

KAMIKAZES

It was a recollection of the thirteenth century salvation that brought about the rebirth of the kamikaze, destined to attempt to save Japan from foreign invasion almost seven centuries later.

Between the years of Hakata Bay and World War II, Japan developed a society dominated by the military and its values. For a war such as that fought in the Pacific between 1941 and 1945, dominated by naval operations and their accompanying air arms, the Japanese needed—but did not possess—numeric superiority in ships and aircraft. Thus, they were doomed from the start, and Japanese warriors have never been more prone to extreme actions than when faced with imminent defeat. The virtually inbred creed that no soldier surrenders, that death for one's country and emperor is far preferable to surrender or defeat, almost guaranteed that the Japanese would sooner or later engage in desperate measures.

In the first offensive ground combat on Guadalcanal, in the Solomons Islands northeast of Australia, U.S. Marines faced what came to be called *banzai* charges. *Banzai* (literally "10,000 years") was the cry to the emperor not only for his long life but for his soldiers' commitment to die for him. What came to be a common occurrence for Marines to witness was emulated by Japanese pilots starting in 1944. The first recorded intentional suicide attack by a Japanese pilot was in May of that year off the coast of New Guinea. Prime Minister Tojo in the Japanese cabinet had already ordered preparations for special attack units. The first serious call for self-sacrificial attacks, however, came from lower-ranking officers who felt the personal need to employ special measures to meet the increasingly desperate straits that the Japanese army and navy were up against in the face of superior U.S. numbers in both aircraft and ships.

In the summer of 1944, the Aerial Research Department of Tokyo's Imperial University began designing a rocket-propelled aircraft called *ohka* (cherry blossom) with a warhead in the nose. The pilots trained to fly these rocket bombs were called Thunder Gods. The *ohka* were not mass-produced (only a few hundred were made), so the vast majority of airborne kamikaze attacks were made by regular aircraft, both bombers and fighters. These made their initial appearance during the U.S. invasion of the Philippines in October 1944.

The pilots who volunteered for kamikaze missions did so from a sense of duty and usually had

a lot of time to think about their decision because almost no one was sent off immediately upon volunteering. In some cases, the pilot waited weeks or even months before his assignment came. Before his mission, the pilot donned a white head scarf (*bachimaki*) with the rising sun emblazoned in the center. Many pilots also wore a ceremonial waist sash (*senninbari*), called "thousand-stitch belts," in which 1,000 women in Japan had sewn one stitch each to show the widespread support for the pilot. Before the mission, the pilot was served a ritual cup of water or sake, rice wine. There were survivors of these missions. Although some sources tell of pilots returning with mechanical difficulties and being shunned by their compatriots, other sources report that, if no target was found, the pilot was supposed to return to base.

In January 1945, the Japanese army and navy chiefs of staff submitted a plan to the emperor to require all the armed forces to engage in suicide tactics. The emperor disagreed. By February, the large number of early volunteers was beginning to dry up, and kamikaze pilots began being drafted. Only a few attacks took place during the Iwo Jima campaign during February–March 1945, but, when U.S. forces landed on Okinawa in April, the full force of the special attack units was felt. Fifteen ships were sunk and another fifty-nine damaged, with a total loss of more than 48,000 Americans killed and wounded during the Okinawa campaign. The final attack took place on 13 August, only 2 days before the emperor announced Japan's surrender. Japanese navy pilots who died in the attacks numbered 2,525; Japanese army pilots who died numbered 1,388.

Although the aerial kamikazes were the best known of the suicide units, there were also small submarines fitted out for one-way trips against U.S. shipping. These were called *kaiten*, or Heaven Shifter, in the hopes that they could shift the fate of Japan's forces. Individual soldiers are reported to have laden themselves with explosives and jumped on tanks to disable them. Plans were also under way to encourage the civil population of Japan to assume a suicidal role when the U.S. invasion came. They were designated the *Ichoku Tokko*, or "hundred million as a Special Attack Force." Many believe that only the shock of the two atomic bombs in August 1945 was sufficient to overcome the duty that many of Japan's population were preparing to undertake.

created, kept the Japanese suspicious of foreign ways and leery of foreign, especially European, motives.

To Japan, the avenging hurricane that destroyed the Mongols came to be termed kamikaze, Divine Wind. The legend grew over the centuries, to be revived in the 1940s. Hoping to create a Divine Wind to save their empire, Japanese pilots used suicide tactics during the U.S. invasion of the Philippines in October 1944 and continued them until the final surrender almost a year later.

References: Cook, Theodore. "Mongol Invasion," *Military History Quarterly* 11(2), Winter 1998; Kwanten, Luc. *Imperial Nomads*. Phila-

tribes interacted strongly with the Chinese, most notably the T'ang dynasty, and alternately aided or were defeated by the Chinese. The western Turkic tribes, however, were better known as conquerors for their occupation of territory stretching from the Oxus River to the Mediterranean Sea.

Their first major entry into western history came with their contact with Arabs spreading Islam past Persia and toward central Asia. The pastoral Turks became exposed to the civilizations of Persia and the Byzantine Empire and began a gradual conversion to western religions, mainly but not exclusively Islam. Soon Turkic soldiers served in Moslem armies, either

Moors (called Numidians by the Carthaginians of Hannibal's time), the Berbers of modern Morocco. In 710, Musa ibn Nusair, Moslem governor of the region, decided to attack across the Straits of Gibraltar and raid Spain. Without ships, however, he turned to Julian, a Byzantine official, who loaned him four ships. Julian did this because of a grudge he bore against Roderic, the Visigoth king that ruled in Spain. With four ships able to carry 400 men,

Moslem named Othman ben abi Neza, who controlled an area of the northern Pyrenees. That alliance provoked Abd er-Rahman, Moslem governor of Spain, who marched against Othman in 731. After defeating him, Abd er-Rahman decided to drive deeper into Gaul, spreading Moslem influence and, more importantly, looting the wealthy Gallic countryside. He defeated Eudo at Bordeaux and proceeded north toward Tours, whose abbey was reputed