The 1st Marine Division, was America's most experienced combat unit, in action on Guadalcanal 4 months before the America's European War began. In Europe, the Army's 3rd Infantry Division had been in combat from the start, landing near Casablanca on 8 November 1942. After North Africa, Sicily, Italy and France, they crossed the Rhine and captured Nuremberg, there raising the Stars and Stripes to obscure the Hakenkreuz (swastika) over the stadium where Hitler presided over the party conferences. They then took Munich, birthplace of the NSDAP (Nazi Party) and near Berchdesgaden, learned that the European War was over. With the 3rd was Lt. Audie L. Murphy, who saved his company from annihilation by a German counterattack. For this action, Murphy was awarded the Medal of Honor and became the most decorated soldier of World War II. The Army however, was not Audie Murphy's first choice – this talented soldier was rejected by the United States Marine Corps.

Soon after landing on Okinawa, the First and the Sixth Marine Divisions marched north along Okinawa's east and west coasts. The 1st met light resistance, but the majority of the 2,000 Japanese defending the north were dug in on the Motobu Peninsula in the 6th's zone. A week-long battle there destroyed the Japanese garrison at Motobu and by 20 April, northern Okinawa was in American hands. It was a difficult time for the marines and soldiers on Okinawa psychologically. On 13 April, many hung their heads in disbelief, others wept openly as they received the flash that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had died. Most marines and soldiers were barely 20 years old and grew up in the great depression, knowing no other President. Could this unknown Harry Truman lead the nation to victory?

Unlike 1942 Guadalcanal, the 1st Marines had no supply problems on Okinawa. Marines "saw their breath" for the first time in their war. Accustomed to the stifling tropical heat of previous actions, they shivered in the 50 degree Okinawa mornings. The Okinawa invasion force was abundantly supplied and goods were offloaded on Okinawa in staggering numbers: 2.7 million cigarette packs, 2.5 million candy bars, 24 million pieces of mail, 2.1 million gallons of aviation fuel. The Marines were quickly issued gabardine field jackets and wool socks. Mortarman Eugene Sledge, was not fond of the USMC socks. After the rain and mud of May on Okinawa, he literally buried his because they were rotting on his feet. He traded a captured Japanese delicacy, canned scallops, for some better quality Army-issue woolen socks and cherished them. The Army's first offensive began on 12 April 1945 at the Kakazu Ridge and the carnage of Okinawa began. Two weeks later, Sledge and his 1st Marine Div. along with the 6th Marine Div., reinforced Army units mauled in repeated attacks on the approach to Shuri.

Poetry was the pastime of the Japanese Emperors since antiquity. It is deeply ingrained in Japanese culture and was used extensively during the Pacific War. Japanese destroyers had names like Asagiri, Morning Mist, Shigure, Autum Shower, and Amatsukaze, Heavenly Wind, poetic names which belied their lethality. And so a poetic name was given to the Japanese air attacks that would rain death from the skies, death to both victor and vanquished – Kikusui, Floating Chrysanthemums. The pilots who would actively fly their bomb-laden aircraft into enemy vessels were themselves called Kamikaze, Divine (God Sent) Wind. Beginning on 6 April and lasting through 22 June, Japan launched 10 organized Kikusui attacks against the American fleet off Okinawa and dozens of individual sorties. The Kikusui attacks were combined operations, fighters escorting the suicide planes. Japanese losses were staggering, by the end of the Kikusui raids, Japan was left with practically no air defense against the constant B-29 bombing raids which were laying waste to it's large cities. The Kikusui attacks were launched from airfields on Kyushu, Japan's southernmost home island which was slated to be America's first landing site for the conquest of the Japanese mainland. General Curtis LeMay, in charge of the air war against Japan, grumbled at his orders to halt strategic raids and concentrate our B-29 force on the airfields of Kyushu to thwart the Kamakaze raids. The Kamikazes eventually sank 36 American ships and damaged over 350 more. With no foxholes possible on a warship, sailors stand watch at their battle stations with little protection against enemy hits. The 10 Kikusui attacks resulted

in over 10,000 Navy casualties, with some 4,900 sailors killed. In the valiant tradition of the Navy, captains and crews never "gave up their ships." Many brave and dedicated crews improvised emergency repairs and either returned their damaged ships to duty or sailed them to American ports.

On 6 April, a small fleet built around Japan's last super-battleship, Yamato, sailed on a suicide mission to Okinawa. Yamato was to beach itself and use its 18.1 inch guns against the American invaders because Japan lacked sufficient fuel for a round-trip. American aircraft sortied against the fleet and 6 Japanese escort vessels along with the world's most powerful super-battleship were sunk south of Kyushu. (The Yamato's sister ship, Musashi, was sunk in the battle of Leyte Gulf.) Tameichi Hara, captain of the cruiser Yahara, escaped his sinking cruiser and clinging to a floating log, witnessed the sinking of the Yamato which marked the complete destruction of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

One of the Navy's fleet of hospital ships, USS Comfort, departed Okinawa for Guam with a full load of wounded aboard. In the evening of 28 April, a Kamikaze pilot circled the ship, whose giant red cross was fully lit per the Geneva Convention. In deliberate violation of international law, he flew his aircraft into the Comfort, exploding below-decks amidships in a surgical compartment. 30 sailors and patients died and another 33 were wounded, but the ship remained afloat. Captain Adin Tooker ordered the lifeboats swung out as a precaution but there was no panic. Damage control crews staunched the flooding and put out the fires and the ship was soon underway, docking at Guam 5 days later.

Japan never respected the humanitarian symbol of the red cross. Army Medics and Navy Corpsmen who tended the wounded on the battlefield were deliberately targeted because their death would cause the deaths of many more American soldiers. As such, medics in the Pacific Theater had to remove their red cross markings which Japanese soldiers were taught to shoot at. One such medic was PFC Desmond Doss of the 77th Infantry Division who had seen combat in Guam and Leyte and at about the time the Comfort was attacked, was tending wounded on the Maeda Escarpment, "Hacksaw Ridge." Doss was a Seventh-Day Adventist who refused to even touch a rifle and could easily have been granted a Conscientious Objector dispensation. Instead, he chose to go into combat unarmed to save lives as a medic. Again and again, Doss braved withering enemy fire to drag wounded from the battlefield and lower them over a cliff with a rope sling he devised. Many of Doss's company considered him charmed and refused to go into combat without him. Later, near the Shuri line, Doss was severely wounded in the legs by shrapnel and waited 6 hours for a stretcher to be evacuated. As he was being carried off on a stretcher, he again came under attack and the stretcher-bearers took cover. Doss crawled through enemy fire to tend nearby wounded and was wounded again in the arm. Doss finally did touch a rifle which, with a blanket, he fashioned into a sled to drag wounded GI's out of the line of fire. After assuring the wounded were evacuated by stretcher, Doss crawled some 300 yards to an aid station. For his dedication and valor under fire, Desmond Doss received the Medal of Honor.

Prior to their action on the Maeda Escarpment, Desmond Doss's 77th division (whose Statue of Liberty patch is still worn by the 77th Sustainment Brigade of Ft. Dix, NJ) was in action on the Island of Ie Shima, off Okinawa. Famed war correspondent Ernie Pyle, who had left Europe suffering from battle fatigue, had now returned to cover the Pacific War. Pyle traveled to Ie Shima to report on the fighting there. As he was driven toward the front in a jeep with some Army officers, a machine gun opened up on them and Ernie Pyle took a bullet in the head. America, still mourning President Roosevelt, was shocked by news of Pyle's death on 18 April 1945. Please honor his memory by reading one of his most famous dispatches, "The Death of Captain Waskow" which can be found on the Internet. In 2013, in San Pietro Infine, Italy where Pyle wrote that dispatch, a group of history buffs, myself included, read aloud Pyle's words – and wept profusely. Ernie Pyle rests in the Punchbowl National Cemetery near Honolulu, sharing that sacred American soil with some 13,000 souls lost in the Pacific War.