

The early 20<sup>th</sup> Century produced a number of military aviation theorists whose tactics guided the various Air Forces of World War II. Italian General Giulio Douhet was one of the earliest proponents of strategic bombing, convinced that heavy bombing of population centers would so demoralize an enemy that their will to fight would disappear. Billy Mitchell proved that aircraft could sink a battleship, Walther Wever of the Luftwaffe showed the value of tactical bombing and Hugh Trenchard developed the RAF's doctrine. In the Pacific War, these theories were refined and utilized by aviators of both Japan and the Allies. Japan's aircraft opened the Pacific War by sinking most of America's Pacific Fleet battleships. Effective tactical air strikes destroyed enemy defenses prior to the Japanese amphibious assaults that conquered all of the western Pacific in the first 6 months of the war. America responded in kind, our aircraft neutralizing the Japanese Navy at Leyte Gulf, later destroying it with raids on Japanese naval bases in the home islands. Now, in fall of 1944, American victories and Japanese setbacks drove changes to the air war. Japan would adopt a strategy of desperation – Special Attack Squadrons flown by suicide pilots. America would switch from tactical air operations to the strategic bombing of Japan itself. Both strategies were shocking and in retrospect, controversial.

The B-29's of the XX Bomber Command, headed by the experienced and able General Curtis LeMay, had been attacking Japan from bases in China since mid-June 1944 but successful offensives by Japanese infantry against Nationalist and Communist Chinese forces - themselves at odds with each other - placed our airfields in peril. America moved it's bombing operation to the safety of the Marianas and B-29 raids commenced from Guam on 24 November 1944. The B-29 bomber fleet in the Marianas grew daily but the increase in capacity had little observable effect on Japanese war production or morale. A month later, Air Force Chief, Gen. Hap Arnold transferred Gen. LeMay from China to assume command of XXI Bomber Command on Guam to kickstart our Marianas operations.

LeMay was a tough, cigar chomping, single-minded result-getter who utilized the productive power of American industry to supply him with vast fleets of long range bombers to destroy Japan's capacity to wage war. Lack of initial success however, proved that American tactics still needed refinement. Weather conditions broke up formations and obscured targets, poor maintenance and overcrowding on the ground reduced the number of available aircraft. About 5% percent of aircraft that sortied were lost due to weather, mechanical failure and enemy anti-aircraft fire. Japan had early warning stations on the Bonin Islands which gave Japanese civil defense an hour's warning and with American fighter bases too remote to provide fighter escorts for the bombers, Japanese interceptors proved major threats.

New airfields on the Marianas increased capacity and a new base on recently-captured Iwo Jima allowed fighter escort over the Japanese home islands. Now massive raids of hundreds of B-29's began a systematic pounding of selected Japanese cities and industry with high-explosives. Results were still disappointing and LeMay switched to a new tactic – fire. Hundreds of bombers loaded with napalm cluster weapons, flew at low levels over Japanese cities whose buildings were mostly constructed of wood. The simultaneous impact of thousands of firebombs created the phenomenon of the firestorm, spontaneous ignition of everything that could burn which drew in oxygen in such amounts as to create fierce winds. 54 percent of Tokyo was destroyed by fire, 4 times as many civilians were killed in the fire-raids than in the Atomic bombings. As intact military targets proved harder to find, LeMay began attacking Japanese transportation by mining ports and bombing railroads to starve Japan into surrender.

Japan's military sought an answer to America's growing strength by co-opting ancient warrior tradition to emphasize fighting spirit over material superiority. Early Japanese Emperors delegated day-to-day governing to lower-level operatives called Shoguns. Shoguns eventually eclipsed the Emperors in real power and employed a Japanese warrior-class called Samurai for their civil conflicts. In the Tokugawa era, civil conflicts ceased and power returned to the Emperors. The Shoguns could no longer support

the Samurai who hung up their swords and became weavers of fine cloth. The Samurai lived by a code of conduct called Bushido which was all but unknown outside of Martial Arts Dojo's. Most of the classic writings of Bushido were nostalgic looks at past Samurai glory or dealt with the role of a Samurai in peacetime - much like the Hollywood-created mythology of the American West. For example, "The Book Of Five Rings," by the Samurai master swordsman Miyamoto Musashi was written when he was 60 years old, retired and had entered the ascetic life of Buddhism. "Hagakure," widely quoted by Japanese militarists, was written by Yamamoto Tsunetomo - a Samurai born after civil combat ceased - his book the reflection of a Samurai's bitterness over his class's superfluity. Much like the popular misreading of Clausewitz's famous "war is the extension of diplomacy" quote (which in proper context means, "war is the extension of the failure of diplomacy,") the Hagakure quote, "The way of the warrior is found in death" was co-opted by Japan's military hotheads to glorify death in battle and to justify suicide as a tactic of war. The result was the Banzai Charge which pitted Japanese "spirit" against American overwhelming firepower. The tactic failed miserably. Every mass suicide charge was broken by allied troops, resulting in a battle forfeited due to irreplaceable infantry losses. Japan rarely changed tactics even when faced with failure and suicide was now promoted as a method of air-warfare. Without trained pilots and capable aircraft, Japan would rely on a re-interpretation of Bushido - pitting willingness to die against superior American aircraft and pilots.

Vice Admiral Takijiro Onishi would be tasked to develop Special Attack Squadrons - minimally-trained volunteer pilots flying aircraft directly into Allied aircraft carriers - too well defended for successful attack by the few remaining combat pilots. The suicide pilots were named "Divine Wind," after the legendary 13<sup>th</sup> century typhoons that twice saved Japan from invading Mongol fleets - in Japanese, Kamikaze. Saburo Sakai, one of Japan's superb early aviators, was a descendant of the Samurai class and knew the correct interpretation of the Hagakure. In Sakai's famous history of the air war, he explains that the Samurai must be willing to accept death in battle - but not pointless suicide. As such, he opposed the formation of the Special Attack Squadrons. Sakai was ordered on an early Kamikaze mission which fortunately failed and explained the philosophy driving the Special Attack pilots as he described the indoctrination he was given for his "last mission." The Kamikaze earnestly believed that the forfeiture of his own life to sink an Allied carrier would destroy up to 1,000 enemy sailors who if allowed to live, would undoubtedly destroy that many or more Japanese lives. In the new Japanese version of Bushido, the Kamikaze believed he would live on as part of the life-force of the many who survived because of his sacrifice. Though their spirits, the Kamikaze would fight on - there was no shortage of volunteers. Kamikaze pilots often dressed in burial shrouds and attended their own funeral before a mission. The Kamikaze of the Pacific War did not save Japan but by precluding the carnage of an invasion of Japan, LeMay's bombers arguably may have saved more Japanese lives than they took.

Curtis LeMay continued to promote overwhelming air power, leading the Berlin Airlift and as head of SAC and Chairman of the JCS, guided the nuclear arms race and the strategic bombing of Vietnam. He was George Wallace's running mate in 1968. Takijiro Onishi deeply regretted ordering hundreds of Kamikaze volunteers to futile deaths. The day Japan surrendered, Onishi committed Seppuku without the coup-de-gras of beheading. He died a slow painful death by the self-inflicted wounds of Hara Kiri, perhaps a fitting military contrition, but it left his wife destitute, eking out a living as a peddler. Onishi's wife happened to be the aunt of Lt. Junichi Sasai, Saburo Sakai's closest friend and fellow pilot who was killed in action. Sakai could do nothing to help her during the post-war period of suffering and starvation that killed his own beloved wife but Sakai eventually saved enough money to start a successful printing business. Finally able to offer help, Sakai sought out Onishi's widow - a Vice Admiral's widow, homeless and dressed in rags - and offered her a position in his business. He later employed other widows and siblings of fellow Japanese Naval Air Force pilots killed in the war. In this humane peacetime act, the modern Samurai, Saburo Sakai, proved himself truly a man of honor.