

EG:100-L1
main unit title

A FIGHT TO THE FINISH

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EG:100-L3a-s, P3a-s

[NOTE: These photographs and labels have been incorporated into section EG:000.]

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EG:110-L1
main title

COMBAT IN THE PACIFIC

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EG:110-L2
main text

As the Pacific war entered its climactic stage during the first half of 1945, the fighting reached unprecedented levels of ferocity and destructiveness. To many on the Allied side, the suicidal resistance of the Japanese military called for drastic measures. The appalling numbers of casualties suffered by both sides seemed to foreshadow what could be expected during an invasion of Japan.

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EG:110-L2a-P2a

Marines raise the flag on Mt. Suribachi, Iwo Jima, February 1945.

Courtesy of the National Archives

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EG:111-L1

THE STRATEGIC SITUATION, SPRING 1945

By the time Germany surrendered, the Allies had reversed Japan's dramatic 1941-42 sweep through the Pacific and Southeast Asia. U.S. forces had advanced through the southwestern Pacific and had recaptured most of the Philippine Islands. The U.S. Pacific Fleet had destroyed most of the Japanese navy, blockaded Japan with submarines, and cut off or captured most of Japan's southern and central Pacific island outposts. British forces had advanced deep into Burma.

Although resistance continued in the Philippines, and Japanese armies remained intact in Southeast Asia, China, and Manchuria, the Allies began to execute their strategy for the final defeat of the Japanese empire. The cost proved shockingly high, however, as Japanese forces used suicidal tactics in the air and on the ground to defend islands close to their homeland.

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The Pacific theater, spring 1945.

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EG:111-L1a-Pl1a
Map needed

EG:112-L1

NO HOLDS BARRED: IWO JIMA AND OKINAWA

American war plans for the first half of 1945 centered on capturing the islands of Luzon, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa and intensifying the bombing campaign against Japan. Iwo Jima was chosen to provide an emergency airfield for B-29s returning from raids on Japan. Okinawa, only 640 kilometers (400 miles) from the southern tip of the main Japanese islands, was chosen to provide a base for an invasion of those islands.

Both Iwo Jima and Okinawa became costly battles of attrition taking weeks longer than expected. By the time the fighting ended, total U.S. casualties in the Pacific for the first half of 1945 had exceeded those suffered during the previous three years combined. To those in combat, Iwo Jima and Okinawa represented an ominous warning of what could lie ahead in an invasion of Japan where the entire population would be involved.

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EG:112-L1a-P1a

Map/photograph of Iwo Jima needed.

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EG:112-L1b-P1b

Map/photograph of Okinawa needed.

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EG:112-L2

The free-floating quotations that follow will be distributed throughout the section on the Pacific war

A MARINE'S WAR

Eugene B. Sledge, a college freshman from Montgomery, Alabama, enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps on December 3, 1942. He served with Company K, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines. Sledge's memoir of combat in the Pacific, With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa, offers rare insight into the experience of a combat infantryman. The veteran Marine survived the war, returned to college and became a university professor.

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EG:112-L2a

"The corpsman was on his knees bending over young Marine who had just died on a stretcher. A blood-soaked battle-dressing was on the side of the dead man's neck. His fine, handsome, boyish face was ashen. "Wha a pitiful waste," I thought. "He can't be a day over seventeen years old." I thanked God his mother could not see him. The corpsman held the dead Marine's chin tenderly between the thumb and fingers of his left hand and made the sign of the cross with his right hand. Tears streamed down his dusty, tanned grief-contorted face while he sobbed quietly."

E. B. Sledge, 1st Marine Division, describing a scene on the island of Peleliu, 1944

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EG:112-L2b

"In a shallow defilade to our right...lay about twenty dead Marines, each on a stretcher and covered to his ankles with a poncho--a commonplace, albeit tragic, scene to every veteran.... I saw that other Marine dead couldn't be tended to properly.... Every crater was half full of water, and many of them held a Marine corpse. The bodies lay pathetically just as they had been killed, half submerged in muck and water, rusting weapons still in hand. Swarms of big flies hovered about them."

E. B. Sledge, 1st Marine Division, describing
a scene on Okinawa, 1945

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EG:112-L2c

"The combat fatigue cases were distressing. They ranged in their reaction from a state of dull detachment seemingly unaware of their surroundings, to quiet sobbing, or all the way to wild screaming and shouting. Stress was the essential factor we had to cope with in combat, under small-arms fire, and in warding off infiltrators and raiders during sleepless, rainy nights for prolonged periods; but being shelled so frequently...seemed to increase the strain beyond that which many otherwise stable and hardened Marines could endure without mental or physical collapse."

E. B. Sledge, 1st Marine Division, describing the fighting on Okinawa, 1945

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EG:112-L2d

"It was common throughout the campaign for replacements to get hit before we even knew their names. They came up confused, frightened and hopeful, got wounded or killed, and went right back to the rear by the route which they had come, shocked, bleeding or stiff."

E. B. Sledge, 1st Marine Division, describing the fighting on Okinawa, 1945

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EG:112-L2e

"I imagined Marine dead had risen up and were moving silently about the area. I suppose these were nightmares, and I must have been more asleep than awake, or just dumbfounded by fatigue.... The pattern was always the same. The dead got up slowly out of their water-logged craters or off the mud, and, with stooped shoulders and dragging feet, wandered around aimlessly, their lips moving as though they were trying to tell me something. I struggled to hear what they were saying. They seemed agonized by pain and despair. I felt they were asking me for help. The most horrible thing was that I felt unable to aid them."

E. B. Sledge, 1st Marine Division, describing the fighting on Okinawa, 1945

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EG:112-L2f

"A passionate hatred for the Japanese burned through all Marines.... My experiences...made me believe that the Japanese had mutual feelings for us.... This collective attitude, Marine and Japanese, resulted in savage, ferocious fighting with no holds barred.... This was a brutish, primitive hatred, as characteristic of the horror of war in the Pacific as the palm trees and the islands."

E. B. Sledge, 1st Marine Division, in With the Old Breed at Peleliu and Okinawa

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EG:112-L3

IWO JIMA: A SLICE OF HELL

The Japanese garrison controlled the high ground on Iwo Jima. They had constructed an interlaced network of underground fortifications in the side of Mt Suribachi, a dormant volcano dominating the 29-square-kilometer (11-square-mile) island. Instead of leaving cover to attack the landing force on the beaches, the Japanese remained in their dugouts and poured a deadly rain of fire on the Marines.

Wresting control of the island from the dug-in Japanese took nearly five weeks of bitter fighting that cost the Marine Corps over 6,800 dead and almost 20,000 wounded. Japanese losses were even higher. When the fighting ended on March 26, only 200 out of 20,700 remained alive as prisoners, reflecting the Japanese refusal to surrender

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EG:112-L3a-P3a
photograph

Marines under fire on Iwo Jima, February 1945.

Courtesy of the National Archives

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EG:112-L3b-P3b
photograph

A dead American Marine on Iwo Jima, February 1945.

Courtesy of the National Archives

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EG:112-L4

OKINAWA: A BATTLE OF UNPRECEDENTED FEROCITY

As the first assault waves landed on April 1, 1945, Okinawa's garrison put up little resistance. Instead of making a hopeless attempt to repel U.S. forces on the beaches, the Japanese largely abandoned the northern part of the island. They withdrew south to fortifications and caves in the hilly terrain near the ancient strongpoint of Shuri Castle. Such positions offered excellent fields of fire, allowing the Japanese to exact a heavy toll for every piece of territory surrendered.

As U.S. soldiers and Marines struggled to root out the island's 83,150 troops from their underground shelters, American and Japanese artillery transformed the southern part of the island into a wasteland of craters and corpses. Despite vast American superiority in material, Japanese resistance was not crushed until the end of June, at a cost of more than 12,500 U.S. dead and 35,500 wounded on land and at sea.

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EG:112-L4a-P4a
photograph

Incinerating a Japanese-held cave on Okinawa
1945.

Courtesy of the National Archives

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EG:112-L4b-S4b

[U.S. Marine mannequin in full equipment with rifle or submachine gun. No label necessary.]

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EG:112-L4c-S4c

Japanese Type 99 light machine gun, 1945.

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EG:112-L5

WAR WITHOUT MERCY

By the third week of June, the remaining Japanese troops on Okinawa had withdrawn to the island's southernmost tip with no hope of reinforcement. On June 19, Lt. Gen. Ushijima, commander at Okinawa, ordered those soldiers who were left "to fight to the last and die." Then he and his staff committed hara-kiri, a ritual form of suicide.

Surrender, even for those inclined to do so, proved extremely difficult. Many Americans were wary of taking prisoners, in part because surrendering Japanese sometimes used concealed weapons to attack their captors. Under the Bushido code of the samurai, Japanese soldiers were told that surrender was dishonorable, cowardly, and illegal, and some were even shot by their superiors while attempting to give up. Over 10,000 soldiers, laborers, and Okinawan auxiliaries surrendered nonetheless, the largest number to do so during the war. But most of the Japanese--more than 70,000--chose suicide or fought to the death.

Thousands of Okinawan refugees, their homes and villages destroyed, also found themselves trapped by the fighting. Caught in the crossfire, and sacrificed by their own troops, at least 80,000 civilians perished.

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EG:112-L5a-P5a

A Japanese soldier surrenders on Okinawa,
1945.

Courtesy of the National Archives

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EG:112-L5b-P5b
photograph

Japanese dead near Shuri Castle, Okinawa,
1945.

Courtesy of the National Archives

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EG:112-L5c-P5c

A Marine with friends killed on the Shuri
line, Okinawa, 1945.

Courtesy of the National Archives

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EG:112-L5d
(free-floating quote)

"Honor was bound up with fighting to the
death. In a hopeless situation a Japanese
soldier should kill himself with his last
hand grenade or charge weaponless against the
enemy in a mass suicide attack. But he
should not surrender. Even if he were taken
prisoner when he was wounded and unconscious,
he 'could not hold up his head in Japan'
again; he was disgraced; he was 'dead' to his
former life."

Ruth Benedict, 1946, The Chrysanthemum and
the Sword

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EG:112-L6

COMBAT FATIGUE

The protracted fighting on Iwo Jima and Okinawa and high U.S. casualty rates caused severe combat fatigue for many U.S. soldiers and Marines.

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EG:112-L6a-P6a
transparency of painting

The Two-Thousand-Yard Stare by Tom Lea, a painting made during the vicious fighting on the island of Peleliu. Lea's notes state: "He left the States 31 months ago. He was wounded in his first campaign. He has tropical diseases.... He half-sleeps at night and gouges Japs out of holes all day. Two thirds of his company has been killed or wounded...he will return to attack this morning. How much can a human being endure?"

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EG:112-L6b-P6b

A flight nurse tends a wounded Marine during preparation for a medical evacuation flight.
Courtesy of the U.S. Air Force

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EG:112-L6c,d-P6c,d

[NOTE: These photographs and labels have been incorporated into section EG:000.]

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EG:113-L1

THE KAMIKAZE

"Even if we are defeated, the noble spirit of this kamikaze attack corps will keep our homeland from ruin. Without this spirit, ruin would certainly follow defeat."

Vice Adm. Takijiro Onishi, sponsor of the kamikaze corps, 1945

During October 1944, Japanese navy and army pilots began a desperate campaign of suicide crash-dives against Allied ships. Called kamikaze (divine wind or wind from the gods) the attacks took their name from a typhoon that destroyed a 13th-century Mongol invasion fleet before it could reach Japan.

Vice Adm. Takijiro Onishi, who helped create the kamikaze corps, hoped the suicide attacks would enable Japan to overcome the Allies' military and industrial superiority or at least salvage a spiritual victory for Japan. The kamikaze campaign proved enormously costly, particularly to the invasion fleet off Okinawa, but failed to stop the Allied advance.

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Kamikaze pilots of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1945.

Photograph courtesy of U.S. Navy

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EG:113-L1a-P1a
photograph

EG:113-L2

MOTIVATION OF THE KAMIKAZE

Americans were horrified and puzzled by the suicidal fury of the kamikaze attacks. The letters and diaries of the kamikaze pilots, however, reveal motives that were complex and deeply rooted in Japanese culture. A sense of inescapable moral obligation to family and the Emperor, who embodied the nation, was very important.

The Japanese honestly believed that an uncompromising determination would enable them to overcome a more powerful enemy whom they regarded as "weaker willed." The ancient and deeply rooted tradition of heroic figures in Japanese history who sacrificed their lives for honor or principles in a noble, but often hopeless, cause was also a factor.

Peer pressure was so effective during the early stages of the kamikaze campaign that official coercion was not required. By the end of the war, however, flying school graduates were being drafted directly into the kamikaze corps.

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EG:113-L2a
(free-floating quote)

"Please do not grieve for me, mother. It will be glorious to die in action. I am grateful to be able to die in a battle to determine the destiny of our country."

From the last letter of kamikaze pilot Ichizo Hayashi, April 1945

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EG:113-L2b-P2b
photograph

A kamikaze pilot ties on a squadron mate's hachimaki before a mission, late 1944.

Photograph courtesy of U.S. Naval Institute

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EG:113-L2c-S2c
hachimaki

Kamikaze pilot's hachimaki (headband), 1945.

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EG:113-L2d-S2d
sword

Kamikaze pilot's ceremonial sword, 1945.

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EG:113-L3

THE DEADLY "FLOATING CHRYSANTHEMUMS"

The invasion of Okinawa for the first time placed a large part of the U.S. Pacific Fleet within striking range of aircraft based in Japan. From April to June 1945 Imperial navy and army pilots flew more than 1,800 individual suicide sorties as part of 10 mass assaults of up to 400 aircraft each. Called Kikusui ("floating chrysanthemum") operations after the emblem of 14th-century samurai hero Kusunoki Masashige, these kamikaze attacks sank 28 U.S. ships and damaged 176, killing almost 5,000 Allied sailors.

The Okinawa attacks expended pilots at an alarming rate. To make up these losses, replacement pilot training was severely shortened. Some reached their units barely able to take off and land. Despite these problems, advocates of suicide operations hoped to meet Allied landings in Japan with over 6,000 kamikaze aircraft.

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EG:113-L4

FIGHTING THE KAMIKAZE

The U.S. Navy suffered its heaviest losses of the entire war at Okinawa, mainly from kamikaze attacks. Although the mass suicide attacks failed to drive off the U.S. fleet, they severely shocked the Allies. Fearing the psychological effect of the kamikaze, U.S. military commanders ordered a news blackout on reports of the suicide attacks. The blackout lasted until the end of the Okinawa fighting. To the ships' crews, the experience confirmed Japanese fanaticism and offered a grim foreboding of what they would face in an invasion of the home islands.

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EG:113-L4a

"Jap planes and bombs were hitting all around us. Some of our ships were being hit by suicide planes, bombs, and machine gun fire. It was a fight to the finish.... How long will our luck hold out?"

Seaman First Class James J. Fahey, aboard the light cruiser Montpelier, 1945, from Pacific War Diary

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EG:113-L4b-P4b

The U.S. aircraft carrier Bunker Hill, after suffering two kamikaze hits off Okinawa, May 11, 1945.

Courtesy of the National Archives

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EG:113-L4c-P4c
photograph

Damaged by antiaircraft fire, a kamikaze Zero fighter plunges breathtakingly close to the U.S. aircraft carrier Essex off Okinawa, May 14, 1945.

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EG:113-L4d-P4d
photograph

U.S. Navy gun crews nervously scan the skies for suicide planes, 1944.

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EG:113-L4e-P4e

Lt. Cmdr. (ChC) Joseph O'Callahan, Navy chaplain on board the aircraft carrier USS Franklin, administers the last rites to a seaman injured during an attack by a Japanese dive bomber in March 1945. Gutted by flames, listing badly, and having suffered more than 1,000 casualties, the Franklin managed to steam thousands of miles back to port. O'Callahan was awarded a Medal of Honor for "conspicuous gallantry" for his action during the attack.

Courtesy of the U.S. Navy

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EG:113-L4f-P4f

His engine engulfed in flames, a wounded Navy pilot struggles to free himself from his cockpit.

Courtesy of the U.S. Navy

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EG:113-L4g-P4g

This chaotic scene is the hangar deck of the escort carrier USS Sangamon, the morning after the ship was hit by a kamikaze aircraft in the Ryukyu Islands on May 4, 1945. The carrier lost 86 dead and 116 wounded in the attack.

Courtesy of the U.S. Navy

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