

Part IV: The Kamikazes

In 2007 suicide bombers today often dominate headlines as they relate to the war in Iraq. These modern-day terrorists dedicate themselves to dying for a particular cause—usually religious. The suicide bombers of today are not an original idea because Japan also employed suicide tactics in its campaign to reduce the number of naval vessels available to the Allies in World War II. The Japanese versions of today’s suicide bombers were called Kamikazes. The Kamikazes differed from today’s suicide bombers in that the Kamikazes were pilots, while today’s suicide bombers often detonate themselves or use cars. The Kamikaze program came about in late 1944 because the Japanese had lost so many skilled pilots that the country was no longer able to mount an effective air force and because Japanese leaders such as Vice Admiral Onishi Takijiro believed that the Kamikaze’s could be effective in reducing the size of the Allied naval fleet. According to historians Mark D. Roehrs and William A. Renzi, “over 4,000 volunteers died, and it is believed that about 330 American ships were damaged or sunk by these missions.”¹ During World War II many Americans believed that the Japanese suicide pilots were either tied in their seats or drugged. In short, Americans generally believed these young pilots were forced into killing themselves. This was incorrect. Kamikazes were more than happy to die for their country in an effort to bring glory to Japan. Ultimately, the Kamikazes failed in their effort to significantly reduce the size of the Allied fleet, but the Kamikaze effort did make a large impact on the psyche of the Allied men in the Pacific theater because of the brutal nature of the Kamikazes.

1. Students will learn about the role of Kamikazes in World War II through class discussion.
 - a. Who were the Kamikazes? What country did they represent?
 - b. How are today’s terrorists unlike the 1940s Kamikazes?
 - c. Why did the Kamikazes want to die for their country?
 - d. What did Americans believe the motivation was for the Kamikazes?

Click here for photographs of the Kamikazes.

<http://casusbelli.iespana.es/mm/wsgm20.jpg>

The following link shows a ship hit by Kamikazes.

http://www.ibiblio.org/hyperwar/USN/ships/img/APD/APD-47_Bates-kamikaze.gif

The following link shows the U.S.S. *St. Lô* which was the first ship hit by the Kamikazes.

<http://www.microworks.net/PACIFIC/pictoral/stlodam1.jpg>

2. Students will look at primary sources to see first-hand accounts of the Kamikazes by reading the following letters, which were compiled by Midori Yammanouchi Rynn from the diaries of Kamikaze pilots.

“Akio Otsuka - graduate of Chuo University, Navy second sub - lieutenant, killed in action on April 28, 1945 as a pilot of a Special Attack Unit during the Battle of

¹ Mark D. Roehrs and William A. Renzi, *World War II in the Pacific* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 2004), 145.

Okinawa. He was 23 years old.

I say this quite frankly: I am not dying voluntarily; I am not going to my death without regrets. The future of my country fills me with anxiety and even more that of my father, my mother and my three sisters. I am terribly distressed about it.

Let my death not hurt you too much or make you lose your reason. Continue to live happily and united as you have done until now: That is my only wish. I will remain alive at the bottom of your hearts. If you want me, call me by my name. I will be there.

This morning I got up at six and I breathed the pure mountain air. It is the last time that I shall breathe the fresh air of the morning. Everything I do today will be for the last time. The pilots are to parade at 2 pm. We will take off at three. It is extraordinary. I have the impression that I want to write many things, but when I try... I can find nothing to say. I have not got the feeling that I am going towards my death. I am relaxed and light-hearted as though I were leaving on a journey. I look at myself in the mirror; my face does not seem to be that of a man about to die.

The cherry blossoms will soon be falling from the trees in Tokyo. Do you not think that it would be a pity were I to fall while the cherry blossoms have not fallen yet? Fall, cherry blossoms, fall! Why should you continue to flower when my life is being cut off?

I leave for the attack with a smile on my face. The moon will be full tonight. As I fly over the open sea off Okinawa I will choose the enemy ship that is to be my target. I will show you that I know how to die bravely and thoughtfully... (Larteguy 97-99)."²

“TAKENORI NAKAO - student of Tokyo University, Navy first lieutenant, killed in action on May 4, 1945 as a pilot of the Kotohira Suishin Special Attack Unit during the Battle of Okinawa. He was 22 years old.

What is death?

Montaigne said that death itself is nothing important. He added that it is the fear of death itself that makes death seem important. If one regards death from a material point of view, it is nothing but the extinction of a physical body. Even granting that a soul cannot exist without a physical body, any discussions dealing with the matter of life and death in terms of the simple coming into being and subsequent extinction of a physical body cannot coexist with a proper grasp on the matter of life and death as they really are. Is it an ultimate truth to think that when a physical body dies the soul also dies, or, rather, that the soul lives on even after the physical body dies? It can be said that our lives amount to nothing more than the outward manifestations of this or that individual, absolute person; but the content of life does not exist on anything like such a transcendental plane; rather, life cannot exist apart from the real world which is constantly changing. If what we have been saying is true, it follows that life and death are not the life and the extinction of a single physical body; also, neither would it be possible for us to seek a world after death apart from this world and beyond the universe. The deep secret of life and death can only be understood by grasping the meaning of this world's constant changes by way of entering deeply into them. Death, in other words, is not a separate entity from life, but it can only be known by searching for the meaning and

² Midori Yammanouchi Rynn, *Listen to the Voices from the Sea: Writings of the Fallen Japanese Students* (Scranton, PA: New York University of Scranton Press, 2000), 228.

significance of life. Death comes to all of us who are given life on this earth and to everything that exists in this real world - but rather than as the end of life we must think of it as just a point in life. To live well is to die well; therefore it can also be said that, by dying well, one can live well.

We can solve the whole question of life and death by searching out the way that will enable us to live well, and by participating in that natural law of this world, which makes our lives meaningful. Both life and death exist in every hour and every second of our daily lives.

As one enters military service in readiness for the sacrifice of his own life on behalf of the Emperor, he once again has to stare death straight in the face. Moreover, once arrived at the battlefield itself and when exposing oneself under the heavy smoke of big guns and amid showers of bullets, at each of these times I shall feel death's stern figure standing right beside me. In this way, one step at a time, I shall come closer to the real meaning of life and death, even as I tighten further the stiff cord of my determination. Death, though, does not only exist on the battlefield; each hour, and each second, is death. If we look at things that way, then no extraordinary determination is necessary in order to face death. It would simply be a matter of being willing to dash toward the best life has to offer by summoning, more than ever before, all one's courage of body and mind (Yamaguchi 140-143)."³

3. Students will assume the role of a kamikaze pilot. Students will write a letter, based on what they have learned in class discussion and from the two letters above, to a relative in the United States explaining why it so important to fulfill the role of a Kamikaze pilot. Students will the read this letter to the class.
4. Play **Clip D [2:07 minutes]** from the Paul McGilvra Oral History. Students will answer the following questions from the interview.
 - a. What did this clip have to do with the Kamikaze pilots? It demonstrated that the United States had air superiority to the Japanese which was a reason behind the advent of the Kamikazes.
 - b. What kind of planes does McGilvra mention in the interview? Hell Cats, P-38s and P-51s.
 - c. What does McGilvra say that demonstrates that U.S. planes were superior to Japanese planes? He saw the United States military shoot down three Japanese planes one morning.

³ Midori Yammanouchi Rynn, *Listen to the Voices from the Sea: Writings of the Fallen Japanese Students*. (Scranton, PA: New York University of Scranton Press, 2000), 140.