

# Cross Cultural Communication Failure: The Pacific War Paradigm

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"The object of war is not to die for your country but to make the other bastard die for his."

Attributed to Gen. George Patton, U.S. Army

"Bushido is the search for a place to die." Quoted by Yokota Yutaka, kaiten ("Kamikaze torpedo) pilot (Cook p. 309)

## Introduction

Unlike most other wars fought by American forces, the war against the Japanese in the Pacific took on a different character – a quality that was characterized by an almost complete dehumanization of the enemy, a failure to abide by the "rules of warfare", and a willingness to commit acts of unprecedented destruction.

War has been called "the continuation of politics by other means." To this could be added that war is cross-cultural communication by other means. Each combatant brings expectations about its own and its adversary's behavior to the conflict and – as with all forms of communication – modifies its behavior according to how the expectations are fulfilled.

This paper will discuss how each side in the Pacific War (1941~1945) modified its behavior to its adversary, resulting in a war that brought out the worst in each-both in terms of behavior towards its enemy and in terms of its own values.

## The Japanese Road to Pearl Harbor

It is often forgotten among Americans that the war did not begin for the Japanese on December 7, 1941. Manchuria was occupied after a series of

"incidents" in 1931 and China itself invaded in 1937.

In fact, the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) had more troops deployed in China and Manchuria than in all areas of the Pacific Theater combined. At the end of hostilities in 1945, there were more than 1.5 million IJA soldiers bogged down in China and another 1.1 million facing the Soviets in Manchuria (Dunnigan, p. 309) It was largely in this conflict that the IJA set the tone for its tactics and ethic for the Pacific War which started at Pearl Harbor. A tone and ethic – "hyper-*Bushido*" – which they brought to the battlefield with the Americans.

As Japan occupied the port facilities along the Chinese coast after 1937, supply for the Nationalist forces by the Americans, for example, became increasingly difficult. As a result, the Japanese, having control of the air and employing their highly developed infantry tactics of using "shock troops"— all of whom were willing to die on the battlefield – rarely lost a battle against the ill-armed and less well-trained Chinese. Despite the battle-to-battle victories, however, the Japanese could find no way to actually win the war and gain an end to Chinese military activity against them.

Assault and occupation of key Chinese towns and cities became the standard strategy with the hope of cutting off Nationalist forces from their supplies which came in through ports on the Chinese coast, French Indo-China, and "over the hump" by air from Burma. One after the other most of these lines of supply were cut, but resistance did not seem to fade as the Chinese withdrew ever further into the depths of their continental expanse. Finally, the Nationalists moved their capital to Chungking (Chongqing) from which the Japanese, despite continuous bombing, were unable to dislodge them.

In fighting this war against the Chinese, the Japanese adopted a strategy of "total war". In principle, this meant that no difference was made between the combat soldier and the civilian population from which he was drawn. In practice, this resulted in the IJA indiscriminately bombing civilian targets, using poisonous gas, attempting to use biological weapons, and otherwise killing large numbers of Chinese who happened to be in the way. The Rape of Nanking (Nanjing) is but one of the more hideous examples. IJA forces went on a rampage of rape, looting, and random killing that resulted in the deaths of at least tens of thousands of Chinese including POWs (Honda, p. 245). Other



examples of casual brutality include the fact that when IJA soldiery were first brought over to China, they were required to "toughen themselves" by using their bayonets or swords (depending on their rank) against live Chinese prisoners (Cook p. 41~42). In addition, the Japanese public was treated to articles about the activities of their fighting men in China which glorified the war and the killing of Chinese captives. The fourth of a series, the one shown above (public domain photo) depicts a competition between two Japanese officers to see who could behead 100 Chinese first. Written like a sports report, the headline reads, "100 Beheadings, Record Exceeded. Mukai - 106, Noda -105 Both lieutenants head into overtime". Since the end of the war, there has been some debate about the veracity of the four reports by the reporter for the newspaper, but there is no question that the articles appeared, that they casually represented what the Japanese public took to be the truth, and that such brutalities were a daily part of the IJA's work in China.

In fact, very few Chinese were actually taken prisoner and kept as POWs in conventional camps by the Japanese, and in many cases orders to kill POWs were explicit (Honda, p.192).

The issue of the treatment of prisoners of war is one which loomed large in the post-war tribunals, and it was in China that the IJA set the "standard" for

how the war in the Pacific would eventually be fought. Proper treatment of prisoners of war is outlined in the Geneva Conventions of 1929 to which Japan was a signatory. The treaty was never ratified in Japan, however, with the Japanese claiming that such provisions for the treatment of POWs were essentially unfair. It would be only the Japanese who would have to provide this treatment to foreign POWs as no Japanese soldier would allow himself to be captured (田村, 2005, ¶ [paragraph] 4). The "total war" strategy also applied at home, as the whole population of Japan was expected to fight as "one bullet", and that each citizen as well as its fighting men should be prepared to die for the Emperor and the country.

Bogged down in a quagmire of major fighting since 1937 and facing what it perceived as discriminatory sanctions by the US and the other Western powers, Japan hatched a plan to gain vital resources on its own by attacking to the south. This operation which included the attack on American forces in Hawaii, however, did not contain any plan for victory against the United States. There were no military proposals for an invasion of California, a march across the continent, and a signing of surrender documents in the White House, for example. The most that the Japanese military could hope to achieve was a delay in when the US would retaliate, or a hope that they could somehow overcome "our outnumbering enemy with the utmost efforts of our numerically inferior officers and men" (Ugaki, p.7).

December 8, 1941 dawned in Japan with the Japanese public largely supportive of the war in China and the occupation of Manchuria, and not suspecting that a new front would be opened against the United States.

### The American Road to Pearl Harbor

The war in Europe had begun with the German attack on Poland on September 1, 1939, but the Americans were not directly involved as they had no international commitments to defend Poland as did the British and the French. In addition, the Neutrality Act of 1939 specifically prohibited American involvement in the war. The American public, for its part, was still relatively isolationist, despite its leadership's analysis that participation in the war might be inevitable. In November of 1939, the US provided "cash and carry" weapons sales to the allies in Europe. American concern about European developments

did not become acute until the spring of 1940 when the Germans first invaded the lowlands and then France, pushing British forces into the sea at Dunkirk (Rose, 2005, ¶ 8).

Despite the gloomy progress of the war in Europe and President Roosevelt's eagerness to support the enemies of fascism, the US Congress did not vote the "Lend Lease" program until the spring of 1941. This provision allowed for the United States to give military supplies to the British to the extent that such materiel "promote(d) the Defense of the United States". In addition, Congress specifically stipulated in the Act that it was not to be construed to allow American forces to escort the delivery of the materiel or to enter the war zone. There was little popular support for involvement in the war in Europe. As late as summer 1941, an article in Time Magazine even criticized the Lend-Lease program for its alleged abuses by the recipient (Britain) (Uncle Sucker?, 1941, ¶ 1).

Despite popular concerns about entry into the war in Europe, by early 1941 President Roosevelt was already engaged in discussions with Prime Minister Churchill about the progress of the war. Churchill was eager for the US to become more actively involved and insisted on a "Europe First" policy in the event that Japan undertook hostile action in Southeast Asia (Skates, p. 10). By July of 1941, Japan had taken advantage of the fact that the German-controlled government of France in Vichy had given it "permission" to occupy French Indochina in its efforts to block the flow of supplies to the beleaguered Chinese. In response to this occupation, the US halted some trade with Japan and undertook other measures which were designed to put pressure on the Japanese. The goal of this pressure was to keep Japan from attacking to the south into the Dutch colonies of Indonesia and to express dissatisfaction with what they were doing in China (Utely, p. 136).

The idea of fighting a war with Japan was anathema to American leaders, as the US – not prepared for war in the Pacific – did not want to be engaged on two fronts should it become entangled in the ongoing war in Europe (Utely, p. 157). Nevertheless, the US did make plans for how to contain Japan should it attack to the south, and moved its fleet to Pearl Harbor as part of that plan (Utely, p. 84). In addition, there was a certain amount of hubris among the Americans and the British about how difficult defeating Japan in the event of a

war could be. The British, for example, thought their garrison in Singapore was virtually impregnable – to the extent that prior to the war General Robert Brooke-Popham, the Commander of British forces in the "Far East" was quoted while reviewing his troops, "Don't you think they are worthy of some better enemy than the Japanese?" (Dower, p. 99). The Americans as well could not imagine that Japan would have anything to gain from an attack on American forces – either the forces already in place in the Philippines or the fleet at Pearl Harbor. Undoubtedly, unadulterated racism played a part in this view, but also the enormous productive capacity of the US compared to the relatively miniscule industrialization of Japan was seen as a major deterrent to Japanese adventurism against US or British interests in Southeast Asia. Many Japanese naval leaders, such as Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, had studied and lived in the US and knew well what its capabilities were. Actual plans for defense of the US against the Japanese, were restricted to naval defense of the Western Hemisphere (Utely, p. 113). The British Navy would have to protect Singapore and Southeast Asia.

The American public also was not being infused with a daily dose of anti-Japanese publicity. Despite the sinking of an American naval vessel in China by the Japanese, the reaction was relatively mild. Time Magazine reported on December 27, 1937, only fifteen days after the sinking of the US warship,

Incidents such as the sinking last fortnight of the Panay by Japanese aircraft are among the immediate causes of wars. But last week the incident aroused no outcry, no demand in Congress or the press that the U. S. Navy immediately steam across the Pacific to blow Tokyo off the map. What was remarkable was that it produced precisely the opposite effect. While the State Department was engaged in sending the sharpest notes since the World War, reaction of the U. S. generally was alarm, not that Japan would go unpunished, but that the offense might somehow involve the U. S. in war (Panay Pandemonium, 1937, ¶ 3).

One could only imagine what might have come of an effort to "steam across the Pacific to blow Tokyo off the map", but it is a good example of the superior feeling many in the US had towards the Japanese. Chief of Naval Operations

William Leahy favored a show of force that would "teach the Japanese a lesson" (Utely, p. 27), but the crisis passed without the Americans doing anything (Utely, p. 31). Even after the Nanking massacre which started in December of 1937, Time Magazine, for example, reported the event only four times in the following year. In fact a search of the Time archives from Dec. 1937 to Dec. 1941 reveals no other mention of the massacre. Some reports were even "balanced" to the extent that while the depravity of the event was disclosed, Japanese efforts to "atone" were also presented. In the April 18, 1938 edition of Time, for example, "There has been the most drastic shakeup by Tokyo of officers whose Japanese soldiers went berserk in Nanking", was reported (Basket Cases, 1938, ¶ 1).

The American policy in the late 1930s was simply to hope that the war in China would become so wearing on the Japanese that the "military clique" would fall from power and the "moderates" be restored to influence in the Japanese government – wishful thinking (Utely, p. 35). Reports from the war in China, however, while falling short of stimulating the American public to a war fever, did bring civic opposition to continued trade with Japan. It was after all American gasoline and steel that were putting Japanese pilots into the air to bomb hapless Chinese civilians (Utely, p. 54). Piecemeal sanctions were implemented against Japan during 1938 and 1939, and the US Pacific fleet was moved "without public fanfare" to Pearl Harbor in the spring of 1940 (Utely, p. 84).

December 7, 1941 dawned on an America which was nervously watching events in Europe and in the "Far East", but did not imagine how soon it would itself become embroiled in war.

### The Pacific War

Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku who was primarily responsible for the preparations for the attack on Pearl Harbor is well-known to have opposed attacking the United States. Despite his misgivings, however, he committed himself to the successful implementation of national policy and launched the attack on December 8, 1941.

The attack went very well indeed, as the bulk of America's Pacific fleet was put out of action. The concept of the primacy of the battleship still reigned

supreme in most military and political circles, and so the loss of so many heavy warships at Pearl Harbor was a devastating blow. The fact that US aircraft carriers were not in port was the only silver lining to that day which would "live in infamy".

Following quickly on the heels of the Pearl Harbor victory, the Japanese plunged headlong into attacks across the southern Pacific and Southeast Asia. Troops were landed in Malaya on the same day as the attacks in Hawaii and began their rapid movement down the peninsula to Singapore. On the 8th, the British battleship, Prince of Wales, and battlecruiser, Repulse, along with four other vessels were sent to the South China Sea in an effort to intercept any Japanese forces which might be attempting to make landings in Malaya. They fell prey to an aircraft attack from Saigon on the 10th and were both sunk. These were the first capital ships which were sunk at sea by aircraft while engaged in actively defending themselves, and their loss was an enormous shock to the British military and government (Wikipedia [1], 2005, ¶ 2).

Supposedly impregnable, Singapore fell to General Yamashita Tomoyuki's onslaught on February 15, 1942, despite the fact that his forces were outnumbered and essentially operating on a shoestring (Dunnigan, p. 565). The Japanese immediately began to set the tone for their behavior towards Allied prisoners of war and others who fell under their control by massacring the patients and staff of a hospital in Singapore. (Wikipedia [2], 2005, ¶ 23).

It seemed that nothing could stop the Japanese. Building their Pacific perimeter, the Japanese took Wake Island – attacked on the same day as the Pearl Harbor raid – on December 23rd. The British Crown Colony of Hong Kong surrendered on Christmas Day, 1941. The strategic town of Rabaul in New Britain was attacked and taken over by Japanese forces in January of 1942. Australian POWs captured in that battle also suffered under the control of the Japanese troops. Only the resistance of American and Filipino forces in Bataan and Corregidor in the Philippines put an unexpected obstacle in the way of the Japanese advance, holding out until early April of 1942. The Bataan Death March was the result of American surrender to Japanese forces.

The brutal treatment of Allied POWs by the Japanese needs no documentation here. The horrible realities of this experience, however, were not generally known until late in the war by the American public at large.

Although some US soldiers, for example, managed to escape the Bataan Death March and report on Japanese atrocities, their news did not reach the US media until February of 1944, well after, for example, the battles of Guadalcanal and Tarawa and long after the tide had already turned against Imperial Japan. Time Magazine reported on Lieut. Colonel William E. Dyess's report about Japanese treatment of captured Allied soldiers in its February 7th, 1944 edition (The Nature of the Enemy, 1944). The overall treatment of Allied POWs, however, did not set the stage for how US troops reacted to Japanese forces in battle. The contact between the two on the battlefield did.

The first encounters between US and Japanese ground forces which resulted in reports returning to the US (US victories) and which "conditioned" the battlefield behavior of the two sides, were in the battles in the Aleutians and Guadalcanal. In both of these encounters, the forces arrayed against each other were relatively equal. In both, the IJA was still able to either supply or evacuate its forces. In the late spring of 1942, the Allies attacked the Japanese base at Attu Island in the Aleutians, by-passing the larger base on Kiska. Of the 4700 defenders, only 30 POWs were taken, despite the dropping of surrender leaflets by the Americans (Dunnigan, p. 696). Many Japanese soldiers finished their commitment to defend the island in a "banzai charge", an expression that US forces used to describe last-ditch, suicidal attacks by IJA troops in many of the Pacific battles. The Americans learned for the first time how the Japanese soldier would be fighting the war. A later attack on Kiska revealed that all of the Japanese soldiers had been evacuated under the cover of a small force which was left behind. The members of that force committed suicide, rather than fall into the hands of the enemy (World War II Multimedia Database, 2005, ¶ 4).

On Guadalcanal, the length of the campaign (Aug. 1942 to Feb. 1943) gave the troops of both sides ample opportunity to learn about each other's battlefield behavior. The see-saw nature of the battle meant that American soldiers would occasionally fall into Japanese hands. These would invariably be killed, often after torture. Coming upon the remains of their comrades who were, for example, bent over a log, and killed with a bayonet in the anus (O'Donnell, p. 60) did not predispose the Americans, for their part, to treat Japanese captives any more considerately. American Marines on Guadalcanal would simply shoot

the few Japanese who attempted to surrender (O'Donnell, p. 60). This was, of course, a war crime (Int'l Committee of the Red Cross [2], 2005, ¶ 6). As Japanese were not supposed to surrender (and had no training about how to do so), these killings only reinforced their commitment to die in battle or by their own hand when facing capture. Admittedly, the nature of the battle made it difficult for the Japanese, at least, to process POWs. Starving and under constant attack, there was no way that they could provide the protection and care required by the Geneva Conventions. Reading the Geneva Conventions of 1929 in the context of the horrific battles in the Pacific makes their almost quaint requirements seem something of a cruel joke. Consider the following excerpts:

TITLE III. CAPTIVITY.

SECTION I. EVACUATION OF PRISONERS OF WAR.

ARTICLE 7.

Prisoners of war shall be evacuated within the shortest possible period after their capture, to spots located in a region far enough from the zone of combat for them to be out of danger.

...  
...  
...

SECTION II. PRISONERS-OF-WAR CAMPS.

ARTICLE 9.

...

Prisoners captured in unhealthful regions or where the climate is injurious for persons coming from temperate regions, shall be transported, as soon as possible, to a more favorable climate.

CHAPTER 2. Food and Clothing of Prisoners of War.

ARTICLE 11.

The food ration of prisoners of war shall be equal in quantity and quality to that of troops at base camps.

Furthermore, prisoners shall receive facilities for preparing, themselves, additional food which they might have.

Sufficiency of potable water shall be furnished them. The use of tobacco shall be permitted. Prisoners may be employed in the kitchens.

(Int'l Committee of the Red Cross [1], 2005)

...and on and on. For Japanese troops who had no rations and no way to be evacuated from the battle zone themselves, there was little they could do with the odd American who happened to fall into their hands. For their part, they would not suffer the "disgrace" of becoming prisoners of war in any case. A monthly census (Appendix A) of POWs being held in the US presents this most starkly. Some prisoners were sent to Australia and New Zealand and some kept in the regions where they were captured, but the same dispersion also applied to German POWs. The data reveals that Japanese battlefield ethic simply did not allow for surrender. In fact, at the end of the war, the US held only 11,600 Japanese POWs in all of its POW camps (Dunnigan, p. 513).

The battle for New Guinea, which started in November of 1942, also exposed the Americans to a foe the likes of which they had never imagined. Although Prime Minister Tojo Hideki had issued a Field Service Code to soldiers on January 8, 1941 which admonished Japanese soldiers, "As long as you are alive, you will not accept the disgrace of becoming a prisoner; in death you will avoid the stigma of this offense" (探検コム, 2006, ¶ 17), the fighting in China had already established the principle that Japanese troops fought to the death. In fact, the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers of the Meiji Era, issued in 1882 encouraged the Japanese soldier to consider that while "duty is as heavy as a mountain, death is as light as feather" (田村[2], ¶ 8).

What this meant on the battlefield was that Japanese soldiers were expendable, throw-away items, a general's dream. A US soldier recollected that on the battlefield in New Guinea, as he and other American troops moved forward, they could hear the sounds of hand grenades going off just ahead of their advance. As it turned out, Japanese soldiers had been positioned in holes along the lines of potential US attack and had been given instructions to blow themselves up to signal which way the attack was coming (O'Donnell, p. 128). Americans were willing to sacrifice themselves in the war, but it is difficult to imagine American soldiers accepting an order to blow themselves up as signaling devices. The seeming lack of respect Japanese soldiers had for their own lives spilled over to the American soldiers' attitudes towards them.

Again on New Guinea, the way Japanese dealt with captured Americans provoked only hatred among their counterparts. American soldiers found the remains of their comrades who had unquestionably been eaten by the Japanese

(O'Donnell, p. 122 & 128). Accounts of Japanese cannibalism of their own and American dead are too numerous to list here, but the underlying current of feeling among US troops was that the enemy was not only fanatical but also inhuman.

Inadequate supply made starvation a common occurrence among Japanese troops on the widely flung islands of the Pacific, and in the longer battles, cannibalism was perhaps the only way they had to survive. These "mitigating circumstances", however, were lost on the US soldier who fought with the realization that his enemy could not be induced to surrender and would probably torture and kill him if he should give up. It became a fight to the death on both sides – the Japanese principle of no-surrender prevailing. Censorship kept Americans back home unaware of the manner in which Japanese forces were treating their captured sons. Time Magazine, for example, on August 2, 1943 mentions the issue of US soldiers dying at a high rate in Japanese POW camps, but goes on to say, "the War Department has made no charge of maltreatment" (Gold Stars, 1943, ¶ 1). It was only to the soldier in the field and among military and political leaders that the nature of the enemy was known. Their view came to be that the US faced an "alien" foe which could not be comprehended.

American soldiers did not go into combat thinking they had to die. Avoiding death while carrying out one's duty was the way Americans fought the war. To this extent, Americans would surrender when their situations became hopeless. The Japanese soldier on the other hand, did not expect to live, especially if the battle was going against him. Taking his own life rather than allowing himself to be captured was part of his duty. Even when wounded and left lying on the battlefield barely able to move, Japanese soldiers would try to kill Americans with their last breath. The result was that American soldiers, picking their way over Japanese casualties on the battlefield, would simply shoot any wounded Japanese as a risk-avoidance action (O'Donnell, p. 141). This, of course, is a war crime. The US was a signatory to the Geneva Convention of 1864 which states, "Article 6. Wounded or sick combatants, to whatever nation they may belong, shall be collected and cared for" (Int'l Committee of the Red Cross [2], 2005, ¶ 6). Japanese soldiers would also feign surrender only to blow themselves up as Americans approached (Straus, p. 116).

Japanese troops felt obliged to fight to the death and the American soldier felt little regret in helping him to achieve his goal.

It got worse, much worse. In the assault on Tarawa, an island that is only 3.7 kilometers long and 800 meters wide – smaller than New York's Central Park (Dunnigan, p. 602) – Marines would confront an implacable foe. The battle began on November 20, 1943 and lasted only until the 23rd. During those four days, the Marines suffered 3,301 casualties, including 1,188 dead. This figure does not include combat deaths among navy personnel. For their part, the Japanese forces began the battle with 4,836 defenders, including Korean laborers. When the battle ended, Japanese military prisoners numbered 17 with 129 Korean laborers also falling into US hands (Stevens, 2003). The slaughter caught the attention of the American public and there was a howl of protest criticizing the attack and its heavy losses. Articles in *Time Magazine* at the time reflect the defensiveness of Naval and Marine commanders as to the losses (*Some Will Be Killed*, 1943, & *Postscript on Tarawa*, 1944). Incidentally, *Time Magazine* also reported that the *New York Daily News* and the *Washington Times-Herald* printed an editorial entitled, "We Should Have Used Gas At Tarawa" (*Should the U.S. Use Gas?*, 1944). The *Time* report concluded that there was no need to use gas as "conventional" weapons were up to the task, but also pointed out that the US was not a signatory to the two international agreements banning the use of poisonous gas in battle. There was clearly contemplation of using weapons that most of the rest of the world thought inhumane. This thinking continued when the invasion of Japan reached the planning stages (Skates, p. 93).

With the loss of Tarawa and the naval catastrophe at Midway in June of 1942, the Japanese military command had to be considering the hopelessness of continuing the war. The American insistence on "unconditional surrender", however, pushed Japanese leaders (as it did leaders in Germany) to conclude that they had no alternative but to fight on (Skates, p. 252). The inexorable advance of US forces across the Pacific and the tightening of the noose around the home islands, only pushed the IJA to adopt a strategy of inflicting as many casualties as possible on the Americans in hope that they might lose heart and become willing to negotiate a peace – a peace that would leave the colonies in China, the IJA, or at least the Imperial throne intact. Suffering the heavy

casualties as they ploughed across the Pacific from island to island, the Americans only hardened their resolve to bring the war directly to Japan and its people.

Fighting in the Solomons continued unabated, but in the early campaigns in the Marshall Islands, including Kwajalein and Eniwetok, the Japanese were taken by surprise and American forces suffered relatively few casualties. Japanese forces, on the other hand, true to their training, died in droves. On Kwajalein, the garrison of 8,675 suffered 7,870 killed. On Eniwetok, 2,677 Japanese died with fewer than a hundred being taken prisoner (Dunnigan, p. 411). The surprise factor soon dissipated, however, and the Japanese began to exact their toll in blood for the American approach towards the home islands.

Needing forward bases to launch bombers for direct attacks on the Japanese homeland, the Americans invaded Saipan on June 15, 1944. This was the first battlefield where Japanese civilians were also caught up in the conflict, and their reaction to American invasion was one of the telling points in the American attitude towards the Japanese. Japanese soldiers fight to the death; this was well known, but seeing thousands of Japanese civilians kill themselves, some by throwing themselves from cliffs was a shock to American soldiers (Dower, p. 45). Many Japanese soldiers died in futile banzai charges at the end of the conflict. Only a few hundred of the almost 30,000 Japanese troops became POWs. For the Americans, the cost was heavy and a harbinger of things to come. 9,567 US soldiers died in the three-week battle; 16,348 were wounded (Dunnigan, p. 538).

Only weeks later on the 20th of July, the invasion of Guam began. 18,500 IJA defenders protected the largest island in the Marianas, (The United States Army [1] 2003, p. 19) The US lost 2,214 men in this battle which ended on August 10th (Japanese stragglers continued to "fight" on, including Sgt. Yokoi Shoichi who was finally captured on January 24, 1972). The remainder of the Japanese garrison was largely wiped out. American soldiers walked the battlefield after the banzai charges and killed the wounded Japanese, resorting yet again to this common, criminal practice. The motive seems to have been revenge, and fear that a wounded Japanese soldier would try to make an attack from behind (O'Donnell, p. 138, 141). These single-shot killings after a battle must have been heard by remaining Japanese troops who could only have

concluded that American soldiers had no intention of taking any prisoners. The reality was that – by and large – this was true.

In October of 1944, the battle for the Philippines began with the American invasion of Leyte. Defended by 350,000 soldiers under the command of Gen. Yamashita Tomoyuki, the strategy was to defend in depth, inflicting as many casualties as possible. The conflict would still be underway when the war ended (Dunnigan, p. 500). On the 21st, the Japanese launched the first organized Kamikaze attacks, though plans for such units were under way well before (Naito, p. 11). On the 25th, naval Lieutenant Seki Yukio (23 years old), the leader of the squadron, made the first successful attack and crashed his aircraft onto the escort carrier St. Lo, sinking it (殉国之碑, 2002, ¶ 16).

Then there was Iwo Jima. Iwo Jima was defended by 22,000 troops under the command of Gen. Kuribayashi Tadamichi who had plenty of time to honeycomb the island with caves and concealed fortifications to provide for the defense-in-depth strategy that the Japanese hoped would convince the Americans to negotiate a more favorable peace. Gen. Kuribayashi forbade the banzai charge that had become the desperate trademark of overwhelmed Japanese defenders, requiring instead that they stay in their bunkers and fight to the death. The Americans put ashore 30,000 troops on February 19th, 1945 alone, but before the island was "secure" on March 26th, they had suffered over 28,000 casualties, including 6,821 dead. The Japanese garrison gave up 1083 POWs, many captured badly wounded and unconscious (Dunnigan, p. 294, and Newcomb, 1982, ¶ 30).

Germany surrendered in May of 1945, leaving Japan to face the Allies alone. The ever increasing "fanaticism" of Japanese resistance the closer the Americans came to the home islands induced the Americans to resort to any measures to force surrender. The application of firebombing raids (started against Germany) in March 1945 burned out large sections of Japan's major cities and killed hundreds of thousands of civilians. The architect of these attacks, Major Gen. Curtis LeMay himself said that he would probably be tried as a war criminal if Japan were to win the war (Wikipedia [3], 2006, ¶ 9). Germany, however, had not surrendered on account of the similar destruction of its urban areas, so there was little hope that bombing alone would induce Japan's surrender either (anesi.com, 1996, p. 21).

American strategy against Japan had three parts: first was to cut off Japan from its colonial possessions and supplies by blockade – something that was largely accomplished by submarines; the second was to destroy Japan's military capability and "demoralize" its citizenry by bombing; and finally, the third was to invade the home islands and occupy the country (United States Army [2], 2001, p. 527).

With bombing in full swing, and the submarine blockade in effective operation against Japanese shipping everywhere except in the Japan Sea, the invasion of the home islands began in Okinawa. Once again, the Japanese defense goal was to defend to the last man, inflicting as many casualties as possible. The proximity to the main islands of Japan brought out the Kamikazes in waves and their attacks inflicted large numbers of US naval casualties. In fact, the US Navy suffered almost 20% of its casualties for the entire war (both theaters) in this one battle – mostly due to Kamikaze attack (The Little Ships, 1945, ¶ 1). Even the flagship of the Japanese fleet, the superbattleship Yamato, was sent out on a suicide mission to attack the US landing vessels in Okinawa (Yoshida, p. 17). As on Saipan, Japanese civilians caught up in the battle killed themselves rather than be taken prisoner (Cook, p. 365). American casualties were high; 12,281 combat deaths and more than 50,000 wounded. Japanese deaths were over 150,000, including thousands of civilians (Dunnigan, p. 458). The high casualty rate caused by the to-the-death defense of Japanese forces and the apparent willingness of even Japanese civilians to commit "group suicide" rather than be captured made a deep impression on American leaders. What might ensue with the invasion of Kyushu?

Justification for the use of the atomic bomb has been that the invasion of Japan would have cost America half a million or even a million casualties. While these post-war estimates are clearly exaggerations (Fensch, p. 56), there is no doubt that concerns about high casualty rates pressed American leaders to find as quick an end to the war as possible. While there was debate about how to do this, Truman approved the invasion of Kyushu for November 1, 1945, but also authorized the use of the atomic bomb against "military targets". What constituted a "military target", however, was open to interpretation. Maj. Gen. Curtis LeMay's bombers had been flying low-level, incendiary attacks against Japanese cities since March and there were few left untouched. Truman

himself stated that we "cannot drop that terrible bomb on the old capital or the new", indicating that while those cities were off limits, other cities might be considered (Truman Presidential Museum & Library [2], p. 5).

Nobody could doubt, however, that the American public was weary of war and wanted as fast an end to it as possible. A long, drawn-out blockade (which still would have included continued bombing of Japanese cities) would not have ended the war quickly. For example, "Ninety-seven percent of Japan's stocks of guns, shells, explosives, and other military supplies were thoroughly protected in dispersed or underground storage depots, and were not vulnerable to air attack" (anesi.com, 1996, p. 18). In any case, the moral issues of bombing civilian targets had already been ignored – first in the "terror" bombing of German cities and later in the low-level firebomb raids over Japan. The atomic bomb was simply a more efficient means of delivering the same type of attack. During his visit to Potsdam for the conference with Churchill and Stalin, Truman confided in his notes, "... I fear that machines are ahead of morals by some centuries..." (Truman Presidential Museum & Library [3], p.10).

Truman seemed to have felt, as the soldier in the field did, that anything that could be applied to force Japan's surrender should be used, and that without employing every possible measure such surrender might not be effectuated. He approved the invasion of the home islands, authorized dropping the atomic bomb, and he encouraged the Soviet Union to also get involved in the war – that being something which he thought would be the final blow to end Japanese resistance (Truman Presidential Museum & Library [2], p. 9). There was a domestic political issue involved as well. It is likely that had Truman decided against using the atomic bomb and had Americans suffered serious casualties in a subsequent invasion, the war-weary American public would not have been happy to find out later that a "superweapon" that might have ended the war earlier was not used.

Finally, the Emperor overcame Japanese Military opposition and proclaimed the acceptance of the Potsdam conditions for surrender on August 15th, 1945. Efforts by some Japanese military officers to prevent the surrender were unsuccessful, but Minister of War Anami committed *seppuku* in his house (The Pacific War Research Society, p. 294), and other military men went on final Kamikaze missions (Ugaki, p. 665) for they still believed that only by drawing

the Americans into a final orgy of bloodletting on the home islands could they force more acceptable terms for ending the war. (Ugaki p. 659).

## Conclusion

The conduct of war always seems to fall to the lowest common denominator, and the Japanese Imperial Army set the bar low. That having been said, the cultural expectations of the soldier on the battlefield were so different between the Japanese and the American, that each hardly knew what to make of the other. That Americans would surrender came as a shock to Japanese troops who were ill-prepared to deal with them and held them in very low esteem as a result of their unexpected action. The fact that Japanese would not surrender but would rather commit suicide or rush out of their prepared defenses to be slaughtered in senseless banzai charges, only convinced the Americans that they faced an inhuman and fanatical foe. Their response was to kill as many as possible, resulting in a vicious circle where even when Japanese contemplated surrender, they feared that they would be killed outright by the Americans. The Japanese use of suicide weapons, Kamikaze, Kaiten and others, only reinforced the American view that the Japanese were a nation apart (the Germans had not pursued this type of attack), and that any mechanism that would bring them to their knees should be used. Additionally, aspects of the Japanese spirit of Bushido which had been instilled in every Japanese through education, formed the basis for a belief that the "Japanese spirit" could overcome any adversity. This belief continued to be the *raison d'être* of the Imperial Japanese Army which controlled the government throughout the war and which very nearly succeeded in bringing an end to Japan as a nation. The Americans, for their part, wanted a conclusion to the bloodletting and became willing partners in the apparent Japanese intent on national suicide. Had the bombs been available (and eventually they would have), the US had the delivery capability to put an atomic bomb on every Japanese city of 30,000 people or larger in one day (anesi.com, 1996, p. 30).

The Japanese soldier's powerlessness to surrender in the field was reflected in the Japanese government's inability to find a way to give up as well. Even *Time Magazine* reported at the height of the Okinawa campaign, "Now the next step was clear: to persuade the Japanese nation that inevitable defeat does not

mean that the race will be wiped out, or that its future is everlastingly hopeless. If the ill-matched communication systems between Japanese and American minds could somehow be bridged, the war might be shortened". It went on to mention that President Truman had already stated that surrender "does not mean the extermination or enslavement of the Japanese people"(Power v. Statesmanship, Jul. 16, 1945, ¶ 5 & 7). The Japanese government tried to enlist the "good offices" of the Soviet Union to help them figure a way to surrender, but the Soviet Union was stalling for time as they intended to enter the war for a final land-grab. Moreover, the Japanese responses to the Potsdam Declaration were equivocal and interpreted as a rebuke by the Americans (The Pacific War Research Society, p. 16-17). The Potsdam Declaration clearly mentions that Japanese military forces would be allowed to return to Japan to live normal lives, that Japan would not be "enslaved as a race or destroyed as a nation", and that occupying forces would eventually be withdrawn from the country (Birth of the Constitution of Japan, 2003-2004, ¶ 9,10 & 12). But although the Americans had decided that the Emperor was needed in the post-war environment to assure the surrender of the large and far-flung Japanese Army, no mention was made of his role in the Potsdam Declaration (Skates, p. 238-239).

The two culturally based psychologies of war – one of no-surrender, the other of unconditional surrender or annihilation – created a perfect swirl of escalating violence that finally ended with the first use of atomic bombs on essentially civilian targets. Each nation violated its best moral principles in the conflict. The Japanese took only those most militant aspects of the Bushi code, and made them the core of their national being, convincing soldiers and citizens from all walks of life that they were somehow samurai and that the nation was a samurai nation. This belief and the fanatical defense that surrounded it brought Japan to within a hairsbreadth of national suicide. And America, a country that did not want to enter the war in the first place, turned from a nation which had been a leader in international law, into a combatant for which – from the foot soldier to the President – nothing was immoral.

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東京日日新聞、昭和12年10月6日

## Appendix A

Census of Prisoners of War Interned in the Continental United States (every other month shown here)

End of Month	Total	German	Italian	Japanese
<b>1942</b>				
June	33	32	—	1
August	65	55	—	10
October	183	130	—	53
December	1,881	512	1,317	52
<b>1943</b>				
January	2,365	990	1,313	62
March	2,755	1,334	1,359	62
May	36,083	22,110	13,911	62

July	80,558	54,502	25,969	87
September	163,706	115,358	48,253	95
November	171,484	122,350	49,039	95
<b>1944</b>				
January	174,822	124,880	49,826	116
March	183,618	133,135	50,136	347
May	186,368	135,796	50,164	408
July	224,863	173,980	50,276	607
September	300,382	248,205	51,034	1,143
November	360,455	306,856	51,156	2,443
<b>1945</b>				
January	359,687	306,306	50,561	2,820
March	365,954	312,144	50,550	3,260
May	425,871	371,683	50,273	3,915
July	422,130	367,513	49,789	4,828
August	415,919	361,322	49,184	5,413

([http://www.uboat.net/men/pow/pow\\_in\\_america\\_stats.htm](http://www.uboat.net/men/pow/pow_in_america_stats.htm))