's Battalion. They were ordered to help the adjacent 62<sup>nd</sup> Division with efforts to repulse the American attack and to, "...put its main strength northeast of Shuri this evening."<sup>194</sup>

To General Ushijima, Maeda Ridge had to be held at all costs and no Japanese soldier had any illusion about what the orders true intension meant. As Hokama's Battalion advanced through the ruins of the ancient capital, Naha, he described how men had to avoid hundreds of bodies tossed, "like rag dolls." Pieces of rotting flesh stuck to a stone wall where a wagon full of ammunition had been blown up. Hokama ordered his men to rest and each of the soldiers was given a slice of canned pineapple as a final farewell gift.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan*, 381.

<sup>194</sup> John Toland, *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire*, 706-707.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

The Japanese fought fiercely on Okinawa and in the post-war years took note of the determined defense of their islands. It became a story of a heroic last defense of their nation. There are several memorial sites around the island that honor the Japanese and Okinawan dead. However, compared to other battles, The Japanese military dead on Okinawa were honored far more than their compatriots in other battles. The Peace Memorial Park on Okinawa has the names imbedded in stone of combatants and victims from all sides of the battle, including Japanese soldiers. This is a rare acknowledgement for Japanese soldiers, especially when you consider the war crimes committed on Okinawa. Yet, Japanese armed forces who fought on other islands and in Asia did not receive nearly as much recognition for their sacrifice. With sacrifices endured by many, the Japanese did make some effort to remember and thank the armed forces for their efforts. However, the reality on Okinawa during the battle was that few soldiers had any illusion that they would survive, yet they still chose to fight and die for their country.

Since it was difficult to mourn the military deaths of the Imperialist campaigns in Asia and South Pacific due to war crimes committed by these troops, an emphasis was placed on the remembrance and sacrifice of soldiers who fought closer to home. One American veteran returned to Okinawa years later and was surprised to see, "...the ridge along Mabuni was covered with shrines erected by cities and prefectures of Japan memorializing their dead. It is a big tourist attraction."<sup>196</sup> In a similar manner to the remembrance of *Kamikaze* pilots, Japanese nationalists emphasize the sacrifice of Japanese soldiers.<sup>197</sup> These soldiers bought critical time to prepare the main islands for an expected invasion. In order to instill patriotic virtue and

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<sup>196</sup> Edward Gorman, "The End on Okinawa," *American Heritage* 36 no. 3 (1995), 37.

<sup>197</sup> Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, 234.



demonstrate the value of sacrificing oneself for the greater good of the nation, the Japanese placed greater emphasis on these war dead above many others.

### **Not True *Yamato*: Japanese Memory, Textbook Controversy, and War Crimes**

#### **Committed against the Okinawan Peoples**

While the Japanese mourn their dead at Okinawa, they also downplay their unusual cruelty towards the Okinawan people. Since the Japanese honor many war dead by name, it becomes difficult to justify in the face of documented widespread atrocity. Okinawa and Japan might have been from two different worlds for many Japanese soldiers. Most of them had never met anyone from Okinawa. The distinctive dialect and with physical features of a darker skin tone and shorter height made it easier for the Japanese to discriminate and abuse the Okinawan populace.

Scholar Alastair McLauchlan reveals the resentment many Japanese soldiers felt towards the Okinawans, "... when the 32<sup>nd</sup> Army began arriving on Okinawa, many of the soldiers resented having been sent to fight for a place and people whom many of them despised as 'non-Japanese.' Soldiers on Okinawa often referred to themselves as 'real Japanese' (*Yamato*), a psychological gap that widened when they discovered they could not understand the Okinawan dialect."<sup>198</sup> A Japanese soldier writing after the war noted that this resentment originally stemmed from the government. Despite ruling the islands for nearly 70 years, the Japanese

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<sup>198</sup> Alastair A. McLauchlan. "War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity on Okinawa: Guilt on Both Sides," 375.

government made, "...many suppositions that the Okinawan people were primitive...is a complete error due to ignorance of their true culture and to Okinawan humility...The politicians simply regarded these small islands as a burden- so poor, so backward, so unimportant."<sup>199</sup>

The discrimination and racialization of the differences between the Okinawan and Japanese population provided the powder keg for soldiers to commit atrocities against them. Rapes of Okinawan women were common before and during the battle. Very few of these were reported either because of intimidation or because they did not want to offend the soldiers who they thought were there to protect their island.<sup>200</sup> Yet, despite this maltreatment some Okinawans still hoped that one day they would be able to be accepted by the Japanese. Many decided the best way to do this was to sacrifice themselves for the Japanese nation. One Okinawan youth described this thought process, "Throughout the Sino-Japanese War, the Russo-Japanese War and the China Incident to the Pacific War, Okinawans' thought patterns and activities very well reflected their idea that the more they sacrifice themselves for the Japanese cause, the quicker they will reach their goal of attaining identity with Japan. Okinawan sacrifice in the...Pacific War disclosed the cruel result of this thought pattern..."<sup>201</sup>

Civilians who showed reluctance to comply were often savagely beaten or shot. Imperial troops also sealed many civilian's fates by driving them out of the caves to face American fire and starvation.<sup>202</sup> Kinuko Ishihara, a young girl during the battle of Okinawa recalled being forced out of the caves by Japanese soldiers. "Five or six Imperial soldiers suddenly appeared at

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<sup>199</sup> George Fiefer, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, 58.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 370.

our cave, surrounded my mother and shouted at gunpoint, ‘You must kill your children, or you all must leave the cave. We left the cave, leaving what small amount of salt and water we had there by their demand....We wandered the sugarcane fields that had been burned by flamethrowers....Under the rains of naval gunfire, flamethrowers, mortar shells, and bombing from B-29 bombs...We merely followed people ahead of us, while pieces of human bodies kept flying over our heads.’<sup>203</sup>

While those who could not fight were pushed out of the caves to make room for soldiers, young men were often pushed out for different reasons. There was an expectation that the Okinawan men would die “honorably,” meaning they would attempt to kill an American soldier before dying themselves. These attacks were often done with primitive weapons. None had any doubt that they were intended to be cannon fodder and their sacrifice would mean little. One sixteen year-old boy and his brother were forced by Japanese soldiers to kill themselves but awoke to find that they were still alive. He and his brother noticed that his parents and sisters were still alive, so they decided to end their mother and sister’s lives with their own hands, “We had to do it because of love. Mother was the first one we laid our hands on.... When I was finished, my brother and I looked around us. Our parents and sisters were all dead.” When they marched out with sticks to fight the Americans, they bumped into the same Japanese who had ordered them to die fighting and commit suicide alive and well. He burned with anger, “They had betrayed us!”<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Matthew M. Burke and Chiyomi Sumida, “Okinawans Recall Horrors of War, Call for Lasting Peace During Battle of Okinawa Remembrance,” *Stars and Stripes*, June 23, 2017.

<sup>204</sup> George Fiefer, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, 457.

In the papers on mainland Japan, the papers touted that children were “dying gloriously on the battlefield!”<sup>205</sup> The public was kept blind from the forced suicides of the Okinawan people, instead, they made it seem like they died on their own accord with no reluctance. However, this scenario was deceitful at best and propaganda at its worst and has harmed Japanese-Okinawan relations ever since. If Okinawans went against Japanese orders to commit suicide, build fortifications, or leave the cave, they were often killed. Some of the recorded methods to kill dissenters included bayoneting, drowning, poisoning, choking, and tossing hand grenades into caves where they decided to surrender.<sup>206</sup> Neo-conservative members of the Japanese government and those involved in the movement to revise history schoolbooks downplay the Imperial Army’s role in war crimes against the Okinawan populace, which caused increased tension between mainland Japanese politicians and the Okinawans.

This tension exploded 60 years after the battle. In 2007, proposed revisions to Japanese history textbooks were made to coincide with newly passed Japanese law that emphasized teaching patriotism in schools. Previous attempts included deleting any mention of the Nanking massacre, the three “Alls” policy in China, and comfort women from all over Asia. These proposed changes were the first to ignite controversy within Japan itself. The new proposal included contesting Okinawan accounts of Japanese atrocities. The proposed revisions in 2007 included classification of accounts of Japanese soldiers forcing Okinawans to commit suicide as, “historically debatable.”<sup>207</sup> Though the change was just a few words, it was more than enough to

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 457

<sup>206</sup> Alastair A. McLauchlan. “War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity on Okinawa: Guilt on Both Sides,” 369.

<sup>207</sup> “Okinawans Protest Schoolbook Revisions Downplaying Army Role in Suicides,” *World War II* 22, no. 9, (2008), 15-16.

ignite the anger of Okinawans. Nearly 100,000 Okinawan protestors turned out to dispute these modifications in history. Survivors of the battle and witnesses to mass suicides also attended to attest to these coerced or forced suicides. The Okinawan governor sympathized greatly with the protestors stating, “We cannot bury the fact that the Japanese military was involved in mass suicide.”<sup>208</sup>

While this may seem like an attempt to make the younger Japanese generation ultranationalists who would be geared and ready for war, the issue is far more complicated than at first glance. While politics does shape the Japanese memory of atrocities, it is not for creating a new generation of Japanese militarists. The root of Japanese memory of atrocities on Okinawa is a complex issue that goes back to the post-war period. Undoubtedly, the Japanese nation suffered greatly during the Second World War and immediate post-war literature reflected the national mood. Artists, filmmakers, soldiers, bureaucrats, and others who previously may have worked with Japanese militarists began to condemn them.

This condemnation of militarism spread to those who helped spurn it. Famed filmmaker Akira Kurosawa bitterly remembered that he was forced to make a sequel to a propaganda film even though he had no desire to do so.<sup>209</sup> Many Japanese bought the American argument that ordinary citizens were victims of a small group of militarists which controlled every facet of decision making during the war. However, this rationale diffuses individual responsibility for the

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<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> Akira Kurosawa, *Something like an Autobiography* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 135-137.

Japanese. If all Japanese were guilty, then none of them were guilty. They believed themselves and other Asian nations had all suffered for being complicit with the regime.

This communal suffering was a theme during the 50-year anniversary commemoration the conclusion of the Second World War. In August 1995, twenty-six documentaries and 6 dramas were produced for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>210</sup> These biopics emphasized the suffering inflicted on the Japanese and repeated ad nauseam that war is wrong, and they should never be fought again. The NHK, Japan's national television broadcasting station, depicted war crimes this same year. However, commercial stations are hesitant about showing anything to do with the Second World War and even if they do, it is often very late in the evening.<sup>211</sup> The state-owned media drives the narrative of collective trauma and guilt plus it is not uncommon and many don't learn the details of Japan's involvement during the Second World War until university.<sup>212</sup>

This idea of collective guilt and victimhood started in the immediate post-war years in Japan. From approximately 1945 to 1958, literature reflected this antimilitarist mood brought about by American occupation and the humiliation of Japanese defeat. A former Japanese prisoner of war wrote during this period that, "I felt strong hatred towards the military that had drawn my home country into such a desperate war; but I also felt that I did not have any right to complain about the regime change since I myself had not done anything to prevent it from coming into being in the first place."<sup>213</sup> However, this was a rare sentiment. For the most part,

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<sup>210</sup> Naoko Shimazu, "Popular Representations of the Past: The Case of Postwar Japan," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 1 (2003), 107.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 108

<sup>212</sup> Okinawans Protest Schoolbook Revisions Downplaying Army Role in Suicides," 16.

<sup>213</sup> Naoko Shimazu, "Popular Representations of the Past: The Case of Postwar Japan," 104.

Japanese wanted to place the blame on their leaders for the war and their suffering. Early publications of Japanese war crimes in Asia included Gomikawa Junpei's work *Ningen no joken* (Conditions of Humans), which was a rare portrayal of the Japanese as aggressors. It was surprisingly successful and sold nearly 2.4 million copies in less than three years. Despite this astonishing admission of Japanese war crimes and aggression in this work, it still included the Japanese as a part of a shared victimhood. The depictions of Japanese as aggressors was only included in popular works if Japanese suffering was present in the work as well.<sup>214</sup>

These portrayals were meant to display what war does to people and the misdeeds it can allow ordinary citizens to do. To include the Japanese as victims of militarism, it allowed for a dangerous narrative to find their way into Japanese memory of the Pacific war. By the 1980's depictions of the Second World War in film and literature began to lose mass appeal. Televised programs depicting the war became less frequent as the generation who remembered the war began to dwindle as many began to die off.<sup>215</sup> However, a reversal occurred in the 1990's fueled by the political climate and contemporary events. When the Japanese economic bubble burst in 1992, the national mood soured accompanied by numerous blames and explanations for this economic disaster were passed around. The following decade also known as the "Lost Decade," was a period of economic stagnation in Japan. Real wages fell around 5% and many Japanese

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<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>215</sup> "Ending Deflation In Japan: Waging a New War," *The Economist*, March 9, 2013. <https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2013/03/09/waging-a-new-war>

felt disillusioned with their society and economic prospects. GDP fell nearly \$1 trillion from \$5.33 trillion to \$4.36 trillion in nominal terms.<sup>216</sup>

The anger at the political and economic situation led some to rage with Japanese society at large and desired a return to a nation of strength and a force in world affairs. To these ultra-nationalists, contemporary Japanese society and selfishness were to blame for the economic stagnation. One such prominent figure, Kobayashi Yoshinori wrote an influential and popular *manga* (roughly equivalent to a graphic novel) called *Shin Gomanizumu Sengen Special: Sensoron*, or the New Special Statement ‘Gomanizumu: The War Debate. It sold over 650,000 copies. While Kobayashi had previously written controversial political *manga* about his dismissal of Japanese war crimes during the Second World War, this was one of his most successful publications. He justified Japanese expansion into Asia as a war of national liberation from Western Imperialism.

Yoshinori denies the Japanese atrocities as invented by the allied countries in order to secure their power during occupation. Kobayashi broke new ground when he expressed and popularized views that were previously considered taboo. However, at its root, his work is angry with Japanese society. Kobayashi accuses the Japanese of having lost their direction and have become a weak-willed and “spineless” nation. He rails against those who pursue their own personal rights and consumer goods rather than thinking of public well-being.<sup>217</sup> While Japanese

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<sup>216</sup> Leika Kihara, “Japan Eyes to End Decades Long Deflation,” *Reuters*, August 17, 2012. <https://www.reuters.com/article/japan-economy-estimate/update-2-japan-eyes-end-to-decades-long-deflation-idUSL4E8JH1TC20120817>

<sup>217</sup> Naoko Shimazu, “Popular Representations of the Past: The Case of Postwar Japan,” 113-114.



intellectuals and left-leaning citizens and politicians condemned the work, it remains a popular work for many.<sup>218</sup>

Collectively, the current memory of Japanese war crimes on Okinawa was influenced by politics, self-victimization and the economic state of Japan. Neoconservatives viewed antebellum and war time Japan through nostalgic lenses because their economy was stagnating. While death and destruction were widespread during this period, they believed there was less rampant consumerism and selfishness because the war made everyone equal. Citizens helped each other, and patriotism made the Imperial state strong. Nationalists believe that contemporary Japanese society and emphasis on individuality was responsible for the economic stagnation and Japan's weakness on the world stage.

To solve Japan's woes and their society's problems, these ultranationalists believed she needed to return to emphasizing patriotism and willingness to sacrifice oneself for the greater good. However, it is difficult to justify the belief that they should ever return to ultra-nationalism policies because of the death and destruction that it wrought to other Asian nations. In order to appeal to ordinary citizen's sentiments, war crimes are denied or greatly downplayed as propaganda, appealing to those who hold anti-Western sentiments in Japan.

The government also played a role to foster a narrative that allowed these views to develop. These leadership views are particularly harmful to Okinawans. The collective victimization of all Asian nations who fought during the Second World War was a view promoted by the Japanese government. This narrative allowed fringe political parties like ultra-

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<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

nationalists previously taboo views on the war to gain credibility... If the Japanese are also victims of the war, then their status as citizens of an aggressor nation comes into question. The war crimes against the Okinawans falls into this conviction of collective victimization. If all Japanese suffered greatly during the Pacific War, then crimes against the Okinawans and their suffering are not unique to them.

Some Japanese were even angry at the victimization of the Okinawans. A widow of a *kamikaze* pilot recalled when she went to Okinawa and her disgust with the people, "...Okinawans think they were the only victims. It's amazingly how strong they feel that. That feeling is everywhere. They think Okinawa was cut off and only Okinawans had terrible times...Haruo died to protect Okinawa. I get angry when they consider themselves just victims...I'd hate to set foot on the soil of Okinawa again."<sup>219</sup> While Okinawa suffered greatly, Japanese civilians suffered greatly as well. Many Japanese were angered by Okinawan's belief only they suffered during the battle of Okinawa, despite soldiers fighting on their behalf. Japan was being increasingly bombed, and everyone on the home front was impacted directly by the war. The perceived emphasis on Okinawan anguish during and after the conflict angered many Japanese who lived through the war.

The rage against revising Japanese textbooks came from the perceived fear of rising Japanese nationalism in contemporary Japan. Some political leaders saw this danger increase with Article 9 of the Japanese constitution being rescinded, which forbids Japan from declaring

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<sup>219</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 324.

war or having a standing military.<sup>220</sup> Textbooks play a critical role in how the youth of a country perceive themselves and their nation. Many Okinawans and politically left Japanese fear that if the textbooks do not acknowledge the war crimes of the Japanese, then their nation might follow the same march of folly that led to December 1941. In fact many of the textbooks that were proposed to be changed included an emphasis on teaching pacifism. One major civics textbook claimed that its three core principles are, “respect for fundamental human rights...sovereignty of the people...pacifism.”<sup>221</sup> The fear for some Japanese is that students will become increasingly nationalistic after reading the textbooks and might renounce pacifism and plunge the country into a situation that would do her great harm. In order to prevent this, Okinawans and the Japanese political left fight against the policy of making the Japanese textbooks more “patriotic.”

### **The Human Face of the Divine Wind: *Kamikaze* Pilots in Japanese Memory**

*Kamikazes* were used widely off the shores of Okinawa. One of the hallmarks of remembrance for the Japanese was the pilots themselves. The story of their sacrifice is a tragic story that many Japanese romanticize greatly. Okinawa was one of the first sites of Japanese suicide attacks. While there were other methods of suicide attacks used, such as boats and submarines, the *kamikaze* pilots receive the greatest remembrance and respect. While there had been isolated incidents of Japanese suicide attacks earlier in the war, they weren't part of a coordinated effort. During the battle, *kamikazes* were utilized to great effect and inflicted high casualties on American sailors.

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<sup>220</sup> Linus Hagstrom and Erik Isaksson, “Pacifist Identity, Civics Textbooks, and the Opposition to Japan’s Security Legislation,” *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 45, no. 1 (Winter 2019). <http://muse.jhu.edu/article/717648>

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*

While the Americans decried *kamikaze* pilots as inhuman fanatic slaves to their leaders, the Japanese after the war viewed the pilots in a very sympathetic, even romantic light. Countless Japanese novels, movies, and television shows depicted the lives of the pilots doomed to die and how they and their wives handle this knowledge. The image of a wife knowing her husband will perish and remaining true to him struck a chord with many Japanese in later years. Books transcribing letters between wives and their husbands who are *kamikaze* pilots still arouses interest in not only Japan, but many other countries as well.<sup>222</sup> The violent, determined fanaticism that drove some of these pilots and horrific way they died are rarely a part of these stories; many of them opting instead for a tragic love story. The pilots were often represented as the best and brightest of Japanese society, who willingly sacrificed themselves in a senseless war doomed from the start. This was not the case. However, the myth of the best and brightest dying willingly for the mother country is a pervasive myth in Japan.<sup>223</sup>

Even among some who declared to be anti-militarist after the war, there was a sentimental feeling for these pilots. Many on the Japanese political left, who normally decry Japanese militarism and fascism, tend to stay silent on this issue. Artists also fed into this portrayal of the *kamikaze* pilots. Shigeru Mizuki, a Second World War veteran and highly respected *manga* artist, shared these quixotic notions. Despite later being an avowed anti-militarist, he sees the *kamikaze* pilots in a romanticized light. While the art for one of his series, *Showa*, flips between goofy and hyper realistic, the *kamikaze* pilots were presented in a dreamy

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<sup>222</sup> George Yagi, "Farewell Letters of the *Kamikaze*- It Was Love, Not Fanaticism, That Drove Many of Japan's Suicide Pilots," *Military History Now*, February 13, 2019.

<https://militaryhistorynow.com/2019/02/13/farewell-letters-of-the-kamikaze-it-was-love-not-fanaticism-that-drove-many-of-japans-suicide-pilots/>

<sup>223</sup> Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War: 1931-1945*, 183

way. An almost faceless Japanese officer asks the pilots to make this sacrifice for their country. In the following two panels his face becomes downcast as he realizes that he will follow his men to the grave soon.<sup>224</sup> The pilots, compared to some of the goofy portrayals of soldiers and officers in the series, are depicted as hyper masculine warriors. The following page includes a famed song sung for *kamikaze* pilots is transcribed. When he depicts the strikes on American ships off the coast of Okinawa, there are no humans faces present in the attack.<sup>225</sup>

In *Showa*, Misaki rarely shied away from depicting the horrors of war, including corpses.<sup>226</sup> However, while portraying pilots; there is a strange lack of the death and destruction wrought by their actions. . Instead they are almost untouchable, the men who are sent off were the epitome of Japanese martial spirit. Misaki does not present a more complex picture of the aviators, instead opting for a romanticized view. Comics, film, literature, and television about the pilots after the war reinforced this myth of doomed youth and ultimate sacrifice.

The myth of nobility of the pilots continued into contemporary Japan and still retains a hold on public consciousness. Those who managed to blow themselves up against an American ship were glorified as the pinnacle of Japanese military spirit and masculinity. After the war they were seen as noble, tragic figures. Because many Japanese soldiers were accused of war crimes in Asia and Pacific regions, the pilots became almost a surrogate for mourning the war dead. The impression was originally given that all the pilots were volunteers.

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<sup>224</sup> Shigeru Mizuki, *Showa: 1944-1953, A History of Japan*, 143. See Appendix 5-10.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 143. See Appendix 4.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-146. See Appendix 5-8.

However, it is not the whole truth. Members of these, “Special Attack Units,” were a motley group of varying beliefs about the operation. There were men who desired to be a part of these units, but many others were reluctant pilots that suffered from peer pressure. One Japanese historian discovered the intense psychological pressure from friends, family and from other personnel assigned to these units.<sup>227</sup> Lance-Corporal Iawo Ajiro who worked as a technician during the war, recalled when a friend walked into his room to share grievances and apprehensions, “You’re a lucky guy, working in signals. I’m supposed to fly tomorrow.” To comfort his friend Aijiro said, “We’ll meet again at Yasukuni.”<sup>228</sup> Despite the Japanese narrative of willing self-sacrifice of these soldiers, many of them held great apprehensions about their task. Many soldiers and students were coaxed, pressured or told falsehoods to convince them to volunteer for these units. Pilots who managed to return alive were derided as cowards and ostracized from the unit. Some pilots suffered such mental anguish from the mission they purposefully crashed their planes into the ground or ocean. Many were also not super warriors. More often than not, they crashed their planes accidentally because of their lack of training.<sup>229</sup>

Yet, the fable of these tragic pilots provides an important function for some Japanese. In a similar fashion to Germany after the Second World War, some Japanese felt that they couldn’t decently mourn their war dead because of the atrocities they had committed. These pilots were often young and to remember and honor their story of self-sacrifice was a decent way to mourn their dead. These pilots were perceived to be innocent and selfless, the perfect warriors. The Yasukuni Shrine and the Yushukan museum honor the sacrifices of these pilots significantly

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<sup>227</sup> Saburo Ienaga, *The Pacific War: 1931-1945*, 183.

<sup>228</sup> Max Hastings, *Retribution: The Battle for Japan*, 392.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

more than other soldiers and sailors, even surpassing the Japanese dead on Okinawa. While the Yushukan war museum remains a controversial institution because of its vehemently militaristic and nationalistic tone, it is more complicated than just a mere nationalist museum.

This tone has been noted by some visitors to the museum. Journalist Ian Buruma noticed the emphasis on honoring the self-sacrifice of the pilots at the museum, “The tone of the museum and indeed the entire shrine is summed up by a large bronze plaque put up by the Association to Honor the Special Attack Forces (*kamikazes*)...Engraved in stylish characters are the words of Takeda Tsuneyoshi, president of the association: ‘Some six thousand men died in suicide attacks that were incomparable in their tragic bravery...The entire nation sheds tears of gratitude for their unstinting loyalty and self-sacrifice.’”<sup>230</sup> Instead of honoring the sacrifice of the thousands of Japanese soldiers who died on remote islands or distant regions in Asia, many Japanese opted to hold these pilots in greater regard. This is due to the *kamikazes* being utilized in greater numbers towards the end of the war. They were also viewed as gallant soldiers who attempted to protect their homeland from foreign invasion. They believed that there was something pure and noble about these young men. Politicians latched on to their sacrifice and have attempted to leverage this image for their own ends.

Remembering and honoring the pilots is not just about mourning their deaths. Nations and people tend to revere those who sacrifice themselves for the greater good. Since these pilots were said to be volunteers, their story is more palatable and tragic. The story that brave, young pilots stepped forward to volunteer to give their lives for the country and people is a great narrative that any government would love. Japanese politicians and others who unofficially visit

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<sup>230</sup> Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*, 234.

the controversial Yasukuni Shrine emphasizes their respect and belief in the importance of sacrificing oneself for the welfare of others.<sup>231</sup> The striving for this remembrance is a product of the current geo-political situation over the rights to exclusive economic zones in the South China Sea.<sup>232</sup>

In a manner like the controversial *manga* artist Kobayashi, these politicians tend to dislike individualist ideals and desire for Japan to become a major leader on the world stage. They believe Japan has become docile and subjected to other nation's whims. In order to become a major leader of nations, these politicians believe they need a respectable standing army and overall military strength. Their visits to Yasukuni shrine allow the younger generations to see that if one dies selflessly for the nation, they will be enshrined and remembered for all eternity. Recently neo-conservative politicians rescinded Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution that forbids a declaration of war amid increased tensions with other nations in the South-China Sea, the narrative of self-sacrifice becomes more important to tell the youth.

### **The Spirit and Pride of the Japanese People: The *Yamato* in Japanese Memory**

The Japanese battleship *Yamato* occupies an interesting place in Japanese memory. Even among some avowed anti-militarists, there is an awe for the leviathan. The *Yamato* and her sister ship *Musashi* were the largest and heaviest battleships ever built, weighing nearly 72,800 tons

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<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 234-235.

<sup>232</sup> Rongxing Guo, *Territorial Disputes and Resource Management: A Global Handbook* (New York, Nova Publishers, 2006), 104.



each.<sup>233</sup> On each of their decks were the largest guns ever mounted on a warship, 18.1-inch guns, firing shells weighing over 3,000 pounds each?<sup>234</sup> The ships were considered by many even after the war the pinnacle of Japanese naval engineering. This awe even extended to the Japanese media. Countless books, movies, and even television shows have paid homage to the battleship. Even among the generation who suffered greatly from the effects of the war, admiration of the battleship remains. The memory of the *Yamato* was shaped by political forces, specifically the Cold-War era cooperation between the United States and Japan. However, the Japanese political left and right have different memories regarding the battleship.

Famed Writer Yoshinobu Nishizaki and artist Leiji Matsumoto, both members of the war generation, wrote an *anime* series based on the battleship, *Space Battleship Yamato*, which aired during 1974-1975. Despite neither of them being an avowed nationalist, they contributed to the legend of the *Yamato*.<sup>235</sup> In 2005, a Japanese War film about the ship called *Yamato*, premiered and was a massive domestic hit breaking some box office records.<sup>236</sup> The film paints a brilliant picture of Japanese memory of the battleship. Despite many modern-day Japanese having little nationalist tendencies, the film tends to portray the Imperial Navy in an almost positive light. Even the Navy officers are portrayed as sympathetic, contrasted with many films depicting the harshness of Imperial Army officers. Famed Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, a Naval Strategist who was killed before the sinking, gives one of the main characters in the film a dagger. The dagger is

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<sup>233</sup> Robert Jackson, *The World's Greatest Battleships* (Greenwich Editions, La Jolla, CA, 2011), 74.

<sup>234</sup> John Campbell, *Naval Weapons of WWII* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 180.

<sup>235</sup> Takashi Murakami, *Little Boy: The Arts of Japan's Exploding Subculture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 70-73.

<sup>236</sup> Aaron Gerow, "War and Nationalism in *Yamato*: Trauma and Forgetting the Postwar" *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 9, no. 24 (June 13, 2011).

later passed on to his widow. The senior officers on board the *Yamato* during Operation Ten-Go, the plans for the *Yamato* task force on Okinawa, are also depicted in a sympathetic light.<sup>237</sup> For all the condemnation of militarists and the senior military staff, this film is somewhat devoid of negative representations of them.<sup>238</sup>

It is impossible to discuss Japanese memory of the battle of Okinawa without reference to this ship. In Japanese histories of the battle, the story of the sinking of the *Yamato* can consume several chapters. Even Japanese Army Colonel Hiromichi Yahara was in awe of the bravery of the sailors. Despite the great Japanese Army-Navy rivalry that existed during the Second World War, Yahara expresses admiration and heartache for the sailors who died in the sinking.<sup>239</sup> The story of the sinking went beyond the military rivalry and managed to become a near national epic in Japan.

The name *Yamato* refers to the largest ethnic group that encompasses Japan's main islands. In naming the ship *Yamato*, leaders hoped that this would rally the fighting spirit of the Japanese people. Many considered it a tremendous honor to even be stationed on the ship. One naval officer who was commissioned in 1944 remembered feeling stunned to find out he would be stationed there, much to his classmate's envy, "I was shocked! *Yamato* was then the largest ship in the world. Unsinkable, they said. Japan's finest. Everyone was so envious of me. 'The laziest guy in the class! How'd he gets sent there? What's wrong with the Navy?'"<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> *Yamato*, DVD, directed by Junya Sato, performed by Takashi Sorimachi and Nakamura Shido II (Asahi Shimbun, Chugoku Shimbun, Hiroshima Home TV, 2005).

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> Hiromichi Yahara, *The Battle For Okinawa*, 35-36.

<sup>240</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 373.

The sinking of “Japan’s finest,” *Yamato* was a dramatic event from the Japanese perspective and much has been written about it. The few survivors of the *Yamato* weaved a dramatic tale of sacrifice, incredible devotion, and bravery. During the battle that ensued after American planes spotted her, the commander of the *Yamato*, Admiral Seiichi Ito, watched silently from the bridge of the decimation of his crew. He ordered the vessel to break off from the rest of the fleet because he knew that the Americans would continue to target the ship. Some protested the move as cowardice, but soon he shook hands with the surviving officers who crawled to him through the wreckage and told those who pleaded to stay with him to save themselves. He then retired to his private quarters and silently awaited his fate.<sup>241</sup>

Meanwhile, Navigation Officer Captain Ariga, refused the order to abandon ship. Instead he and several others bound themselves together to lessen the possibility of floating or involuntarily struggling to the surface. They awaited their fate with a sailor nearby who volunteered to guard the battle flag until death. Ariga soon panicked when he realized portraits of the Emperor and Empress in the senior wardroom were not safe. A fellow officer assured him that it was better to let the portraits be destroyed than fall into enemy hands. Another sailor volunteered to guard the portraits and locked the door from the inside.<sup>242</sup> Some of those who managed to survive the sinking and explosions that wrecked the pieces of the ship were still singing the national anthem and military songs.<sup>243</sup> These acts of tremendous self-sacrifice were some of many occurrences during the sinking. The way these men died struck a chord with many Japanese. Many believed these men had a proper warrior’s death.

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<sup>241</sup> George Fieffer, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, 28.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

The demise of the battleship, while not changing the strategic naval situation, was very detrimental to morale of the Japanese. The impact on Japanese morale went up the chain of command and even infected higher ranks. Many members of the top brass and civilians believed that *Yamato* was unsinkable and believed she was the pride of the Japanese fleet. The ship's name also carried significant weight. It was the poetic name for Japan.<sup>244</sup> If the *Yamato* was sunk, did that mean the end of what Japanese nationalists referred to as the *Yamato* Race or the Empire? Some feared so. After the war, one of the men who served on the ship, Mitsuru Yoshida, believed the destruction of the ship represented the end of the Japanese Empire.<sup>245</sup> Even Hirohito was deeply affected by its loss. When the Showa Emperor learned of the destruction of the ship with five of her escorts, he raised his hand to his temple in disbelief and was shaken by the news, "Gone? She's gone?" He asked those who reported the news.<sup>246</sup>

The incredible display of bravery and devotion by sailors shaped Japanese memory of the battleship, both for the political right and left. The one-way trip scenario is a heartbreaking narrative that fits well into the more nationalist Japanese narrative of self-sacrifice. The reality was very different. The ship was ordered to sail to Okinawa, inflict as much damage on the American fleet as possible and then beach itself with its crew ordered to fight as infantry. She expected not to return and was allotted a mere two thousand tons of bunker oil for the journey, only enough to get to Okinawa. However, some naval officers of the *Yamato* had secured plenty

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<sup>244</sup> Robert Tignor, *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart Volume 1: Beginnings Through Fifteenth Century* (New York, W.W Norton & Company, 2013), 346.

<sup>245</sup> Mitsuru Yoshida, *Requiem for Battleship Yamato, XVII*.

<sup>246</sup> George Fieffer, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, 33.

of additional oil before her trip to Okinawa, it happened to be more than enough for a round trip.<sup>247</sup>

This adds complexity to the narrative of the sinking and ultimately the memory of the battle of Okinawa. If Naval Officers knew it was intended as a one-way trip, then they shouldn't have brought extra oil. Some hoped that they would be able to return home. The desperate search for and seizure of these valuable oil reserves suggests that not everyone was willing to go on a suicide mission for the nation, despite it a narrative pushed by contemporary Japanese nationalists. Some nationalists content that the tense regional political situation in Asia means that Japan might have to fight a conflict to ensure its sovereignty. They believe that some of the Japanese youth have “gone soft.” They believe that this is unacceptable for their nation in the current political climate. To inspire the youth to be willing to fight if need be, narratives such as the *Yamato*'s sailor's willingness to sacrifice themselves for the nation are necessary.<sup>248</sup>

However, the memory of the battleship is not entirely dictated by either Japanese neo-nationalists or conservative politicians. It is far more complex than the political right narrative dominating the memory of the battleship. Despite the clear presence of Japanese nationalism in some depictions of the battleship, the Japanese political left has also used the ship and its sinking off of Okinawa for their purposes. Some have even attempted to reconcile memory of the battleship by blending the two competing memories. The creators of the *anime* series *Space Battleship Yamato* stated that while their show has some nationalist depictions, it is not militarist. They do not deny war crimes committed by the Japanese during the Second World War, yet they

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<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>248</sup> Brad Lendon, “Why You’re Seeing More of Japan’s Military.” *CNN*. October 16, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/15/asia/japan-military-visibility-intl/index.html>

feel strongly that the ship represented something greater. They stated the inspiration for the spaceship version of *Yamato* was mostly from an admiration of strength, rather than love of militarism.<sup>249</sup> The Japanese political left also expresses some admiration for the battleship. It was a marvel of naval engineering, yet their narrative instead of promoting self-sacrifice promotes a more anti-war version of the sinking. Some depictions of the *Yamato* even border on a pacifist storytelling of events. The sinking of the battleship and the suicide mission represented the folly of war and these sailors suffered because of Japan's leader's arrogance and militarism.<sup>250</sup>

Still, other depictions tried an interesting blend of left-wing and right-wing ideas. This became the dominant narrative. Many of these works became incredibly popular. Even *Space Battleship Yamato*, accused of having militarist leanings, is not entirely without a pacifist message of the futility of war and the horror it can bring. Other depictions represented an ideal that transcended the political divide. One such work was *Silent Service*, a *manga* series in the weekly magazine, "Weekly Morning" or *Uikuri Moningu*. The work was published from September 1988 to March 1996, this *manga* was so popular that politicians both right and left recommended it and attempted to study it.<sup>251</sup> The work depicts a Japanese submarine named *Yamato* after the famed battleship. The story is set during the Cold War that reflects the economic ups and downs of Japan during the period as well as the problematic situation with Japanese-American cooperation in security.

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<sup>249</sup> Yoshinobu Nishizaki Interview. Translated by Tsuneo Tateno, Interview Conducted June 10, 2013. Accessed March 12, 2019. <https://ourstarblazers.com/vault/316/>

<sup>250</sup> Robert Farley, "Japan's Most Famous Battleship: The Yamato," *The Diplomat*. June 12, 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/japans-most-famous-battleship-the-yamato/>

<sup>251</sup> Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (London, Richmond, 2000), 87.

The author intended for the story to show an alternative role for Japan in world politics outside the East-West divide and questions the role of the United States as a global leader. The submarine and her crew manage to outsmart the United States and the American Navy winning many battles against them, all the while seeking to establish a World government. As the story continues, the submarine can challenge American dominance in world affairs. The crew and her commander believe that through the use of their invincible submarine, they can bring about world peace and forcibly disarm nations of nuclear weapons. At the end of the story, they did not entirely fulfill their goals, but the United Nations General Assembly would investigate the idea of a world government. However, the crew had achieved Japanese political independence from the United States and the nation would no longer have to rely on and be forced to help her.<sup>252</sup>

While the submarine in the story is not a carbon copy of the battleship it reminded many readers of the *Yamato* because it represented facing overwhelming odds against the American Navy and a near suicide mission. The Japanese political right enjoyed the work because to them it represented military strength and ingenuity against all odds. The aspect of freeing themselves from security independence on the United States was also appealing to them. Similarly, the political left enjoyed the work for its message of political separation and world peace.<sup>253</sup>

The Japanese Cold-War political culture ultimately shaped the memory of the battleship for both right and left-wing activists and politicians. During the Cold War, the United States and Japan were greatly intertwined with security and economic cooperation. Some individuals on

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<sup>252</sup> Shunichi Takekawa, "Fusing Nationalisms in Post-War Japan: The Battleship *Yamato* and Popular Culture." *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies* 12, no. 3 (2013). <http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/ejcs/vol12/iss3/takekawa.html>

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

both ends of the political spectrum resented this reliance and desired for Japan to be a leader on the world stage. To accomplish this goal, they had to gather support to break off the close-alliance and they began depicting the *Yamato* as more than a mere battleship, but an icon. While the nationalists favored depicting the heroic feats and self-sacrifice of the sailors, the Japanese political left highlighted the horrors of war and the futility of it.

However, adherents to left wing philosophies also depicted the battleship as a mighty warship, but to demonstrate how to throw off the yolk of a foreign power such as the United States. Through use of *manga* and other popular mediums, they promoted the idea that the Japanese should distance themselves from the capitalist model and United States. Ultimately, both sides succeeded in selling their views. In 1995, a researcher found that Japanese students tended to gain most of their knowledge on the Pacific War through popular works such as *manga* and *anime*.<sup>254</sup> Due to the sinking of the battleship *Yamato* coinciding with the battle of Okinawa, it has become difficult to discuss the memory of the battle without referring to the ship. However, it offers a microcosm through which one can view the difficulties both the Japanese right and left have in reconciliation with the bitter memories of Okinawa.

### **In Summary Japanese: Memory**

While politics shaped the memory of the battle of Okinawa, the narrative differs depending on Japanese political affiliation. Undoubtedly, the Japanese troops fought tenaciously

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<sup>254</sup> Geoffery M. White et al., *Perilous Memories: The Asia-Pacific War(s)* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2001), 198-200.



on Okinawa and suffered greatly during the nearly three-month long battle. However, neo-nationalists and conservatives remember the battle and the war dead as a sort of act of martyrdom and patriotism. Since the battle occurred so close to the end of the war in August 1945, it retains a special place of honor and distinction in Japanese memory.

Unlike the war dead in other parts of the Pacific and Asia, the soldiers who fell on Okinawa were honored with multiple memorials on Okinawa which includes one that lists their names, unlike other soldiers who are only listed in Yasakuni shrine in death.<sup>255</sup> The neo-nationalists and conservatives hold the self-sacrifice of the Japanese and Okinawan troops as a gold standard for sacrificing oneself for the good of the nation. Due to the tense current political climate in East Asia, the emphasis on honoring sacrifice becomes much more apparent. Some Japanese leaders believe that post-war generations of Japanese have become increasingly selfish and less willing to die for their country. To prepare the next generation for what they believe might be a possible conflict in East Asia, they highlight stories of Japanese bravery in the face of tremendous odds. Representations of the battleship *Yamato* and the *Kamikaze pilots* tell stories of sacrifice and courage that appeal to modern youth. These stories come in many forms of media such as *manga*, *anime*, and movies. The hope for these nationalists and conservatives is that the Japanese youth will follow the examples set by the war generation.

The Japanese political left highlights the war dead on Okinawa as a warning against the folly of war. They depict the battle of Okinawa as a place of anguish for the Japanese and Okinawans, but condemn their willingness to die in what they believe was a pointless war against a much larger power. This belief in the absurdity of war leads them to depict the battle as

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<sup>255</sup> Ian Buruma, *Wages of Guilt*, 230-234.

a moral abyss in which all sides are victims. This is present in many pacifist's works on Okinawa. Their anti-militarist stance is present in some stories about the *Yamato* and the *Kamikaze* pilots. These men are commonly depicted as the best and brightest in Japan who died violently for a foolish cause. Similarly, to the nationalists and conservatives, the Japanese left desires to instill ideals on a new generation. However, they want the future Japanese generation to remember the vast misery, death, and destruction as a warning against going to war.

### **Conclusion: The Politics of the Ghosts of Okinawa**

In post-war Japan, many American movies were released that were previously not allowed to be shown. One such movie was "Gone with the Wind," based on the American book of the same name. Many Japanese found common ground with the main character, Scarlett O'Hara, who stated in the ruins of the American South after the Civil War, "After all tomorrow is another day!"<sup>256</sup> While many Japanese found comfort in that phrase, it is not entirely accurate. States cannot escape their history. It looms over them like a phantom. Likewise, the ghosts of Okinawa haunt the politics and memory of Okinawa, America, and Japan and ultimately affects how they remember the trauma each of them encountered.

Politics shaped the memory of the battle of Okinawa and all major belligerents in the battle appropriated their war dead in different ways. The dead were so numerous and the destruction so prevalent that many felt that they owed it to the fallen to remember them. In order

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<sup>256</sup> Takashi Oka, "For Japan, Musical is 'Gone with Wind,'" *New York Times*. January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1970. Accessed March 19, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/01/01/archives/for-japan-musical-gone-with-wind.html>

to do so, all sides began remembering the battle and presenting narratives of the event. However, politics shaped how the battle was remembered. Those who fell on Okinawa and those who survived became a political tool for politicians on the right and left. As such, nations began remembering the battle in different ways, occasionally overlapping when it suited their political interest.

Okinawans suffered greatly during the battle and it is remembered as the watershed moment in their history. It is impossible to overstate its impact on Okinawan national identity due an estimated half of the island being killed during the battle. The memory of the battle for Okinawans emphasize war crimes committed against them and the suffering that was inflicted upon their peaceful island. Their emphasis on sole victimization led to other narratives being downplayed or outright denied. The memory of patriotism and resistance of such groups as the Lily Corps and Okinawan volunteers is rarely mentioned. To the Okinawans, no other nation can claim victimhood regarding the battle, despite all sides suffering enormous casualties. This narrative was easy to sell to the Okinawans and international community because of the prewar persecution by the Japanese and their continued discrimination by the Japanese and American governments. In order to remove the American base of their island, gain recognition for Japanese atrocities, and reparations, the Okinawans portrayed themselves as a peaceful people that were the sole victims of the battle of Okinawa. This innocent, peaceful soul narrative has sold well with the international community and some nations and notable individuals have sympathized greatly with their plight.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Tim Shorrock, “The United States is Building a New Military Base in Okinawa, Despite Overwhelming Local Opposition,” *The Nation*. December 13, 2018. Accessed March 19, 2019.

To use Japan as a bulwark against perceived communist aggression in Russia and China during the Cold War, the United States began to emphasize reconciliation and forgiveness rather than destruction. Despite many citizens, soldiers, and politicians calling for punishment and revenge in allied countries, American elite ignored these sentiments in the name of national security. Over time, the war crimes of the Japanese were whitewashed to present their newfound ally as misled by their militarist leaders. This was done in order to promote sympathy and forgiveness, so the alliance could stand up to Cold War era threats. This narrative became present in American histories of the Second World War. While war crimes against western and American troops were acknowledged in order to portray themselves as morally superior to their former foe, the horrific crimes against other Asian nations were glossed over or not cited at all. To sell forgiveness, acknowledgment of Japanese war crimes became less apparent in American narratives of the Pacific War.

Americans also remembered the battle of Okinawa as a violent abyss in which no nation left with clean hands. This depiction is often used in conjunction with the narrative of the American decision-making process to use the atomic bombs. Television series such as “The Pacific,” depict Okinawa as a horrific, nightmarish battle, influenced by such memoirs as *Goodbye Darkness* and *With the Old Breed*. These memoirs are candid about the horrors of war and are incredibly graphic. Due to their honesty and straightforward writing, they and have become the standard American memoirs of the battle.

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<https://www.thenation.com/article/the-united-states-is-building-a-new-military-base-in-okinawa-despite-overwhelming-local-opposition/>

The temporal closeness to the use of the atomic bombs against Hiroshima and Nagasaki has led many American elites to depict the battle in graphic terms. It has become nearly impossible to discuss the battle of Okinawa without reference to the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. This depiction was presented for other nations and possible allies to understand the decision-making process behind the use of atomic weapons. The use of the bombs remains incredibly controversial. The fact that the Soviet Union soon afterwards possessed these weapons and did not use them was a moral sore point for the American elite who believed many nations were falling under communist influence. The United States could not claim to be the ethically loftier nation versus the Soviet Union if they did not develop a comprehensive and through rationale to use them against a civilian population. The depiction of the complications behind the decision-making process to drop the bombs allowed the United States to continue to portray herself as morally superior of the Soviet Union.

The Japanese tell a somewhat similar narrative as the Americans because in part it suited their national interest. They also remember the battle as a violent abyss and were convinced by the United States that their militarist leaders had led them astray. This meant every Japanese was guilty in being complicit with the regime and if everyone was guilty, then individual responsibility for war crimes on places such as Okinawa was absolved. The absolution of Japanese individual responsibility for war crimes led to the emphasis on victimization. The Japanese all suffered greatly during and after the war, so the case of the Okinawans was neither unique, nor special. The Japanese political right and left portray famous events surrounding the battle of Okinawa in different fashions. The *Yamato* and *Kamikaze* pilots became symbols of not only national sacrifice, but of the folly of war. This symbolism is present in numerous works

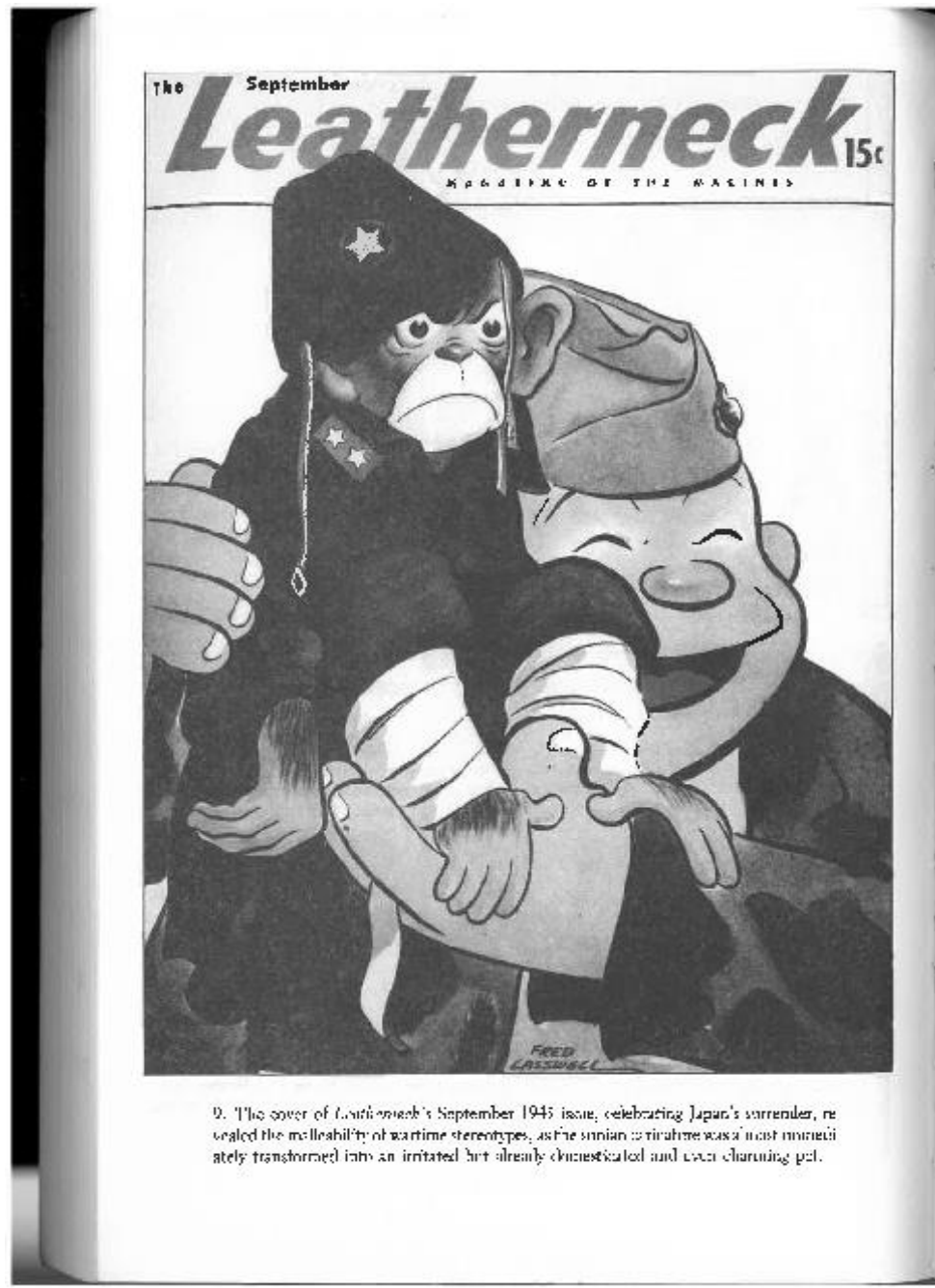
regarding the battle. Both ends of the political spectrum use these examples to promote their agenda from pacifism or to sacrificing oneself for the greater good.

The Okinawan citizen who complained that the Okinawans are “living off their dead,” paints an interesting picture.<sup>258</sup> Nations do in fact “live off their dead.” The remembrance and memorialization of national trauma is a powerful rallying tool that many countries or homelands have used for their political gain. Ultimately, in the case of the memory of the battle of Okinawa, politics shaped its memory and portrayal. With the current political climate in East Asia, the specter of the battle Okinawa looms over like a shadow as a warning that wars do not end when the last bullet is fired.

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<sup>258</sup> Haruko Taya Cook and Theodore F. Cook, *Japan at War: An Oral History*, 477.

APPENDIX 1



*Figure 1:* In direct contrast with earlier depictions of the Japanese as a brute gorilla, this magazine cover depicts the Japanese as a pacified creature.

## APPENDIX 2



19. Following Japan's spectacular early victories, the perception of the Japanese as supermen emerged alongside the images of apes and lesser men. This British graphic was used to illustrate a mid-1943 article in the *New York Times Magazine*.

*Figure 2:* This racist caricature was a common depiction of the Japanese during the Second World War. The Japanese as a brute was a powerful depiction that contributed to the hate fueled fighting in the Pacific.



APPENDIX 3



*Figure 3:* Shigeru Mizuki's depiction of the war turning against the Japanese and in the midst of continuing disasters, the Lily Corps Emerges.

APPENDIX 4



Figure 4: The top panel was drawn in a similar panel to Fransisco Goya's execution victims. In depicting the Lily Corps as such, Mizuki makes these girls Martyrs for the Japanese Empire.

APPENDIX 5

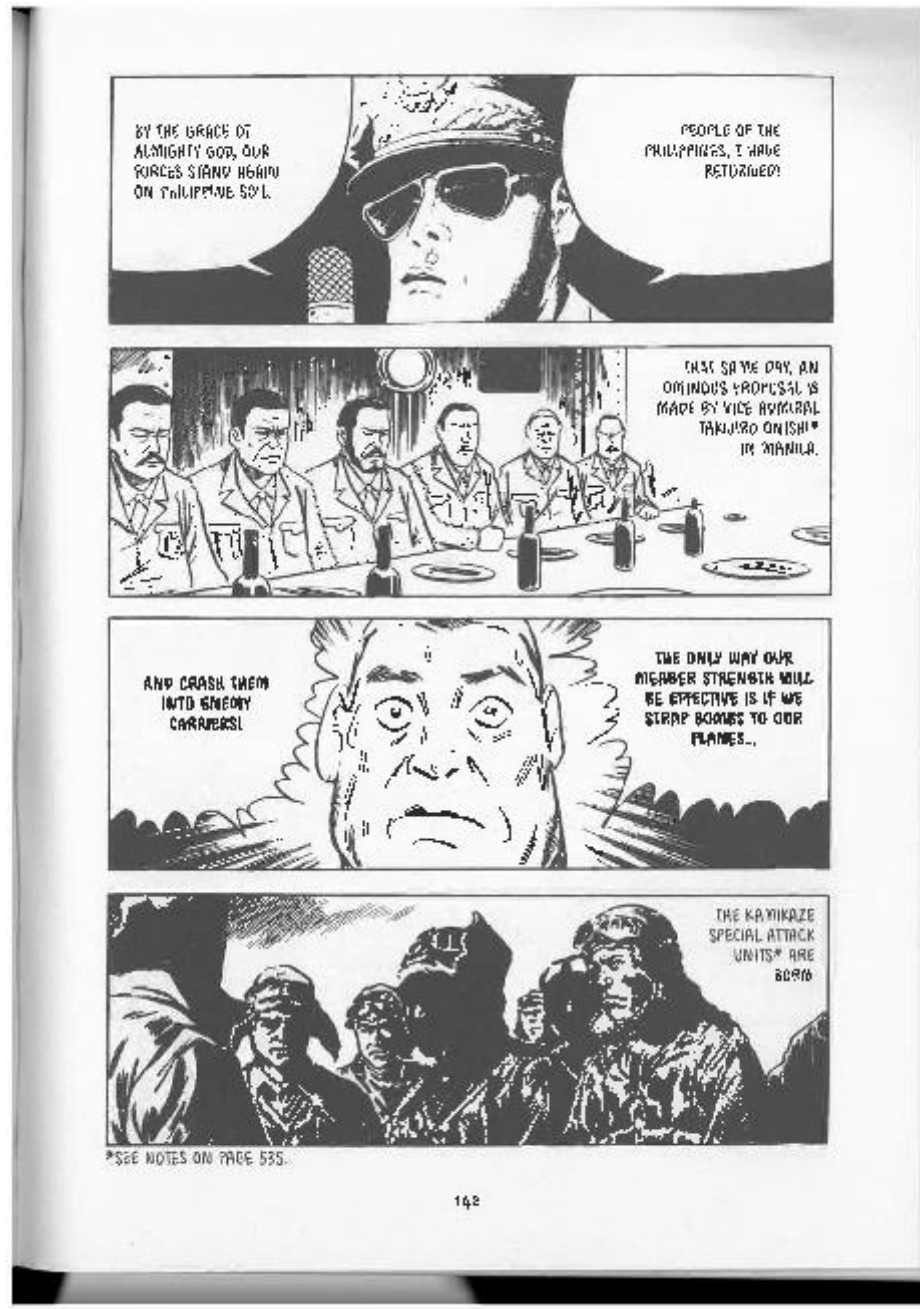


Figure 5: Mizuki's depiction of the decision to use *Kamikaze* attacks against American ships. Note the turn from exaggerated depictions of military leaders to hyper realistic depictions of the pilots.

APPENDIX 6



*Figure 6:* Despite Mizuki's avowed pacifist stance in his work, he still depicts the pilots as honorable, tragic figures. In doing so he is paying homage to the doomed youth.

APPENDIX 7



Figure 7: A peaceful depiction of the pilots being sent off to intercept the American fleet. This is done in direct contrast with the violence shown a page later.

APPENDIX 8

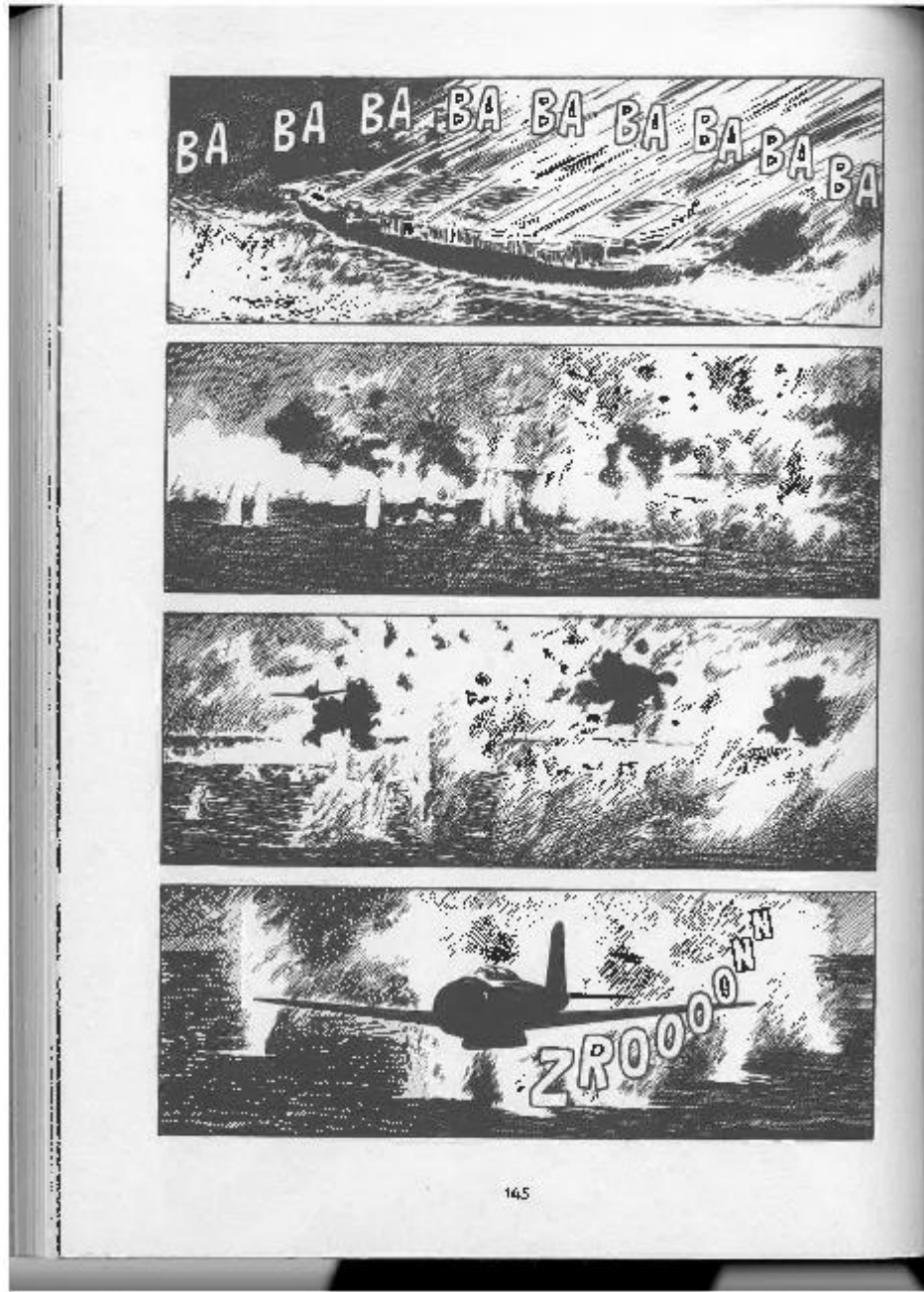


Figure 8: Shifting from a peaceful image of the pilots to a depiction of machines and war.

APPENDIX 9



*Figure 9:* Despite the display of destruction here, Mizuki does not show the carnage that ensued after the plane hit the ship. In not showing the human cost of the strike, Mizuki is strengthening the myth of selfless sacrifice for the nation.

APPENDIX 10



*Figure 10:* While the bombing of Japan continues, Mizuki again depicts the pilot as a selfless figure. His face is barely recognizable in the frame, suggesting the idea of sacrifice supersedes individualism.



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