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A comparative study of the United States Marine Corps and the Imperial Japanese Army in the central Pacific War through the experiences of Clifton Joseph Cormier and Hiroo Onoda

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A COMPARATIVE STUDY
OF
THE UNITED STATES MARINES
AND THE
IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY
IN THE CENTRAL PACIFIC WAR
THROUGH THE EXPERIENCES OF
CLIFTON JOSEPH CORMIER AND HIROO ONODA

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Arts

in

The Interdepartmental Program
In Liberal Arts

By
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BMed, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1967
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Dedication

To “Nan Nan” Bea who made this degree possible even in death.

To my wife Dianna and children

Jay, Kevin, Robin, and Amber.

To a group of men and women I quietly and secretly admired most of my life,
the United States Marine Corps of the Pacific War, 1941-1945.

Acknowledgements

A number of people need to be recognized for their very kind and helpful assistance in the writing of this thesis, the first of which must be Mr. Clifton Cormier whose advice and suggestions were absolutely invaluable. Through private telephone conversations, letters, e-mail messages, Mr. Cormier provided highly descriptive data not found in his book, *A Postcard From Joseph*. Mr. Cormier remains a staunch LSU Tiger football fan but finds himself living near some ungodly place they call the “Swamp.”

Dr. Charles Shindo is a man for all seasons. Guiding a novice through the academic maze we call LSU requires nothing less than a saint. He gave me a lot of room and freedom needed to produce a document such as this, while at the same time patting me on the back for doing a good job. Not once were his comments negative or abusive. I am not worthy.

I also need to thank Dr. William Demastes and Dr. William Clark for serving on my committee defense of this thesis. Both of these gentlemen made an impression on me as being terribly competent in their respective fields and left me with enlightenment that I will carry the rest of my life. They were AWESOME! Glen Thibodeaux also.

The Fifth Marine Division Association provided immense help. A big hug of appreciation to Mrs. Lynn Lejeune and Mrs. Susanna Dixon both of the LSU Office of Graduate studies whose patience and counseling also qualifies them for “sainthood.”

My wife, Dianna, was forced to become a widow in this time-consuming project and my daughter, Robin, who always told me, “You are going to do just fine Daddy.” We both hope to graduate together, she with a 4.0 GPA, mine in reference to the Fifth Amendment. Also Mr. Carl Mastro’s computer magic saved me a lot of misery..

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Abstract

This thesis is a biographical description of the lives of two men that fought in the Pacific War, 1941-1945. One was a member of the Third Marine Division, the other a member of the Imperial Japanese Army stationed on Lubang Island in the Philippines, but were connected by a very intense conflict across the vastness of a very large ocean.

Primary sources were drawn from the two privately published books by both. Clifton Cormier's *A Postcard From Joseph* (2002) and Onoda's *No Surrender, My Thirty Year War* (1974). In addition, Clifton Cormier graciously supplied self-written newspaper articles, private telephone conversations, and e-mail messages providing data not found in his book.

The treatment of this thesis attempts to describe the experiences of these two gentlemen as seen through their eyes. It describes how the battlefield behavior of the Japanese soldier and the United States Marine were different yet strangely similar when fought on a stage of live combat where the will to survive is paramount to the will to win. Also find brief thematic descriptions of the military cultures that spawned the two along with eye witness descriptions of two of the largest banzai attacks in the Marianas (1944) along with a short treatment of the Bougainville, Guam and Iwo Jima campaigns.

It concludes that the war itself is the real culprit as opposed to the political, racial, and social differences that existed in that era between these two armies and the cultural diversity under extreme stress that goes with it. This thesis explains how both gentlemen had no choice and did what they could to survive within the parameters allowed. Clifton Cormier rationalized that victory achieved revenge and Onoda sought isolation to circumvent the dishonor of defeat both of which brought to each the crowning glory of survival.

Chapter One

Clifton Joseph Cormier (pronounced korm-yea) was born December 30, 1918 just a few days after the termination of World War One. He was the youngest of two children, the oldest being a sister, Zula Mae. His father, Orenus Cormier, and mother, Clara Legros Cormier, were residents of Lake Arthur in Jefferson Davis parish, Louisiana. Lake Arthur is a sleepy little village on a rather large lake fed by the Mermentau River that empties into the Gulf of Mexico. He was a product of Cajun ancestry, a culture that still exists to this day. He grew up in Lake Arthur and spent the first eighteen years of his life there. Mr. Cormier attended Lake Arthur High School graduating in 1937 with a class of seventeen. Going to LSU in Baton Rouge was what he wanted but there was no money and no work during the Depression, so he was never really in full-time employment by anyone. His father worked where ever he could. Somehow there was food on the table and a small amount of pocket change in his pocket for spending. The family raised chickens for gumbo on Sundays and graced the table with fruits and vegetables from a home-grown garden. Clifton was ten years old when Herbert Hoover became president followed by Roosevelt and the infamous Depression that ravaged the nation. Hoover tried to do something about the economy but failed. He opposed direct federal relief to the mass of unemployed changing the temper and mood of the country. FDR would enjoy a landslide victory because of it.

Picking cotton at two cents a pound, harvesting rice in the fall, pumping gas, pulling indigo weeds, and selling Spanish moss for pillows and mattresses was hardly the picture of prosperity. Mr. Cormier did them all. There were no jobs. One had to pull his own weight as best he could.

His memories of Lake Arthur as a youth are distant and vague now, but happy ones. Like most young men of his age, the outside world existed in books, magazines, radios, and movies. He wanted more and came to realize that he would never be a prophet in his own land. He would have to seek and find something that would provide some kind of security with a future. Lake Arthur could only offer uncertainty. Clifton Cormier would join the United States Marine Corps in 1938 to escape the restrictions and trappings of a small town setting. He was 19 and hungered for travel and adventure. His parents reluctantly signed their permission and on Ash Wednesday of that year, Clifton was sworn into what would become a military career lasting the length of the war and beyond.

A private's pay of \$21 a month, free clothing, and three square meals a day during the Depression was a boon. There was no shortage of applicants. The youth culture of the times was the sweet and smooth sounds of Glenn Miller and Benny Goodman, and the well-sculpted legs of Betty Grable. She would become the reigning pin-up queen of that era along with Rita Heyworth and Heady Lamar. Clark Gable and Frank Sinatra were making waves on the movie screens of the country while the air-brush mastery of Alberto Vargas adorned just about every military barracks in the country. Clifton's first train ride to San Diego offered him a view of the country unknown to most young men of his age.

It was an epiphany!

Boot camp was a six-week period of re-socialization. There he learned to do things the Marine Corps way. Boot camp was tough but not abusive. There were no in-your-face "chew outs" popularized by Hollywood. The drill instructors (DI) were professionally minded men but their discipline could be sometimes un-nerving. Serious about the business of soldiery, his best friend became the .30, bolt-action, 1903 Springfield rifle,

serial number and all. The trappings of boot camp were a demanding way of doing things that change one forever. Clifton walked away realizing that military craftsmanship was just as crucial as any other profession. Much of his training was programmed out of a WW I mindset as was the equipment and weaponry (the .30 caliber Springfield rifle was a relic of the First World War).

Regimentation, following orders instinctively, leadership, and the camaraderie of brotherhood unique to the Corps are the by-products of this training. They leave lasting and indelible imprints on one's experiences throughout life. It is a success-oriented type of training that brings young men out of their boyhood into manhood. Marine Corps training of WWII placed a strong emphasis on self-discipline and unit-discipline as essential to the prompt and correct execution of orders. Recruits quickly learned that it was an all-for-one and one-for-all teamwork that became the glue of the corps. The Corps has a proclivity to instill in its membership a strongly felt responsibility for one another. It trains and assimilates its recruits into a culture it has carved for itself. Even mom, apple pie, and the red, white, and blue took a back seat to teamwork. There was no room for anything less. No matter what you do or do not want to do, don't be the one who lets your buddies down. It is a brotherhood of sorts that molds one's particular job to another's particular job creating an oneness of thought and action despite the opposition in front of it. Reflexes become automatic, responses become conditioned, all of which "kick in" on the battlefield. The individual no longer belongs to himself, but rather becomes part of something much bigger and transcendent...the United States Marine Corps.

Clifton met other young men from around the country: farmers from the red clay of Georgia and Alabama, poor Irish kids from the slums of Boston and New York, kids

from the tough, out-of-work neighborhoods of Chicago and San Francisco, the sons of carpenters, teachers, plumbers, bankers and garbage collectors. Some of these recruits were running from bad marriages, illegitimate babies, and impatient creditors. Others were even running from the law and some were under-aged high school drop-outs. All of this settled well with Clifton Cormier. After recruit training he was assigned to an artillery regiment in San Diego and remained an artilleryman through most of his military career. He accepted what was handed to him.

The 1930s saw the world sink into political insanity. The United States, hamstrung by isolationism and mired in the economic calamity of the Depression, saw on both sides of the globe a world seemingly going mad with agenda-seeking dictators. Hitler called it his *Lebensraum*; Mussolini called it his *Pax Romano*; and Japan called it their *Co-Prosperity Sphere* (Asia for Asians). All were beset by expansion through conquest; all were spawned by economics or the lack of it; all were frowned upon by the United States, Britain, and the West; all were destined for failure.

All of this was out of the reach, influence, and control of Clifton and his family in quiet little Lake Arthur, Louisiana. Big things were happening a long way from the rice fields of Jeff Davis parish. Adolph Hitler's panzers invaded the Polish frontier; Japanese armies were engaged in a war with China; Italy wanted Ethiopia back in its fold. A global war was brewing for the second time in the Twentieth Century.

Suffice it to say, Pearl Harbor was what it was, a very brilliant and risky tactic that led the Japanese Empire in an ocean war against the United States. At the time of the attack, Clifton Cormier was off-loading supplies in Reykjavik, Iceland. His brigade was dispatched to relieve the British garrison as part of Roosevelt's undeclared war in the

North Atlantic. The attack did not set well with him and his buddies. Everyone was stunned as was the nation. The isolationist mode of the American people faded away almost over night. For years Japan was behaving in ways unpopular with Washington. Japanese expansion portended imperialistic designs frowned upon by the Roosevelt government. Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini were doing the same thing on the other side of the planet. If left unchecked, the United States could be caught in a vice not conducive to world order on either side of two very large oceans, leaving itself open to a lot of distasteful scenarios unknown in the history of this country.

The Cormier family went about its business. Clifton fell in with what the Marine Corps expected of him. Both he and the Corps braced themselves for what was sure to follow. The giant was awake and angry! (The United States).

It is interesting to note that when Roosevelt placed Admiral Chester Nimitz as Commander of the Pacific Fleet, who was told not to return until this war was over and won. CINCPAC was born! (Commander-in-Chief Pacific). Nimitz became the highest ranking officer in that arena, equal to MacArthur, and was responsible for the westward thrust into the Central Pacific.

Radio was in its glory. Most everyone in America owned at least one. Jack Benny, Fiber McGee and Molly, Burns and Allen, were the leading personalities of the time. Tom Harmon, Joe Dimaggio, Lou Gehrig and Ted Williams were the sports heroes, made alive by the magic of Bill Stern and Red Barber. The big band era flourished even from ballrooms with radio hook-up, trade paper-backs and comic books gave many of the Marines new and easy avenues for reading. Kate Smith's powerful rendition of *God Bless America* became a second national anthem and John Phillip Sousa's *Semper Fidelis* was

known by every Marine that wore the eagle, anchor, and globe. Offenbach's gallop from *Genevieve de Barbant* took on renewed meaning (The Marine's Hymn). Walter Winchell and Edward R. Murrow were as well known as Roosevelt's "fireside chats" and Ernie Pyle wrote what mom and dad wanted to read.

At the same time the nation's economy was waking up. The nation mobilized and entered a war-time setting. Memories of the Depression seemed to fade away.

In 1942 Clifton took his first home leave. Rice farmers in and around Lake Arthur were beginning to feel the trickle-down effects from federal crop subsidies. The new East Texas oil boom reached Southwest Louisiana giving people greater buying power. Clifton's father opened a beer and liquor bar in Lake Arthur. Despite the hard times of the Depression and the beginning of the war, people seemed to have money for a drink. Before long he put in pool tables and a slot machine. Eventually the business began to grow. Jax and Dixie beer drunk from long neck bottles seem to be the favorites. His parents purchased a home with indoor plumbing and electricity supplied by the REA. Later an ice box and radio allowed his mother to listen to "Stella Dallas" and "Portia Faces Life" while ironing her laundry. He was able to enjoy the banquets from the bayous of South Louisiana and Gulf of Mexico a few short miles away. Off shore drilling was active and in time, Louisiana would show the world how to do it. But things were not good on the war front.

Wake Island fell. Guam would follow. Bataan, Corregidor, the Philippines, Singapore, and soon Southeast Asia felt the fist of Japanese aggression. The horrible news from Nanking in China leaked out little by little long before "The Final Solution" in Western Europe was ever known. Who were these Japanese people to make the Pacific

Ocean their own private lake? The speed in which they did so left everyone spellbound. Fear and mistrust would grow into racial hatred.

For six months (100 days actually) Japan seized territories owned by Holland, France, and Britain, even threatening Australia. *Hakko Ichiu* (bringing the eight corners of the world under one roof) was their national slogan during the 20s and 30s which they intended to accomplish post-haste.

It took ten well-placed bombs on carrier decks filled with Zeroes refueling and rearming to stop their onslaught. It battle was called Midway and the turning point in the Pacific. It was time for Clifton Cormier to fight back. Would the bayonets of Pittsburgh steel fare well with those from Yokohama? Would the young man from Lake Arthur, Louisiana “stand to” against the young man from Kyoto or Tokyo? He would have to wait a little while to find out.

The United States Marine Corps fought a dozen major land battles in the Pacific War. Clifton would be in three of them. The total cost would exceed 95,800 young men from a family oriented society of America that wanted to be left alone. Six divisions would do the job. One of them, the Third Marine Division the Fighting Third, would confront the young men from the “Land of the Rising Sun” who were well-armed, well trained, and eager to fight for their Emperor. Bougainville, Guam, and the infamous Iwo Jima would bring this division a Presidential Unit Citation and 12 Medals of Honor, but at the cost of over 8,600 casualties during the course of the war.¹

The Third Marine Division was born in June 1942. A full strength Marine Division of World War II (mid-1944) was 16,000 (plus) men and organized after the Army’s

¹ Third Marine Division Association. *Two Score and Ten*. Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing. Co. 1992, pgs. 281-282.

triangular order of battle including three infantry regiments each with an authorized strength of 3,100 men, an artillery regiment, an engineering battalion, and headquarters with service companies, however, divisional strengths varied as the war progressed. With the exception of a few officers and seasoned NCO's, the new Third Division was made up of recruits directly from the boot camp of Parris Island. Its ranks filled up quickly and its first Commander was Major General Charles D. Barrett, a veteran of WWI and a staunch believer in the new amphibian doctrine. General Barrett's command did not last long. He died of a freak accident in Noumea, New Caledonia going to a high level staff meeting with the Navy's South Pacific HQ. He was replaced by General Allen H. Turnage, who would command the division for the Bougainville Campaign. Its training was specialized in jungle warfare and amphibious landing, quick seizure of the beaches, and the establishment of a beachhead.

Training was almost endless especially for the infantry regiments. Artillery units could only practice fire. Weapons and equipment were slow in arriving but in time the division had what it needed to be combat ready. Satisfied with the readiness of personnel and equipment, General Turnage announced the Division was ready for deployment. A quick trip to Samoa, New Zealand, and continued jungle warfare training at the now captured Guadalcanal (the 17th Japanese Army that defended it was no more), the Third Marine Division would receive its baptism of fire at an island called Bougainville in the Solomons.

Bougainville is 125 miles long and 38 miles wide covering an area of some 3,800 square miles. It was twice the size of Guadalcanal. Two densely forested and mostly unexplored mountain ranges dominated the island's central spine. Kunai grass, coral

reefs, and almost impenetrable jungles coupled with mangrove swamps and torrential rains, with 40,000 fanatical Japanese soldiers awaited Clifton. Its capture would place Rabaul (a crucial Japanese staging area) within reach of allied aircraft. So began the island hopping method of the Pacific War. Rabaul would be by-passed. Its 100,000 defenders were left to starve, wither, and die. Clifton was promoted from gunnery sergeant to Warrant Officer before the Bouganville landing.

The landing at Bouganville was on November 1, 1943 at Torokina in Empress Augusta Bay on the western coast. By nightfall some 14,000 Marines were ashore alongside several thousand tons of supplies. Clifton was now a gunnery sergeant of Battery E, 2nd Battalion, 12th Marines. His bible was the .75-millimeter pack howitzer. The beaches were crowded and congested with supplies and decapitated palm fronds and banyans. Dead Japanese corpses were yet to be buried. It didn't take long to set up his battery along side the others in his outfit. The guns blazed away at unseen targets. The soft earth quivered like Jell-o. The terrain was swampy and muddy and dictated fire direction. By night Japanese bombers from Rabaul and nearby Kieta would make their bombing runs to affect casualties. He learned first hand the meaning of foxholes, "I was never so frightened in my whole life. I was absolutely terrified of those bombs falling all about me. I became a devout Christian real fast."² He saw dead Marines for the first time. Some 423 would not return.

Two weeks into the campaign the largest and heaviest concentration of artillery fire-power of the Pacific War up to that time fell on Japanese positions without mercy. Hot shredded steel that could cut a man in half churned up the ground and rearranged the terrain into something that looked like pudding. Hundreds of Japanese soldiers were

²Clifton Cormier from a private telephone conversation Friday, February 11, 2004.

killed ending the last major threat to the beachhead. The rest retreated inland to the other side of the island. During the entire battle, thousands of Japanese were killed, half of which were killed by artillery. The enemy was well dug in and experts at night infiltration. The jungle suited the Japanese quite well. They knew how to fight and it became apparent to Clifton that if they were not afraid of dying, they were not afraid of anything. The number one memory of Bougainville to those who were there would be the deep sucking mud that seemed to cover everything. It could suck a man's boots off of his feet coupled with the smell of rot decaying Japanese bodies. The greatest enemy of that island was not only the Japanese, but the terrain itself composed largely of swampland and very dense jungle that could hide the sun from view. Bougainville was a green hell veiled by clouds of insects and mosquitoes. Yard by unending yard the Marines inched forward to push the Japanese back. Two unsuccessful attempts in early November to replenish losses failed at a great cost to the enemy. The "Tokyo Express" never gave up during the entire Solomons campaigns and was quite successful despite American control of the air. On March 9, a force of some 12,000 Japanese soldiers came over the mountains and out of the jungle to attack the Torokina perimeter determined to push the enemy back into the sea. Some six major attempts over a period of two weeks at a cost of over 6,800 dead netted them nothing. He would never try again. Running out of food, ammunition, water and medical necessities, resistance began to weaken.

As on Guadalcanal and other islands under their control, Japan was overextended, unable to support and replenish the necessary items to fight. Above all, it could not replace its losses as easily as the United States. The main battle for Bougainville would soon be over.

The 75 MM howitzer, irreverently called “peashooter,” was the smallest of the artillery inventory of the United States. It unleashed a 24 pound projectile a little less than three inches in diameter. A high explosive shell had an effective killing radius of about 30 yards and left a crater some 60 inches wide by 36 inches deep. Their rate of fire was 20 rounds per minute up to a maximum range of nine thousand yards. By elevating their short muzzles, they could arch shells set to burst several feet above the ground spraying open slit trenches and foxholes with hot and razor sharp buckshot. A battery of four howitzers fixed in a parallel position took 120 yards and could lay a field of fire on unseen targets over a mile away with deadly accuracy. The 75 could “walk” a barrage by increments of 50 or more yards forward and/or backward. There were four to a battery and 12 to a battalion capable of massing concentrated fire on a single target with extreme accuracy. It was a magnificent weapon the Japanese held in great respect and Clifton Cormier’s “Holy Grail.”

One night while attending to a malfunctioning howitzer, a sleepy gunner inadvertently jerked the lanyard and fired the weapon. It failed to behave properly requiring on-the-spot maintenance. The gun would not recoil (the recoil plug blew out). Clifton’s head was perilously close to the muzzle and then fired causing a ring in his ear. He would have to live with Tinnitus in his right ear-drum the rest of his life.

Clifton remembers best the volcano eruption of Mount Bagano belching white smoke and steam several miles away but clearly visible. The ground shook and knocked him off his feet several times for a couple of minutes. Mother Nature shows no favoritism, not even in times of war. Both the Japanese and the Marines had to bow to her will.

The jungle fighting on this island was fierce. The young Clifton would soon see the value of training. In time the Third Marine Division was replaced by the Army's American Division and a low-level guerrilla scenario continued. Many isolated pockets of Japanese resistance on remote islands lasted to the end of the war and beyond. Some would walk out of the jungles as late as the 1960s exposing bare the soldiers of Nippon's tenacious nature of allegiance to one's Emperor. It was dishonorable and unthinkable to surrender. The Japanese paid dearly for this mindset.

The Third Marine Division became a unit of experienced combat veterans taking rank with the first two. It was an entirely different division that returned to Guadalcanal for a little rest and re-grouping. The WWII Marine never knew "rest and recuperation." Bougainville gave it the real meaning of jungle warfare and fighting an unseen enemy. They now knew they could beat him on his own ground and on his own terms. Clifton felt confident in his weapons and the men that operated them. The officers and enlisted ranks of the division were now combat-wise, having learned from their mistakes and proud of their triumphs. There were some command changes made within the division. Losses were replaced and weapons updated to the new M-1 Garand rifle.

In his book *A Post Card From Joseph*, Clifton describes what life in war was like in the Solomon Island chain of the South Pacific.

In film and print, the South Sea Islands were portrayed as idyllic tropical paradises. Here, the brown-skinned beauties in grass skirts were nowhere to be seen. The dark skin of the Solomon Islands natives exuded a bluish sheen and bore the features of fierce Aborigines. It was believed that headhunting was still practiced among tribes in the remote islands. The newcomers would soon learn that just beyond the graceful coconut palms, sandy beaches, and languid lagoons lay an impenetrable, hostile jungle. Stinging mosquitoes were not only a nuisance but carriers of debilitating malaria and dengue fever. Leeches clung to skin and when pried off--the burning end of a cigarette being the preferred way---left ugly red welts that quickly festered into sores if not treated. Insects of every description crawled over exposed bodies, and the sweat-soaked heavy twill of the marine utilities chafed tender skin. The equatorial sun bore down relentlessly and

blistered exposed faces and limbs. Even the kunai grass was something to avoid. Its sharp blades could slash through exposed skin areas like a razor. The kunai grass vanished at the edge of the dark towering wall of rain forest that shut off the sunlight. Thorny vines that reached for sunlight high among giant trees raked at anything that moved on the ground. Only with a machete could a man slash his way through the dense underbrush. At any time, a firm footing could give way to spongy ground where the mud sucked the shoes off one's feet if not tightly laced. It was difficult to imagine anyone surviving for months in that harsh environment while ducking bullets, shells and hand grenades from a hidden enemy.³

The same misery also existed for the Japanese a hundred fold.

The Solomon Islands, Bougainville included, are located in one of the worlds most geographically remote regions where the jungle itself can become a killer. Tribal warfare was common and very violent. The military terrain was difficult and crowded. Combat was almost at point blank range. Supply was a nightmare and supplies keep armies alive. Every thing seemed to move at a snails pace. There were no roads, only trails, sometimes impassable. Heat, rain, and humidity made the body feel sticky. Saturated air created a giant steam room. One didn't get any fresh air at all. Giant trees of all descriptions and shapes disallowed the flow of winds. The rain and mud were despised and hated. The heat never went away and dead corpses would decay in places difficult to access. The relentless assault of the sun made life distasteful. One was never truly dry or clean. Bougainville was the closest thing to a living green hell. The impact of the terrain and the weather along with an unfriendly jungle created some of the harshest conditions ever faced by a modern land army in the history of warfare. The worse was ahead for Clifton Cormier.

The Gilberts fell, then the Marshalls. MacArthur was "leapfrogging" up the coast of New Guinea towards the Philippines in quest of a vow, and Rogers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma* was the reigning smash hit on Broadway. It was mid-1944 and Nimitz had his eyes set on the Mariana

³ Clifton Cormier *A Postcard From Joseph*. New York, NY: Vantage Press, Inc., 2002, pg. 102.

Islands in the Central Pacific---the “crossroads”---Saipan, Tinian, and a peanut shaped island called Guam! In two and a half years America, with the help of Australia and New Zealand, had re-claimed half of the Pacific Ocean.

The recapture of these islands was essential to American planning in order to build bases housing the new long-range B-29 bombers capable of reaching Japan and returning on a single tank of fuel. A landing on Guam’s beaches was scheduled for June 18th but had to be delayed until July 21st. The fighting on Saipan was stronger than expected and the Japanese deployed what was left of its fleet to the area in hopes of spoiling American intentions. A U.S. submarine discovered the Japanese fleet and radioed its position back to “Bull” Halsey resulting in what was to be called “The Great Mariana’s Turkey Shoot.” In short, the battle broke the back of the Imperial Japanese Navy sending it to oblivion to rest at the bottom of the sea. After Saipan fell, Prime Minister Tojo resigned, the Navy never attempted anything so bold and the infamous “Divine Wind” (*kamikaze*) made its appearance. It was the beginning of the end.

Guam is the largest of the Mariana Islands. Its beaches were narrow and heavily forested in the highlands to the North while flat plains lie in the East. Prior to Pearl Harbor little attention was given to its defense. Japan easily seized it the day after the “hit” at Pearl. The re-conquest was necessary for the construction of airfields for the legions of B-29’s that were to come. Three airstrips would be built. The Third Amphibious Corps, of which Clifton’s Third Marine Division was part, along with the 1st Marine Provisional Brigade and the Army’s 77th Division landed abreast on two beaches, Asan and Agat, on the western side of the large island. It took 17 days of naval and air bombardment to shatter the 18,000 Japanese Army and Naval troops garrisoned there. As on Saipan, they resisted with intensified fanaticism. Two very large scale “*banzai*”

attacks failed. Almost the entire Japanese garrison had been killed en' mass. Their defensive framework was stubborn. Asking for no quarter, they fought to the death. Much of the fighting took place in heavy scrub and forest growth. Army and Marine casualties numbered over 7,700. The closer we got to Japan the harder they fought and the higher the casualty numbers soared. The fighting became much more intensified and vicious and the wounded were much harder to repair

Cormier tells us "On July 24th, three days after the landing, the Japs counter-attacked in a wild, drunken banzai charge exploiting a hole in the lines of the 1st battalion, 21st. The Marine artillery blazed all through the night. At one point, the telephone man in the battalion fire direction center began relaying fire commands to Easy Battery in a whisper. He was surrounded by Japs. They had swarmed all the way to the artillery command post located in a ravine just ahead of the firing batteries. Some had even reached the division hospital. Wounded marines grabbed rifles and left their sick beds to stop the onslaught. Many of the Japs blew themselves up with satchel charges and grenades. In the aftermath, it was estimated that 3,200 enemy had died in the front lines and 300 in the rear areas."⁴

This attack was the brainchild of Colonel Tsunetaro Suenaga, commander of the Japanese 38th Regiment of their 29th Division. The man felt optimistic about the attack thinking that his outfit could drive the marines back into the sea not too far away. It didn't work, but had it been successful they would have regained the Agat beach area and indeed push the marines back into sea. This incident on that night would become one of the largest and heaviest banzai charges of the Pacific War. A similar one happened on Saipan a few short weeks before. The Japanese threw in their wounded and the sick along with innocent civilians armed only with sticks as spears. It was a blood letting affair.

⁴ *ibid. pps .132-133.*

By the 10th of August all organized resistance on Guam had ended. The Japanese had lost its central command. “They starved, died of dysentery and became too weak to flee, and then blew themselves up with the one precious grenade which they saved to take their own lives.”⁵ “We are continuing a desperate battle. We have only our brave hands to fight with. The holding of Guam has become hopeless. Our souls will defend the island to the very end. I am overwhelmed with sorrow for the families of the many officers and men. I pray for the prosperity of the Empire.”⁶ It took 21 days to recapture Guam. The cost was horrendous. More than 8,500 Japanese soldiers and sailors were killed or captured on Guam in August of 1944 to the end of the war a year later. Some never surrendered and would walk out of the mountains and jungles long after the war was over.

Clifton thought of the enemy as enigmatic. So did a lot of others. Their battlefield behavior stupefied those who fought them. Many a marine were horrified by Japanese willingness to affect an open frontal charge in such a reckless manner against overwhelming fire power. Banzai attacks accomplished nothing but needless and mindless death in quantity. It was not uncommon to see heaps of bodies strewn all over the ground in the hot open sun drawing flies and maggots not conducive to good health and sanitation. The smell of decaying human flesh was overpowering that seem to stick to clothing, skin, and even hair. Many were buried in mass graves and some were never found. When prisoners did surrender, they were searched producing only condoms from

⁵Cyril J. O’Brien. *Liberation: Marines in the recapture of Guam*. Marine Corps Historical Center. World War II Commemorative Series. Washington , D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1994, pg. 43.

⁶ *ibid.* Japanese General Obata’s final message to the Emperor. pg.43.

their pockets. Such is the nature of war. War is realism personified and shrinks to insignificance all efforts of human endeavor.

Within a short time, waves of Curtis LeMay's B-29's were heading for a myriad of "juicy" targets in Japan from airfields recently constructed on Saipan, Tinian, and Guam. The 1st Marine Division had finished a very bitter battle at an island called Peleliu in the Palau Island Group. It is at Peleliu where the Japanese changed their defensive tactics and switched from a banzai mind-set to a defense in-depth posture (a sophisticated come-and-get-us). They stayed entrenched in their pillboxes, bunkers and caves with a stubborn, no surrender type of resistance. The only way they could be dislodged was by sealing them with close combat tactics and burning them out with the dreaded napalm chemical. They also started using their small knee mortars in profusion and heavier spigot motors up to 320 millimeters delivering a 550-pound projectile. The marines had never had to deal with this before. Casualties increased a hundred-fold. As we got closer to Japan, the Pacific War was getting uglier and meaner. The blood letting would continue.

The trip by air from Tinian to and from Japan was over 3,000 air miles. If one draws a straight line with a ruler from the Mariana's to Japan it doesn't take long to see that that line passes almost directly over a little tiny fly-speck of land-mass located in the middle of nowhere. IWO JIMA! (Sulfur Island). Japanese based aircraft from Iwo would attack our formations going and coming (not to mention time over target). The costs mounted in aircrews and aircraft. Tactics demanded its elimination.

Without a doubt Iwo Jima would become one of the most shamelessly brutal battles of World War Two. It is inconceivable to understand how so much violence can occur in so restricted a space (about three times the size of Central Park in New York City---7.5

square miles). “Iwo Jima is forever seared in my mind. Out of Bougainville and Guam, I remember Iwo the best. I will bring its memory with me to my grave.”⁷

Iwo was placed center stage by the logistics and happenstance of strategy. There was no chance to avoid or bypass the island. Only by brutal frontal assault from the sea could the issue be solved and eventually become the classic textbook amphibious assault envisioned by the Marine Corps some 20 years earlier. Iwo’s landscape looked like something out of an Edgar Allen Poe novel. There were no rain forests or lush tropical growth with their sugar white beaches and swaying palm trees or coral reefs with its blue green waters and sleepy lagoons. Iwo’s black volcanic sand looked like an alien lunar landscape deserted, haunted, barren and devoid of beauty. Ideal for killing. There were sulfur pits that smelled like rotten eggs, no natural water springs, and an extinct volcano looming much like a sinister monster wanton of sacrifice. Even birds avoided it. In 1945 Iwo Jima was a crucial and important target absolutely essential and necessary to scheme of the Pacific War. Indeed it was Imperial Japan’s front door. Arguments to circumvent its capture didn’t hold up.

Navy carrier planes and long-range Army Air Corps bombers bombed and plastered the island for months (15,000 tons of explosives and bombs of some kind). Ironically, Iwo Jima seemed to thrive and prosper from all of this destruction and took on a more grotesque, eerie look. Reconnaissance photos showed no Japanese activity on top of Iwo, they were under it well protected and hidden.

From the air Iwo looks like a pork chop. Air photos showed nearly five thousand craters of one square mile. By the day of the invasion nothing but rubble remained in the north affording excellent hiding cover for the Japanese. Coarse black volcanic sand

⁷ Clifton Cormier quoted to the author in a private telephone conversation Friday, February 11, 2005

graced the planned invasion beaches. Mount Suribachi yama rises to 556 feet on its southern tip. Its mustard brown slopes looked impregnable. To the north a rock-strewn plateau rising to about 382 feet exhibited a landscape of rocks, gorges, and ridges. “Gnarled bushes and stunted trees struggled to survive in the barren environment.”⁸ Many of the Japanese soldiers garrisoned there didn’t like it but after years of tropical service, the Third Marine Division welcomed the change in weather. It was Iwo’s winter. Roughly in the 40’s.

The island’s command rested in the arms of Lt. Gen. Tadamichi Kuribayashi, a man sculptured by the ancient military mold. Kuribayashi was hand-picked by the Emperor himself. A faithful husband, loyal father and a professional soldier of the highest order. “Five generations of his ancestors had served in the armies of six emperors, and he carried the tradition with pride and zealous dedication.”⁹ He was a tough disciplinarian and totally committed to the *Code of Bushido* and his Emperor. Kuribayashi was a Twentieth Century samurai warrior highly motivated in fighting to the death if necessary but not of the *banzai* mentality. He wanted a ten to one death ratio. His orders were very clear. Iwo must be defended to the death. Its importance to Japan was more important than its size and it was armed to the teeth and ready. Clifton Cormier would feel the sting of its whip.

On February 19, 1945 the 4th and 5th Marine Divisions landed abreast on the ugly black beaches of Iwo Jima. The Third Division was kept in reserve. The landing was unopposed at first. Waves of amtracks carried thousands of marines from their troop ships to shore line. When the beaches became cluttered, men and machines mired in the

⁸ Clifton Cormier. *A Postcard From Joseph*. *Ibid*. Pg. 145.

⁹ Bill D. Ross. *Iwo Jima. Legacy of Valor*. New York: Random House. 1985-1986, pg.19.

thick sand, Kuriabshay's guns opened up with a vengeance and the beaches became killing grounds. Confusion and devastation created chaos on the crowded beach. From the deck of the *Mormacport*, Clifton clearly remembers as he watched the carnage through a pair of high powered binoculars: "Suddenly the beach erupted into a holocaust. Shells and rockets rained down on the assault waves. Bodies of marines were flung upwards like rag dolls by the explosions. For what seemed like an eternity, the assault troops were trapped by the unrelenting rain of iron and steel. By midmorning, eight assault battalions were on the beach, about 8,000 men."¹⁰ Higgins boats, water buffalos, and larger landing craft waited for their turn to head shoreward loaded with reinforcements, supplies, ammunition, trucks, tanks, cranes, badly needed medical supplies, bulldozers, artillery, fuel, fresh water and food enjoined in the landing through a choppy and rough sea. In less than half a day, the beaches became a huge log jam and had to be closed. The marines were being cut to pieces but slowly moving forward. Finally some of the tanks made it to shore and were immediately put in support of the infantry and by mid afternoon things improved a little. Bodies of dead marines were everywhere; a backlog of wounded awaited evacuation amidst a Sahara of smoldering wreckage and burning debris in a bedlam of destruction.

The situation looked hopeless but by dusk the Fifth Marine Division had severed the neck of the island and isolated Suribachi from Japanese command and control. Two days later a flag would be hoisted atop the summit followed by another larger one. The first flag created quite a cauldron of excitement and lifted the morale of those who saw it. It was electric. The second went unnoticed. Clifton didn't see it. Cormier's division was deployed in the middle of the line (between the 4th and 5th) where he replaced a forward observer (spotter) for his artillery battalion.

¹⁰ Clifton Cormier. *A Postcard From Joseph*. Ibid. pg.146

His weapons were a pair of high powered field glasses, a grid map, compass and a field telephone connected to a fire direction center thousands of yards back by a single wire often cut by tank treads or explosives.

Casualties were mounting, up to thirty-five percent in some units. An average of three men per minute was being hit. On the third day Clifton's outfit, the 21st Regiment of the floating reserve, was deployed into the battle and plugged between the other two divisions in the dead center of the island. Suribachi would be at his back the entire time. The real main event for the battle for Iwo Jima was about to play out. The northern part of the island was the main defense belt. Hundreds of Japanese bunkers, pillboxes, spider holes and trenches were well concealed. Countless caves hidden from view came alive. There was a Japanese under every rock and groups in ravines and gullies. The only way to destroy them was with a flanking assault and either burning them out with napalm or sealing them by dynamite charges. Tanks and artillery fired almost at point blank elevation. Once their concealments were thought to be neutralized, marines would advance only to find live fire coming from their backs by the very same cave or bunker they thought was destroyed. Certain areas nicknamed by the marines; the "Meat Grinder," "Turkey Knob," "Cushman's pocket," the "Amphitheater," "Death Valley," "Nishi Ridge" and Kitano Point have all emblazoned themselves into the Corp's bitter memory. Gains were measured in yards and feet. Inch by bloody inch, the Japanese fought until declared secure by Nimitz. There were still 8,000 Japs alive and well fighting by the most stubborn means possible, but Kuribayashi was running out of men and ammunition. Thirty-six days later he would die. Casualty figures were reaching unusually large proportions. Roosevelt cringed when he learned of them. Day by day, Clifton's artillery fired on the enemy with relentless effort. Not

all the hits scored kills. Move in, set up, load, triangulate the target, fire then reload and fire again until he reached the north end of the island and no more viable targets.

“You wonder about the actual destruction of all our fire power. Well it’s hard to say since there was nothing to destroy on the surface. The Japanese were underground. Their mortars were concealed below ground level. Their heavy coastal defense guns were more difficult to hide and therefore easily destroyed by our ships. We dug a lot of craters with our shells.”¹¹ In time Clifton’s battery ran out of targets. His guns saved a lot of marines. The horrible fighting was dwindling down. Men were suffering from a term popularized by Hollywood as “shell shock.”¹¹ The victory was cheerless and very little consolation to a lot of wives, mothers, fathers, and sweethearts back home.

“While 5,885 marines and 433 navy men died seizing the island and 17,272 were wounded, they had saved the lives of 24,761 airmen. It was a stretch of figures which assumed that every crewmember of the 2,251 Superfortresses that made emergency landings on the island would otherwise have perished.”¹² Iwo Jima was an amphibious epic worth the horrible cost in lives it took to remove it from Japanese possession. The island was in the right strategic location at the right time. Because of its size a lot of brutal violence occurred that is un-imaginable by today’s standards. Everybody has heard of Iwo Jima. One of the most famous pictures in photographic history was taken there that has since become synonymous with the mystique of the Marine Corps.

The generation of Marines that fought World War Two had been molded by the deprivations of the Depression. Its harsh realities made them labor intensive and appreciative of basic

11. Clifton Cormier. *A Postcard From Joseph*. Ibid. pg 162

12. Clifton Cormier. Quoted in an E-mail dated August 8, 2004, Thursday 06:57:06 EDT.

necessities that we take for granted today. Despite its woes, these young men were the best educated generation of that era. They cultivated skills that became useful in war. Many teenagers of that era knew how to fix machinery and were clever with the tools to fix them. They repaired old cars, maintained farm tractors, hand made crystal radios, mowed their own lawns. They didn't hire someone to do something they could do themselves. They were not wasteful and wisely spent what little money they had. They were not afraid to get their hands dirty nor afraid to "clean their own toilets." Somehow necessity produced a "can do" attitude. They went off to war, won it, came home and built cooperate America to what it is today. Tom Brokaw was right; they were the greatest generation and by far the toughest. Many of them volunteered for the Marine Corps before the draft was set into place and even after. They wanted some "say-so" and control of their own destinies. They were self-starters and street wise but lived a simple life and this is exactly what the Marine Corps wanted. Above all, these young men of Iwo Jima were aggressive when they had to be. They could do anything when called upon to do so, the impossible just took a little longer. The enemy was tenacious, defiant, and fought with a fanatical mind-set throughout the war. Both were at their best on Iwo Jima. For thirty-six days the Japanese resisted these young seventeen, eighteen and nineteen year olds with an unyielding tenacity beyond belief and yet these young marines found a way to kill and dislodge him. In time Iwo Jima would compare with the carnage of Shiloh, Antietam, and Gettysburg of the previous century all because the job simply fell to that generation. It was one of the bloodiest battles in the history of the United States Marine Corps and Clifton Cormier was squarely in the middle...literally!

“The Japs died horribly. Flame throwers roasted them in their caves and bunkers, or they were sealed in by our engineer troops with large charges of TNT and left to suffocate. Those

who ran out of their caves were cut down mercilessly by small arms and automatic weapons. Many were safe for the time being in huge caves deep underground but their food and drinking water would soon give out. In that capacity I probably came very close to the Japs but they were always underground or in caves. But I was close enough to hear them jabbering and at night I could hear them shouting 'Mah-leen you die.' The usual response from our grunts in their foxholes was 'F—k you Jap.' ”¹³ They just did not surrender. They fought to the death taking as many marines as they could with them. Such was the battlefield behavior of the Japanese soldier throughout the entire Pacific War. Such was the battlefield behavior of both sides in the Pacific War. Both were well trained, young, and serious about fighting for their country. In retrospect one has to admire and respect both of them through their merits. One was born of a democracy the other born into a semi-feudal society that could not equal itself with industrialized warfare. Perhaps it was the racial ethnicity between the two that fostered hate over tolerance. It's all academic now for all Clifton Cormier ever wanted was travel and adventure away from the crawfish ponds of Lake Arthur, Louisiana. Bougainville, Guam and especially Iwo Jima gave him more than a handful.

After Iwo, Clifton returned states side and married Dorothy Elizabeth Carr on July 23, 1945. The marriage produced one child; Leslie. He remained on in the Corps and five years later found himself fighting Communist aggression in Korea. He retired a captain, attended the University of Florida majoring in journalism and for the next 20 years worked as an investigative reporter for *The Gainesville Sun*. He resides in Gainesville, Florida.

The United States Marines encountered many rivals in its history. By far, Japan was the greatest. Its army, navy and air forces were formidable and well trained. Clifton Cormier and others like him brought the fight to the enemy, faced him and killed him. There was no other

¹³ Clifton Cormier. Quoted from a private letter not of his book dated January 26, 2005

option. He was part of a fighting force that does not believe in failure. All things that seem difficult are made possible. The impossible takes a little longer. Like most of the young men of his generation, there was a job to be done and it fell to them to get this job done. Once accomplished, the World War Two Veteran returned home, went back to school and in the only way they knew how, got the job done and built cooperate America to what it is today. Fifty to a hundred years from now battles like Bougainville, Guam, and Iwo Jima will become footnotes in America's military history books, and people like Hitler, Tojo, and Mussolini will be discarded away in the trash cans of history. However, the greatest war of the Twentieth Century will be immortalized forever. The Japanese Army was fatalistic and unflinching and fought with courage beyond all limits. Its ideology allowed nothing else. Clifton Cormier, along with the brotherhood of his beloved Marine Corps, did his small share of achieving a victory that brought peace to the Pacific. American ideology allowed nothing else, for the quickest way back home was straight ahead. This was the benchmark of the United States Marine. Clifton Cormier's Pacific War was an intense emotion better left somewhere between memory and oblivion but he somehow can't seem to find a proper way to do so.

Chapter Two

Hiroo Onoda was born in 1922 in the town of Kainan, Wakayama Prefecture. The date is unknown as the Japanese consider the date of conception as the official date of birth and not the actual date of birth itself. He was the fifth of seven children, five boys and two girls. There was a third son named Yoshio that died in childhood. His emperor, Hirohito, grandson of the great Emperor Meiji (1867-1912), was twenty-one years old and would ascend to the throne four years later. Both were raised in a cauldron of intense imperialism brewing in Japan's political culture. In time this imperialistic mind-set would become Japan's albatross.

Onoda enjoyed his young school years and acquired an enchantment with *kendo*, a Japanese style of fencing. The sport kept him interested and active in school. He was a short man, only five feet tall, and felt disadvantaged with his peers. He completed middle school and high school then in 1939 decided to take on a job specializing in lacquer ware with a local company named Tajima Yoko. He was seventeen and did not want to stay home living off of his parents. His ambition was to go to the company branch office in Hankow (now Wuhan) in Central China. Because of China's size, Onoda surmised there would be more opportunity for advancement available to him. His second oldest brother Tadao, with whom he was very close, was stationed near Hankow so distance between the two was close.

He enjoyed dancing and singing to blues and tangos along with some of the other forms of western entertainment now coming popular in Asia: dance music, movies, magazines, phonographs (he owned an electric Victrola), radios and chewing gum. Unfortunately, state-of-the-art battleships, tanks, aircraft and machine guns were coming of age also. He remained in Hankow for some two years and liked China hoping one day to start his own business there. In the meantime he grew some two or three inches in China and embraced other Western habits like

smoking, drinking, and women. He began to learn the Chinese language but was not fluent.

“Although I drank a little, I smoked about twenty cigarettes a day, and when I played mahjong all night long, as I sometimes did, I smoked fifty or more. My countrymen all said that I was studying up on Chinese to make time with the Chinese girls. My Chinese rarely helped much when I was talking to them.”¹ On the whole, life in China seemed to agree with him.

In late December 1941 war broke out between the United States and Japan. Dance halls were closed and he returned to Wakayama when in May of 1942 he was called up for his army physical. As time progressed he was assigned to the Two Hundred Eighteenth Infantry Regiment and sent to cold region of Nan-ch'ang where he continued to grow to five feet four inches and increased his weight to 132 pounds. He was not a big man. In January of 1944 Onoda was sent to the Reserve Officer's Training School in Japan and trained in modern warfare and tactics. On August 1st he completed his training and was ready for a real assignment. The situation in the Pacific was getting serious. The Mariana's fell, what was left of the mighty Imperial Navy's fleet was resting at the bottom of the Pacific, Tojo resigned as prime minister and MacArthur's forces were fast approaching the Philippines in the South Pacific. The Japanese people would soon feel the impact of America's new long range B-29's in the daily comings and goings of their lives. They no longer felt safe despite what their leaders were telling them. Things were not good and Japanese children were singing a popular song about Iwo Jima. It was believed this island would not fall into American hands. Onoda said his last good byes to his family and was ordered to the military intelligence school at Futamata to learn things about secret warfare. It would be the single most important moment that would affect the rest of his life.

Here he learned the art of stealth, sniping, spying and wire tapping. He would observe the enemy and report its intentions to his superiors. Above all he would learn how to stay alive and

¹Hiroo Onoda. *No Surrender: My Thirty Thirty-Year War*. Tokyo: Kodansha International, Ltd., 1974, Pg. 20.

survive in a hostile environment which was totally polarized to the idea of all-out banzai attacks. He was to gather as much information as he could, make necessary maps and gather data that related to military needs. The course at Futamata was originally one full year then reduced to six months and reduced even more to three months of jammed-packed training.

Onoda tells us: “I began to understand the basic differences between open warfare and secret warfare. What we were learning at Futamata was the exact opposite of what we had been taught before. We had to accustom ourselves to a whole new concept of war. The aim was to stay alive and continue to fight as guerrillas as long as possible, even if this entailed conduct normally considered disgraceful. This kind of training and this kind of warfare seemed to suite my personality. It was permissible to be taken prisoner and not be held liable for surrendering. We could give the enemy false information. In secret warfare there is integrity.”² Hideki Tojo’s *Instructions for the Military* had no qualifications for Onoda. Stay alive and fight back for the glory of the emperor. It was mainstream belief at the time if a prisoner returned home he was subject to a court martial and a possible death penalty. He was thoroughly ostracized by others that he might as well have been dead. Soldiers were expected to fight to the death and not disgrace himself to his family and community by capitulating. There is honor in death. One does not uselessly waste away in a prison camp. This would not be Onoda’s lot. He had no plans of dying and would engage in his secret war as long as he was able. There is honor in living and he felt himself ordained to do so.

The Japanese soldier inherited a military culture programmed into him since birth. They called it a “fighting spirit” of which obedience is the glue of that belief. It was a psychology of submission to those appointed above. He endured hunger, cold, heat, and other deprivations above and beyond normal limits. He possessed a willingness to die if necessary, an attribute

² Hiroo Onoda. *Ibid*, pps. 32-34.

inherent in the samurai ethic for more than a thousand years and their “take” on patriotism. Anyone not afraid of death was not afraid of anything. Battles must be fought to the bitter end and to the last man. Surrender is unthinkable, perhaps an individual characteristic more than a collective submission to the larger group. When Japan’s resources began to wane, the only thing left was a willingness to stand alone and die. This was “obedience” in the highest order and it was uncompromising. Despite his job description, Onoda was from that mold.

The Philippine islands constitutes one of the largest archipelagos in the world spanning an area over 1,150 miles from north to south and about seven hundred miles across. There are some 7,083 islands and islets comprising 114,400 square miles of land mass about the size of Arizona. Luzon and Mindanao occupy over two-thirds of the land area. Some of the out-lying islands are so small they are not identified on maps. The islands are replete with dense jungles, thick grasslands and mountains that run the length of the islands. Most of the islands receive over seventy inches of rainfall annually with some areas receiving over two-hundred. By January of 1945 almost all of the large islands were occupied by thousands of Japanese soldiers. It is on one of these small islands that Onoda would find his destiny. Lubang is located a few short miles west of the southern tip of Luzon and roughly twenty miles north/northwest of the northern tip of Mindoro. “Lubang is a long narrow island, about six miles from north to south and eighteen miles from east to west. When I arrived there, the military force included the Lubang Garrison from the Three Hundred Fifty-Seventh Independent Regiment under the command of Second Lieutenant Shigenori Hayakawa.”³ There were other units there also totaling a little over 200, hardly enough to withstand a major landing, hardly enough to warrant a landing. Upon his arrival his orders instructed him and the garrison to engage the enemy in guerrilla warfare as long as possible. Lt. General Akira Muto, Chief of staff of the Japanese Fourteenth Army Area

³ Onoda, Hiroo. *Ibid*, pg.50.

told him “the war is not going well at the moment. It is urgent that you exert every effort to carry out your orders. Understand that I mean it!”⁴ He was placed under the direct command of Major Takahashi who was a little less formal and more understanding of Onoda’s mission. The major saw to his needs then ordered him to Lubang.

“You are absolutely forbidden to die by your own hands. It may take three years, but whatever happens, we’ll come back for you. Under no circumstances are you to give up your life voluntarily. So long as you have one soldier, you are to continue to lead him.”⁵ Onoda found his words comforting, assuring, and entirely believable. Little did he realize at the time what a profound influence these words would have on his life.

On February 1st, 1945 a large fleet with thousands of American army soldiers invaded Luzon. Onoda had spotted this fleet a few days earlier and radioed its position and direction. Lubang was temporarily by-passed but on February 28th a landing party of battalion strength landed on the small island. Pre-landing bombardment from ships off shore and aircraft above plastered Lubang killing many of its defenders. Onoda was trapped and holding on for dear life. The battle lasted four days. Defense of the island collapsed in early March, 1945. In reality the fight was nothing more than a mopping-up operation to flush the Japanese out and off the island. Mopping-up is a term used to describe a pacification attempt to rid a particular area of any last hold-outs. You either captured them or killed them then moved on to the next stubborn hold-out and did the same thing. One by one the officers and men were liquidated in the only way jungle fighting would allow: attrition. Onoda’s training skills could not come into play as he was busy trying to stay alive and coming to grips with abject fear. Fear was motivation that pushed him so hard. Fear also pushed Cormier. War easily supplies lots of fear.

⁴ Hiroo Onoda. *Ibid* pg. 44

⁵ Hiroo Onoda. *ibid*, pg.44

Many of the American soldiers killed or captured most of its defenders. Some committed ritual suicide. It is not known how many. Then suddenly the war left and went to other places. Iwo Jima, Okinawa, Hiroshima and Nagasaki went unnoticed. So did Japan's final surrender. It is doubtful Onoda was aware of the atrocities committed by either army.

On January of 1946 only four Japanese soldiers remained on Lubang. Onoda was one of them. Private First Class Yuichi Akatsu surrendered in 1949, Corporal Shoichi Shimada was killed in a skirmish in 1954, and Private First Class Kinshichi Kozuka was killed in 1972. Occasional fire-fights broke out with the local police and villagers. For many years he always felt that he would be rescued and relieved of his duties. It never happened. Soon he was alone. His training kicked in and he soon began his secret war with an enemy force that was not there. He continued to collect information on enemy troop movements (the local police and villagers) and would report this data to his rescuers. For thirty years he remained on that little island fighting a delusional war that was over. To his way of thinking the Co-Prosperity Sphere envisioned by Japan could not fail. Japan is incapable of defeat. Japan would never willingly surrender and neither would he unless ordered to do so. In 1959 the Japanese Government declared him dead but kept receiving word that fighting of some kind continued in the jungles of Lubang. Search parties came to look for him; leaflets were dropped; pleas were ignored; he never exposed his positions. He became a master of stealth and concealment for he was in an endless search for food and fresh water. He stole and pilfered at night while everyone was asleep. He would not abandon his training and his original orders. To do so meant abandoning his emperor. He ignored micro-phoned pleas from his own father dismissing it as a trick of American treachery. Whatever held him there was strong enough to take hold of his tenacious mind and spirit keeping him alive for such a long period of time as an Asian hermit. It became a

drama of survival and the will to live. His main staple was bananas and coconuts with an occasional cow he stole while grazing. He got by on three cows a year boiling the meat for preservation. Somehow the natives and villagers understood this and just looked the other way. He was both their pest and hero. He had to steal to eat and survive to live. To his way of thinking, his mission was not yet completed. He reckoned, incorrectly, that China was now a communist country in league with Japan to co-rule Asia and that the war was being fought somewhere against the Americans and other nations of the west.

He found old discarded newspapers between 1945 and 1959 that spoke nothing of the war. It was his belief that the war would last a hundred years and in time the Japanese Army would return to rescue and relieve him. He would follow only the orders of the man that assigned him to Lubang...no one else. Only Major Takahashi had the emperor's authority to do this. Five years turned into ten, then ten to twenty, twenty five. Dodging out of sight from the islanders taking great care to steer from them. He was never seen. Workers came into the jungle to work on local projects and intentionally left him sacks of rice and fish. Many of his food needs were supplied by an admiring public. The population numbered about twelve thousand, mostly farmers and fisherman, busy in the daily comings and goings of the own lives raising and supporting their families allowing no time to look for a vagrant. They did not approve of his thievery but left him alone in the world he had made for himself.

He never harmed a child. When they grew up and left, they took with them a real live folk hero as a memory. Onoda never stayed in one place too long. He had a circuit that kept him on the move from one place to another. Sometimes he carried his rifle and extra ammunition, sometimes he left it hidden in places known only to him. He became a good huntsman and

fisherman but only at a time and place devoid of people. In his mind he was still at war for his emperor and the Co-Prosperity Sphere was alive and well.

He improvised his clothing, but in time they were reduced to a basic necessity. “Midnight requisitioning” was the only way to replenish necessities from the islanders. He was able to sustain his uniform and rifle the entire time and would one day surrender as a full dressed Imperial Soldier of Japan, though it was a little ragged and half rotted from many rainy seasons. His number one enemies were ants and rats. The mountains of Luban seemed to be giant anthills. They could sting like a bee. There were also great swarms of bees that always threaten attacks. He was bitten several times by centipedes causing fevers. He even had to improvise methods of reducing his fevers by boiling coconut milk mixed with herbs.

In 1965 Onoda acquired a transistor radio with batteries and spares. Batteries never seemed to be a problem. He could pick up Peiking and began to get news from the outside world. The world had changed. So did Japan both of which he was totally unaware. Newspaper articles that said one thing were misinterpreted into something else. Reality and ideals were polarized in his mind. Yankee propaganda will have one believe in any thing. The calendar he followed was happenstance in his mind but the radio was a little more consistent. Still, he refused to believe anything related to military affairs and foreign affairs as “tricky words” and dismissed them as half lies and deflection of truths even though the evidence of massive conflict had been absent too long. Somehow a growing realization of uselessness would occupy his thoughts that simply would not go away. The islanders called him the “mountain bandit,” “the king of the mountain,” or the “mountain devil” for he was always on the look for supplies. One day he stole some tin from a roof blown off part of a school house by a typhoon in a nearby village and made himself a hut. He even forced himself at gunpoint into a house stealing a number of necessary things from

the terrified family that lived there. No one was hurt but his bounty was not sufficient. Stealing was a way of life for him. He had no choice but felt justified by the secret war he believed himself to be fighting. He saw aircraft with no propellers, a radar site of the Philippine Air Force that amazed him, passing ships with colors unrecognizable, a thing called a helicopter with an unusual blade on top and the rear, and weapons that acted more powerful than his own. Moving pictures in a box amazed him. Even the telephone looked un-recognizable. He began to realize the world was passing him by.

Truths seemed doctored; facts were misnamed; Japan and America must still be at war somewhere in the Pacific and the emperor still demanded loyalty. Many attempts were made by parties to persuade him to surrender. Their message was the same---the war is over, Japan has lost and has surrendered. Come home! Some of these parties even used former Japanese soldiers. Good Japanese soldiers do not willingly surrender so there must be no qualification in the plea. All attempts were unsuccessful and remained so for the entire thirty years. Was Onoda in a state of obsessive denial? Had he lost his mind? Was there any integrity left to his determination? Or was he a faithful Japanese soldier obeying his orders? The correct answer is probably a “yes” to all or part of these questions. One thing is clear. He had no intention of surrendering unless ordered to do so by proper authority. Orders from higher up officially releasing him from his post were the glue that kept him going for so long a time. Many search parties accompanied by armed Philippine soldiers, he interpreted as the enemy, kept him concealed from view. They never left him a field telephone so he couldn’t communicate his intentions. Loudspeaker pleas didn’t work. He was prepared to hold his island domain twenty more years if necessary. Onoda surmised: “Surely the war between America and the East Asia Co-Prosperity League was continuing, and as long as it continued, I could not neglect my duties

for a single day. Until some new secret orders arrived I intended to fight to preserve the territory I was occupying.”⁶

The beginning of the end for Onoda’s drama in Lubang began in February of 1974. A young tourist by the name of Norio Suzuki was enamored of the story going on in the Philippines, so he set out one day determined to bring this lone Japanese soldier back home. Contacting his old commanding officer Major Taniguchi, who was now a book dealer in Japan, Suzuki set out and successfully coaxed Onoda out of the jungle and returned home a national hero. Onoda immediately recognized both of them as polite Japanese gentlemen but it took several weeks to make the contact materialize to fruition. Taniguchi handed him written orders and verbally ordered him to lay down his arms, surrender and return home. Before doing so he turned over his sword to President Ferdinand Marcos with apologies to him and the Philippine people. “I am sorry to have caused the Philippine people trouble for such a long time because of my errors in judgment. After returning to Japan, I’ll do my best to promote friendship between the Philippines and Japan.”⁷ He was given an armed salute by an honor guard from the Philippine Army, boarded a plane and flew back home. It was March 12, 1974. On arrival he was reunited with his family. The people of Japan had reclaimed their last World War Two hero. A thorough medical exam revealed him quite healthy and mentally sound though the ravages of age betrayed his features and frame. His book does not speak of his re-acclimation back into Japanese society nor does it mention the things he had to relearn and discover. Re-assimilation must have been difficult at times. His intentions were to farm in Brazil, because of the nearby jungles, but his book stops short of what he really decided. If he is still alive he would be eighty-three.

⁶ Hiroo Onoda. *Ibid*, pg. 210.

⁷ Hiroo Onoda. *Ibid*, pg. Rear cover jacket.

Onoda gives us an unusual glimpse of survival and dedication but an even deeper examination of the Japanese spirit that permeated Japanese thinking at that time. He is not representative of the typical Japanese soldier of the Pacific War but an extreme example to the meaning of devotion to duty, courage, determination to adapt and stand up for the principles he thought important. He was, indeed, the last true samurai.

“The Japanese tended to regard “spirit” as their main strength, with almost mystical potency--an amulet, whose loss would be fatal. Beyond doubt it carried them to some startling victories; but at the same time, it carried within it Japan’s undoing. The more convinced the allies became that they were dealing with no ordinary enemy, the less willing they were to take chances to offer the Japanese the benefit of any doubt; their responses were conditioned by fear and incomprehension. In a sense, the Japanese conception of spirit governed the behavior of armies on both sides, pushing back the borders of what was considered taboo and opening the way to excess.”⁸

“The Japanese Army was a legend in its own time. To the defenders of Singapore and Bataan, its soldiers were demonic supermen. The willingness of Japan consistently to fight to the last man remains a benchmark of courage today.”⁹ Their behavior to those they conquered leaves a lot to be desired, but their heroism is unprecedented. Onoda exemplifies this. Onoda appears to have divorced himself from reality and it is difficult to determine whether he was actually aware of the war’s end. Indeed he didn’t behave so. He remained faithful to his beliefs and refused to surrender when he could. His personal values dictated surrender only to the man who gave him his original orders. Only authorized orders both in writing and verbally would allow himself to do so. He had much room for judgments and some margin for error

⁸ Meirion and Susie Harris. *Soldiers of the Sun. The Rise and Fall of the Imperial Japanese Army*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1991 pg. 325

⁹ Meirion and Susie Harris. *Ibid.* front overleaf.

while living outside of the flow of time. The typical soldier of the Japanese Army had neither. The Japanese newspapers that he discovered and studied only indicated that Japan was still alive and well. The want ads seem to indicate there was plenty of everything though he was puzzled by articles dealing with foreign affairs and military matters. In reality many of Japan's cities were heavily destroyed, two of them almost completely. His beloved Tokyo was left a burning cinder. These newspapers gave not even a hint. No organized, standing army, navy and air force was left intact but for thirty years he believed that they were and would one day return to Lubang to relieve him of his duties. The Japanese government, he surmised, must still be working for the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere in tandem with Communist China with Japan as the guiding leader. There was nothing in these newspapers to support this idea so the American Secret Service must have censored this information. Every logical assumption was followed by a rational explanation. China and Japan were working for the same goal. Many of the articles rendered by the outdated news papers were perceived at an uninformed face value all of which centered around American deception. Still he was free to make his own conclusions and affect some kind of plan to continue his vigil against possible invasions that were sure to come. He would not abandon his post. This was the "way of the warrior": the way of the ancient samurai. At least his ancestors were watching him. He would not betray them.

Onoda found himself caught squarely in the middle of two ethics: one calling him to die for his emperor, the other just the opposite. He chose the latter never realizing that it would cost him 30 years of his life living in isolation and struggling to stay alive. His Co-Prosperity Sphere at some point in time must have faded away and a realization of futility set in requiring a re-assessment of values and personal priorities. It was just too difficult to accept that the war was over and Japan had lost, so used the jungles of Lubang for security and comfort.

Chapter Three

Cormier and Onoda were a small part of a vicious and savage war that seems to be secondary when compared to the conflict in Europe. The Pacific War was horrible by any standards of industrialized warfare and rooted in a cauldron of cultural, political and racial differences polarized by a very large ocean. Americans fought Germans by normal standards of warfare in that white Christians fought white Christians with ancestral connections. Not so in the Pacific. The Pacific War was unrestrained from the very beginning. It lasted longer than the European War, was fought over a much larger stage and coupled itself with racial hatred that was as intense as the holocaust. The Pacific War was a war of attrition and both of these men were victims. Both belonged to an army of some kind; both were trained and equipped by that army; both armies had an order of battle and both fought each other with great effort. There were as many similarities between the two as there were differences. Some of these differences were on the surface but some ran deeper and the battlefield behavior of both evolved in a manner that went counter to the traditional values of their countries. Men do not fight and die for their country but rather they fight to survive and for their buddies and families back home. Their personal worlds are at risk and they will do whatever it takes to protect themselves and the familiar environment exclusive to each. One's personal life is the one single possession that a soldier has and he will not forfeit it easily to some unknown component who cares (or does not care) in the same way while both know that the drama of warfare shows indifference to neither. He will do what it takes for it is what it is, survival.

The only foreign power to set foot on American soil since the War of 1812 was the Empire of Japan (the frigid Aleutian Islands off of the coast of Alaska). Japan seized more square miles than Hitler could only dream of doing. The Imperial Japanese Army operated under a oneness of

thought and a remarkable unity that still holds historians in awe to this day. Laced with a behavior molded by a culture much older than the bible, the Imperial Japanese Army fought with a fanaticism and loyalty to Emperor and family in ways the West could not understand. Kamikaze attacks from the air, frenzied banzai attacks on a regimental frontage, a whole nation prepared to fight to the last man, woman and child with bamboo sticks if necessary, and belated surrenders from isolated holdouts through out the Pacific well into the late 60s and early 70s mark the behavior of a group of people whose national personality seems to defy Western logic. The preference of death over surrender was a staple of the Imperial Japanese Army. To surrender was unthinkable and not an option. The last bullet or grenade was saved for oneself should the occasion warrant. They were simply not afraid to die and people who are not afraid to die are not afraid of anything.

The United States Marine of WWII was just the opposite. His was a government that functioned from the bottom up. He considered himself a citizen, not a subject. He was protected by a constitution that recognized individual differences and individual rights. His was a government with a proclivity to purify itself every so often and he had a small choice in the outcome. Both were from family oriented social structures holding great value in their cultures and life styles. One was a liberal democracy with all the trappings that go with it while the other didn't know how a democracy worked. Both would develop highly sophisticated military establishments that eventually faced each other in the South and Central Pacific between 1941 and 1945. Cormier and Onoda were powerless to stop it, helpless to do any thing about it and required to put on a uniform and fight for their individual countries with all alacrity.

Since the early 1900's the Japanese Army gained a healthy and powerful political presence inside the fabric of Japanese society. Its military bureaucracy was unique in that it possessed a

control independent and apart from the established government of the time. Matters of national security, military weaponry and manpower, foreign policy, economic stability were decided by a military mindset better left to civilians. The centerpiece of Japanese government was expansion that found very receptive and fertile ground within the infra-structure of the army which envisioned a “defense state” capable of attaining this expansion. “Asia for Asians” under Japanese sponsorship and control eventually became the blueprint for “The Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere” adopted by Japan to justify its need for expansion. By the 1930’s a control faction of extremists (ultra-nationalists) surfaced with agendas of their own and slowly gained control of the government in time leading to a direct confrontation with the West, particularly England and the United States. American and European presence was not wanted and needed to be expelled was part of its theme.

Imperialism is a concept where by one nation desires to extend its control over another or group of nations in order to acquire assets it wants or needs. Imperialism can get ugly and among the nations of the early twentieth century the most aggressive were fascist Italy, nazi Germany, and totalitarian Japan. Imperialism became destructive under these regimes in that it could seek to expel, exterminate, or assimilate conquered peoples who stood in its way. They sought to acquire desirable markets, natural resources and raw materials as needed along with political, cultural, and foreign advantages that added prestige and power to the conquering nation(s). Imperialism is the nadir of capitalism and if successful brings much economic prosperity to the coffers of the conqueror. In the twentieth century it was Japan who sought the dreams of “Empire” and believed it her birthright to stand equal with other nations of that period. She had defeated a major international power (Russia) early in the century and the world had to stop and take a second look. To accomplish this feat, it takes an army, a navy, and air power.

Without these things, a nation cannot expect to command and control. Both Onoda and his emperor Hirohito along with ninety per cent of the Imperial Japanese Army was born into and raised in a thick and intense era of Imperialistic thought whose future intentions was that of expansion under Japanese leadership. By December 7th, 1941 the Imperial Japanese Army had expanded to fifty-one divisions (2.1 million men).¹ The United States Marine Corps was slightly bigger than the New York City Police Department (ca.16,000). The entire US Army was ranked 16th falling behind Rumania in manpower.

Empires have emperors, chancellors, kings and queens whose sovereignty was believed to be absolute and therefore subject to a concept of central “imperial” authority. A new state ideology promoting the emperor as the central symbol of power and authority made it comfortable for the Japanese to acclimate themselves to a figure-head believed to be the “Son of Heaven”, a direct descendent of *Jimmu* the first *tenno* (Emperor) dating back to 660 B.C. Shinto became the state religion, the emperor as the chief priest and therefore a “living god” beatified as the progenitor of all Japanese bliss: past, present, future. He was the father of all, unapproachable, immaculate and free from earthly stain and fault answerable only to *Amateratsu-Omikami* the Sun Goddess, creator of Japan (hence the “Land of the Rising Sun”). To the Imperial Japanese soldier this was his concept of patriotism. It was the same to his parents and his grandparents before them. To dishonor his family was unthinkable and failure to do so was not part of the Japanese personality. To dishonor his Emperor was disgraceful. From cradle to grave, the Japanese soldier was weaned on the glories of *Samurai* ethics hearing story after story of their heroism and bravery somehow always ending in death. A rich tapestry of heroic lore had a wide and popular appeal to a growing youth culture seeking purpose, mission, and identity. Centuries of unrest and

¹ Herbert P. Bix. *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan*. New York, NY. Harper Collins, Inc. 2000, pg. 196.

upheaval produced a vast number of myths, legends and lore that mothers and teachers of the twentieth century would tell and re-tell impressionable Japanese youth emphasizing victory over defeat, death over humiliation, and a self-ordained destiny of Japanese glory. This body of knowledge is easy to grasp and retain for the young mind and pass on to succeeding generations. The self is “absolute”, fostering such noble things as loyalty to the sovereign, faithfulness to ancestral memories, and familial qualities as obedience, respect, and self-discipline to those above and around you are Japanese qualities inbred from birth.

Japan came late to developments in western science, philosophy, and the arts. The flow of government was a “top down” setting while its doors were closed to the outside world for hundreds of years. Shogunate Japan was clan warfare repeating itself over and over while the emperor sat on the sideline as little more than a puppet aloof in his rule. Spawning from a mixture of *Zen* Buddhism and Confucianism, *Bu-shi-do* (Military Knight Ways) became the code that would govern a myriad of standards and principles of behavior for the Japanese soldier in the Pacific. As Japan’s growing pains increased, the code slowly became romanticized and valorized whose central theme was a blend of fight to the death, no surrender, no retreat posture. Eventually the code evolved into a design that allowed no quarter either in the asking or giving. In January of 1941 the code was renamed The Japanese Field Service Code (Tojo) that stressed a no surrender policy under any circumstances. Its guidelines were explicit and clearly defined the conduct soldiers were to obey in combat. Thus the Imperial Japanese soldier was brutally trained to comply to its standards. It defined “Empire” with the Emperor as ruler and “spirit” through unity, discipline, cooperation, and aggressiveness, with a conviction to win. Failure or retreat does not win battles. The destiny of the Empire is the onus of responsibility that falls to the “soldier of the sun.” The “spirit” was considered the basic factor that brings a universal

peace conforming to Imperial desires. The Imperial Japanese soldier was expected to forget himself for the sake of victory. The unit commander acted as the voice of the Emperor and ruled through generals, admirals, and line officers. One was expected to do his duty silently, observing his place and be prepared to sacrifice for the good of the whole. His ancestors were watching. Obedience, despite hardships, must be instant in the response to a command while death was not an issue in the doing.

Cowardice, failure, disgrace, and retreat in the face of the enemy were sins reconciled only by ritual (sometimes ceremonial) suicide (*seppuku*). Sometimes called *Hara-kiri* (“stomach cutting”) this was an excruciatingly painful method of self-destruction and not understood by the western mind. Self-destruction was non-existent to the Japanese prior to the advent of feudal Japan (1192). Westerners look upon it as pagan and barbaric, as a permanent solution to a temporary problem but the Japanese viewed it as an honorable death and a means of saving face. Today Japan forbids its practice as deplorable, but in WWII Japan *seppuku* was deeply entrenched into its culture and a common practice. Often the ritual was performed in a temple, a tea garden, inside a house, but in the case of the battlefield, in a cave, trench, bunker or a *banzai* attack. It was believed that many times an honorable death brought one’s soul to eternal rest with the souls of former warriors who die in battle and dwell at the *Yasukuni Shrine* in Tokyo. *Seppuku* often required an assistant (*kaishaku*) whose job was to decapitate the victim after he sliced open his abdomen with a very sharp knife or sword or shoot him with a weapon of some kind most often with a pistol. Soldiers would often pull the trigger of their rifles with their toes with the muzzle pointing directly at the brain behind the forehead. A United States Marine would never have willingly attempted this. The thought of it would never have entered his mind.

Judeo Christian ethics forbid suicide no matter the reason, but to a Japanese soldier facing impending defeat, it was expected. Onoda saw it as a needless waste.

The teachings of Christianity and Bushido would never blend. Shinto does not accept the idea of a single God/Creator as we do in the West. Homage is paid to the will of *Kempis* (ancestor gods) and practiced in shrines by Shinto priests. The word “democracy” was unknown to the Japanese. Centuries of isolation kept Japan in a medieval time-warp devoid of modern progress. Ideas could not engage in battle and debate was stagnant. There was no middle ground or intellectual battlefield for the flow of things to work. “While the Western world was experiencing the Renaissance, the Reformation, the growth of political and economic democracy, the effect of scientific inquiry and research---great movements and developments which have shaped our thinking and molded our behavior---Japan was locked in complete isolation.”² For over four centuries the Japanese succeeded in locking out western ideas holding true to itself. Commodore Mathew Perry’s historic visit (1853) was an epiphany and awoke this sleeping nation from its long slumber. Fifteen years later (1868) Prince Mutshuito became the 122nd emperor in the traditional court (*Meiji Ishin*) and Japan would never be the same again. The *Meiji* restoration brought broad sweeping reforms that sought to break away from the old ways and customs of the past and ignited a national desire to seek knowledge that would strengthen the foundations of Imperial rule. Two of these changes were conscription and the nationalization of its education system. Shogunate rule ended and was replaced by the *Diet* and conscription ended the traditional need for the Samurai in favor of a standing army.

In the span of some seventy to seventy-five years, Japan made huge leaps from what was once a medieval, feudalistic society to a modern state replete with all the trappings of urbanization and

² Robert B. Westbrook. *Why We Fought, Forging American Obligations in World War Two*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 2004, pg.25, originally quoted from *Guide to Japan*, Pg. 33.

industrialization. Most nations would have become mired in a cultural and social collapse at the same pace. Japanese adaptability to given stimuli is incredible and capable of absorbing many innovations beyond the limits of most. By 1896 Japan established a standing army and a modern navy strong enough to defeat a major western power like Russia. Its Navy was patterned along a British infrastructure and its army molded after a German/Prussian model (staffed). Despite these quantum leaps, thousands of years of samurai influence could not be set aside nor fade away from the Japanese fabric. “The way of the Warrior” laid silently hiding beneath the thin crust of all this newly acquired enlightenment and so did its code and the “spirit” behind it finding a very comfortable resting place within the military.

One of the objectives of the Meiji era was to nationalize its education program. Absolute obedience to authority was the core curriculum along side the three R’s. During the 30’s the military managed to establish almost complete control over the government including its educational structure. Censorship, along with indoctrination, was at the center of Japan’s education programs. Military officers had control of the curriculum. From nursery through the university level, schoolchildren were told what to learn, how to think, and rationalize things through a oneness of thought. Academic freedom was not practiced and practically unknown. Neither teacher nor parent could make the traditional choices and decisions for their children. A consistent theme of “Japanese glory” or “glorious spirit” in relation to Japan’s birthright and destiny would evolve into a conditioned reflex according to the wishes of others higher up. Curiosity faded leaving many natural questions unanswered paralyzing enlightenment and retarding intellectual growth. Warnings by Scholars, critics, writers, academicians, teachers, even Shinto priests went un-noticed or ignored. Those who opposed were never heard and the whole system operated with a “boot camp” mentality that made an excellent feeder system for

the army. The Japanese historian Saburo Ienaga called it “thought control and indoctrination”³ Ienaga continues:” The Meiji political system gagged and blindfolded the populace. The public could hardly participate in charting Japan’s future.”⁴ Public forums, speeches, freedom of the press were prohibited or subject to censorship carrying criminal penalties even prison. “A healthy political and social consciousness cannot develop in a society where the exchange of vital facts and ideas is fretted.”⁵ For the first forty years of the twentieth century it was easy to conjoin the state with the military. The social, educational and political atmosphere provided the vehicle to do so. Japanese education meant national conformity that stressed loyalty to the emperor and love of country, even a willingness to die if necessary. Creative thinking was unknown by the masses. Ignorant of the larger world of learning, children had no choice and this was the world of Hiroo Onoda. This is the backdrop Onoda brought to Lubang in 1945 and lived under a delusory yoke of Japanese invincibility for so long. He was entrapped by what he was taught, programmed by the army, trained to respond and mustered to act instinctively. So were his cohorts----millions of them. In this way Onoda was not different than everybody else for it was the cultural ethic that molded him.

Military service generally fell to impoverished rural lads that found life in the military was a lot easier than life on the farm. Boot camp was brutal and savage, the purpose being to minimize fear in real battle. Endurance, fitness and obedience were stressed. Small unit tactics were a way of life. The Japanese soldier was accustomed to deprivation and a Spartan way of life. He was trained to use his rifle and bayonet with proficiency. Some actually used captured Chinese prisoners for bayonet drill. The order of battle, ranking structure and operational procedures were similar to other armies of the time and need no explanation. They had other assets such as

³ Ienaga Saburo. *The Pacific War 1931-1945*. New York: Random House, Inc. 1978, Chapter 2.

⁴ Ibid. pg.15

⁵ Ibid. pg.15.

tanks, artillery, machine guns, hand grenades and other weapons of differing calibers but slightly inferior to that of the enemy. They became an excellent, almost expert jungle fighter, infiltrator, and sniper and as the war progressed they only got better. They were expert field engineers, construction workers and mastered to refinement surprise night attacks. The Japanese had a fixation with surprise tactics. The Japanese Imperial Soldier never seemed fatigued and could labor endlessly under the hot Pacific sun with very little food and water. His favorite rifle was the 6.5mm “arisaka” rifle, model 38 with bayonet. When the two were enjoined the typical Japanese soldier was shorter. His favorite machine gun was 6.5mm, model 11 of which the US Marine held a profound respect. To his rear was the 70mm, model 92 howitzer coupled with a variety of tanks, mostly the medium *Chi-ha* type 97 by Mitsubishi in Osaka. By 1941 the Japanese Army was the most militarized organization in the world seconded only by Hitler’s Army in Europe. The “son of Nippon” was better than the German or Italian counterpart and accustomed to far more hardship and discomfort. As the war progressed and worsened, all males between seventeen and forty were eligible for conscription. He believed himself to be a member of a special race that was somehow culturally and morally superior to the decadent and materialistic “Anglo-Saxons” of the west.

Eric Bergerud tells us: “The most remarkable behavior shown by Japanese soldiers was their willingness to accept orders that meant certain death and their refusal to surrender. Loyalty to the feudal lord and an unquestioning willingness to die pursuing duty were deep and genuine parts of the traditional samurai ethic. Death in battle was portrayed as an honor to the family and a transcendent act on the part of the individual. Surrender was a disgrace to the soldier and to his family.”⁶ The disgrace of surrender brought dishonor to his emperor, his family and his

⁶ Eric Bergerud. *Touched With Fire the Land War in the South Pacific*. New York, NY: Penguin Books USA. 1996, pg 130.

ancestors and the means to do so came from within. “The field Service Code, issued in 1941 contained the injunction ‘Do not be taken prisoner alive’.”⁷ If so, it was believed that his name and memory was permanently erased and forgotten and no longer a member of his family and society though one is hard pressed to believe millions of Japanese mothers agreed with this line of reasoning. He was never to return home with the albatross of shame hanging about his neck. The same thing was expected of officers so the young soldier saw himself with no choice. Japanese officers who allowed their commands to surrender to the enemy without fighting was punishable by execution. The only possible course of action was to stand and fight to the death no matter the outcome. Once again Ienaga states: “Young Japanese soldiers were forced to throw away their lives in adherence to this code”⁸ and locked into a system by his upbringing and training that allowed no margins for error. The samurai of old would have been horrified.

The Japanese historians Haruko and Theodore Cook states: “Japanese high command was torn between irreconcilable strategic alternatives. Evacuation was seldom possible. The only course of action seem to be to stand in place and die.”⁹ This would bring Japan to its defeat.

The society that bore the Imperial Japanese soldier suffered from intellectual collapse and became convoluted when faced with strategic choices. Its imperial dream almost materialized and, dare say, this could have been Japan’s finest hour but when she could have quit she choose not to. This was not part of its national personality. The Code of Bushido grew out of a closed and feudal society whose applications did not fit the mold of twentieth century warfare. Nor does it hold up well against modern thought enlightened by a people whose history is grounded in an abhorrence for a “oneness of thought” and a strong dislike for single handed control of

⁷ Ienaga Saburo. Ibid. Pg.47.

⁸ Ienaga Saburo. Ibid. Pg.49

⁹ Haruko and Theodore F. Cook. *Japan at War, an Oral History*. New York: The New Press. 1992. pps.262-263.

others without a choice in the doing. Modern, sophisticated weaponry laid to waste the old ways. Japan had come of age and possessed modern weapons and knew how to use them. However, the thinking behind their use becomes negligible when faced against others who can replace their losses not bound by an antiquated or utilitarian codes whose purpose supports death because of failure. Overconfidence followed by over extension from a society hungry for expansion and control does not bode well against those who have a larger capacity to prevent such expansion especially if laced with aggressive designs. Wars of attrition show no favors against antiquated codes of the past. As the American military juggernaut neared Japan, resistance intensified leaving only one of two choices--- surrender or annihilation. From the highest ranking general down to the lowliest private, desperation determined by tactical and strategic alternatives were not available. Battlefield behavior became more destructive leaving no avenue open for surrender.

Perhaps the single most well known pattern of fighting practiced by the Imperial Japanese Army of the Pacific War was the *Banzai* attack. It was a part of their pattern from the Solomons (1942) through the Mariannas (1944). The second was the *Kamikaze* attack from the air at Okinawa (1945). Once again the Cook's tell us: "Cut off from reliable sources of re-supply, small island garrisons braced for invasion, in the face of which there was no escape. And just as the troops on tiny Tarawa atoll faced extermination, so too, did the large Japanese armies deployed in New Guinea, the Philippines, and Burma."¹⁰ With no other option, Japanese soldiers elected to fight to the death to the last man if necessary as they often did preferring death in mass to surrender. Japanese soldiers held little hope for rescue or escape becoming entrapped within the adverse and primitive conditions created by island warfare. Often they had

¹⁰ Haruko and Theodore F. Cook *Japan at War, an Oral History*. New York: The New Press, 1992, pg. 263.

no weapons, ammunition, food, water and medical supplies. Exhausted, starved, thirsty, wounded, near nudity and generally emaciated by circumstances beyond his grasp, the only hope for the Japanese soldier was a “last ditch” effort to drive the enemy back into the sea. The *Banzai* charge was an agonizing act of desperation in the final hours of a battle most which never accomplished anything but needless carnage.

All across Micronesia, countless eyewitness accounts describe the horrific sometimes drunken and frenzied behavior of the Japanese soldier in his final death throes. Two of the largest banzai charges occurred on Saipan and Guam in mid-1944 where thousands of good infantry troops were literally slaughtered by merciless gunfire at point blank range. These attacks were generally uncoordinated and disorganized originating by one single command. Prior to the attack officers and men would say their goodbyes to one another, settle their differences, affirm friendships sometimes even drinking a final “toast” to solidify their nation with rice wine (*saki*) and resolving to regroup at the Yasukuni Shrine for none expected to survive. Very few did. Bodies were then bulldozed in quickly devised mass graves and ingloriously covered over for battlefield sanitation. The shadow of Hideki Tojo and his “glorious spirit” would stalk Japan for years. *Banzai*, contrary to popular belief, was a term rarely used on the battlefield. It was a term often used by the home front in patriotic celebration of a unit’s deployment to some far away place. Its magic was something only meant for Japanese ears and its real meaning remains an enigma to western curiosity. But it was used on Saipan to great affect. A young marine rifleman recounts an attack in the early morning hours of July 7, 1944:

Whenever we cornered the enemy and there was no way out, we faced the dreaded banzai attack. I dreaded these attacks and yet welcomed them, which is quite a paradox. They generated a great deal of fear but, when it was over, that particular sector was Jap-free. For hours we could hear them preparing for their banzai attack, as it was the end for them and they knew it. Because it was against their heritage, their training, and their belief, they would not surrender.

All that was left was a final charge, a pouring in of all their troops in one concentrated place with their pledge to take as many of us with them as possible. Yells and screams going on for hours as Marine artillery and mortars, pounding in the direction of the Japanese sounds, added to the deafening din. The Marines were waiting in their foxholes with clips of ammo placed close at hand so that they could reload fast, fixing their bayonets on to their rifles, ensuring that their knives were loose in their scabbard all in anticipation of the forthcoming attacks. Listening to the screaming, all senses alert, many of them had prayers on their lips as they waited. Unexpectedly, there was a silence, a silence that signaled the enemy's advance. Then: Suddenly there is what sounded like a thousand people screaming all at once, as a hoard of 'mad men' broke out of the darkness before us. Screams of 'Banzai' fill the air, Japanese officers leading their 'devils from hell,' their swords drawn and swishing in circles over their heads. Jap soldiers were following their leaders, firing their weapons at us and screaming 'Banzai' as they charged towards us. Our weapons opened up, our mortars and machine guns fired continually. No longer do they fire in bursts of three or five. Belt after belt of ammunition goes through that gun, the gunner swinging the barrel left and right. Even though Jap bodies build up in front of us, they still charged us, running over their comrades fallen bodies. The mortar tubes became so hot from the rapid fire, as did the machine gun barrels, that they could no longer be used. They came in droves. Haunting memories can still visualize the enemy only a few feet away, bayonet aimed at our body as we empty a clip into him. The momentum carries him into our foxhole, right on top of us. Then pushing him off, we reload and repeat the procedure. Bullets whiz around us, screams are deafening, the area reeks with death, and the smell of Japs and gunpowder permeate the air. Full of fear and hate, with the desire to kill---[Our enemy seems to us now to be] a savage animal, a beast, a devil, not a human being at all, and the only thought is to kill, kill, kill---Finally it ends.¹¹

During the aftermath of clean up it was common for some Japanese soldiers to fake a dead corpse and attempt a kill on unsuspecting marines looking for life amidst the debris of bodies. It was not unusual to see their sick and wounded armed with only sticks and stones thrown into the charge along side Chamorro men, women and children who were forced to join in.

Cormier witnessed an equally intense banzai attack a few weeks later on Guam.

Late in the night of July 24, three days after the landing, the forward observers began calling fire almost on their own positions. The Japs had counter-attacked in a wild, drunken banzai charge, exploiting a hole in the lines of the first battalion, 21st. The marine artillery blazed all through the night. At one point, the telephone man in the

¹¹ John C. Chapin, Captain, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve (Ret). *Breaching the Marianas: The Battle for Saipan*. Washington, D.C. Marine Corps Historical Center. World War II Commemorative Series. 1994, pps. 31-33.

battalion fire direction center began relaying fire commands to Easy Battery in a whisper. He was surrounded by Japs. They had swarmed all the way to the artillery command post located in a ravine just ahead of the firing batteries. Some had even reached the divisional hospital. Wounded marines grabbed rifles and left their sickbeds to stop the onslaught. By daylight, troops from various units near the beach had surrounded the Japs and were picking them off. Many of the Japs blew themselves up with satchel charges and grenades. In the aftermath, it was estimated that 3,200 enemy had died in the front lines and 300 in the rear areas.¹²

Banzais occurred elsewhere earlier, often with hand-to-hand combat, and with bayonets made in Pittsburgh against bayonets made in Yokohama. To the Japanese soldier a “general attack” meant suicide and in time became Japan’s national strategy. In retrospect Yamauchi Takeo tells us “Once you are in the military, what you thought on the outside becomes meaningless. They reshape and remold your very nature. They make a human being who fits into the mold. One who will move as ordered, like a chess piece. I fired my rifle despite my principles, and survived only by surrendering.”¹³ Both the Japanese soldier and the United States Marine did things in war contrary to their own personal beliefs. It is not easy to kill another human being. It does not come naturally. One has to be removed from his environment, re-socialized and taught to rethink personal concepts and learn that a “kill-or-be-killed” scenario rules his life in time of war despite his moral views. There are no rules at the end of a gun-sight. When placed on the battlefield there is a strange someone out to kill you or your friend so kill him first. There are no other parameters and life hangs on a slender thread. For both the United States Marine and the Imperial Japanese soldier all noble forms of human endeavor are reduced to insignificance and live combat on the battlefield is the crucible on which this concept can be learned. Men behave differently in battle because war allows them to do so. Neither Japanese nor American really fought for idealistic reasons such as democracy or the Emperor but for closer more personal

¹² Clifton Cormier. *A Post Card From Joseph*. New York: Vantage Press. 2002, pps.132-133.

¹³ Craig M. Cameron. *American Samurai*. New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press. 1994 pg. 44 originally quoted by Lawrence H. Suid. *Guts and Glory* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1978), 92.

reasons. Nations fight for national ideals, soldiers fight for their lives. Cormier fought as a citizen of the United States while Onoda fought as a subject of Imperial Japan but the will to survive was all the same for both.

The United States Marine Corps was originated squarely in the middle of a fledgling nation embroiled in protest. From the very beginning the Corps has had to argue, debate and defend a rationale of some kind for its existence, particularly with the Army establishment who saw it as an unnecessary duplication in the cause of national defense. The Marine Corps has a storied history and takes incredible pride in its past service to its country. It is serious about war, priding itself as the “first to fight.” It is selective in its recruitment, preferring volunteers, and its customs are rich with tradition. “Once a Marine, always a Marine” has been the very center of its infrastructure since the beginning.

Throughout its history the young men of the United States Marine Corps have had to fight a variety of foreign flags to its front. By far the toughest and most treacherous were the young men of the Imperial Japanese Army in the Pacific War. It was a war that taxed the Corps to its limits and gave the Corps the image it enjoys today. The 1920's and 30's were lean and austere for the Corps. Budget cuts in defense spending, demobilization from The Great War, a decade of false prosperity followed by a deep depression forced government to focus its attention on relief and reform. The American public slowly reversed its outlook on war retreating into an isolationist mentality foolishly believing the First World War was indeed the one true war to end all wars. Staying out of the European and Asian political quagmires was what the people desired and reflected such in their voting patterns. They thought two oceans on either side of America's shores was sufficient enough in matters of security. The authorized strength of the Marine Corps fell from a high of 28,500 to something equating the size of the New York City Police

Department with a mission stewing in a cauldron of ambiguity. The Corps needed an identity, an image, and a profile acceptable to the tax paying public.

Budget constraints squeezed all the fat and all the muscle away from the military. The Corps had to survive on its public relations to sustain itself through these hard times and chose Hollywood's fledgling movie industry by producing a series of movies intended to enhance its appeal to an isolationist public by attracting young recruits looking for change and excitement. Strange as it seems, it worked. Large audiences that saw such movies as *Star Spangled Banner* (1917) and *The Unbeliever* (1918) followed by *Tell it to the Marines* (1926), *Devil Dogs of the Air*(1935), *The Marines Are Coming* (1935), *Come on, Marines*(1934), *Leathernecking* (1930) and others gave the Corps an image and mystique of mythic proportions as an elite military organization that was combat ready, tough and professionally capable of defending the country as the public expected. "Of all the armed forces, the Marine Corps has been the one branch that over the years best publicized its role in the nation's martial history. By providing marines as extras to bases and training facilities, and technical advisors, the Marine Corps helped insure how the Marines turned raw recruit-boys into mature, courageous men."¹⁴ Thus was born the term "Hollywood Marine"¹⁵ a metaphor that still exists to this day with an exotic flavor. Today we call it "marketing."

The two decades between wars saw men with vision craft a future course for the Corps that was to play a very large role in the Pacific War to come. Marine Corps thinkers had to deal with indifference and hostility of the other services and limited resources to test their theories. Its history in the 20's and 30's reflected a sincere quest for one single mission unique to itself and apart from others they devised the doctrine of Amphibious Warfare along side the self-contained

¹⁴ Robert J. Moskin. Ibid, pg. 227.

¹⁵ Robert J. Moskin., Ibid, pg.228

autonomy that went with it. These years were lean and austere for the Corps and the entire military establishment as well. Budget cuts in defense spending forced government to look to relief and reform in an economy mired in a depression. The Corps was poorly equipped and inadequate for a major shooting war. Its duties were nominal and not a major component to national defense. Inter-service rivalry and petty bickering amongst the high commands hindered its growth and retarded its desired objectives. The same circumstances existed in Japan. However, there was a small cadre of uncanny “thinkers” who saw the need for possible advanced bases across the vastness of the Pacific as crucial to national defense. Led by John A. Lejune and Earl H. “Pete” Ellis and others who understood political power and worked within it, overcame the usual indifference and hostility toward the Corps’ plan. In time the doctrine would become its birthright and sacred franchise.

Amphibious warfare is a doctrine stressing the need for advanced naval bases in support of ship to shore landings on hostile beaches in an imaginary war with Japan. It requires a multiplicity of assets (landing craft, pre-naval and air bombardment, troop transports, etc.) with a large enough navy capable of deploying these assets on any given target as needed. Eventually evolving into Operation Plan 712, the doctrine became a blueprint of the Marine Corps in the Pacific War from 1941 through Korea and beyond. The Navy issued General Order No. 241 establishing the concept of a permanent Marine strike force in a state of readiness in support of the fleet (FMF---Fleet Marine Force) whose mission was to execute amphibious landings of foreign shores as the situation demanded. At first it was a theoretical design but December 7th, 1941 made this design materialize. When summoned to war, the Marine Corps had certainly not ironed out all the problems of amphibious assault. Many flaws existed. This would require the test of actual combat. But the Corps had a mission, a doctrine, a knowledge of tactics, officers

and men trained in landing operations and the most essential equipment to get them ashore. The Marines had worked for some 20 years to get ready and would lead the way across the Pacific all the while an experienced Japanese soldier awaited their arrival.

Amphibious landings on hostile beaches is a unique science. Landing a mass of armed soldiers on foreign shores requires a small dictionary of strategies and tactics that must be accurate and workable. Anything can go wrong at any time with costly results. They are very complex operations requiring a multiplicity and integration of a variety of assets that must fit together like links in a watchband. Planning and preparation, command relationships, and inter-service cooperation, are but a few of the major components required not to mention logistics, intelligence data, tides, disposition of the enemy, selection of suitable beaches, and ship-to-shore delivery. Simply put, one has to deliver a large mass of troops to a target over long distances, get them to the beach, supply and support them while there, and get what ever is left safely back home after it is all over. Hospital and medical components must be present at all times. Once the Navy got him there, the onus of responsibility fell to the Marines and all they had was their light green fatigues for armor. By war's end the Corps had mastered its craft at the expense of some bitter and costly lessons frozen to that three and a half year time slot known as the Pacific War.

From the Solomons (1942) to Okinawa (1945) the two forces fought each other with an intensity not found in Europe. The Marine Corps began the war with two divisions and ended with six. For some unknown reason the two battles that seem to capture and enchant the imagination of today's America is Betio, Tarawa and Iwo Jima. One because of a landing that almost failed on what was once a lazy, idyllic little atoll sitting astride the equator, the other because of a picture. Both contained an inordinate amount of extreme violence within very small

land masses, one no bigger than Central Park in New York, the other no bigger than the City of Scott, Louisiana. One was a very costly experience of misdiagnosed tides the other was an unseen, well entrenched Japanese Soldier who was at his best. Both were an all-Marine Corps effort. In time Iwo Jima became an amphibious epic. It was at Peleliu (1944) were the Japanese changed their wasteful banzai habits to a defense in depth and the war became more intense as the U.S. got closer to the Japanese homeland. The Japanese fought harder and it required more resources to extricate them from their positions. The pattern remained the same, pre-naval and air bombardment, landings, establish a beach head, move inland and destroy the enemy. None were easy.

Wilbur Jones reminds us: “Each man had his own reasons for joining the Corps, but in January of 1943 the Selective Service System determined who went where in the Armed Forces.”¹⁶ The draftee of World War Two was likely to have some high school education but not likely to have the same shooting skills like his father before him. The average U.S. Marine was Caucasian, measured five feet nine inches and weighed 140 pounds and was mostly from the rural south or urban north. His social status ranged from a blue-collar laborer to a farmer’s son molded by a jobless depression. He was more likely a student that completed the 10th and 11th grade though many lied about their age. He was apt to be single but had a girlfriend; did not drink alcohol, smoke and was a practicing Christian but not overly religious. By war’s end most were drinking, smoking, playing serious poker, and his favorite sins were of the flesh along side other profanations. All became a rite of passage in the Marine Corps. He was predisposed to temporary foxhole conversions with the Almighty when under fire and prayed the 23rd Psalm seeking Divine Intervention accompanied by a litany of life-altering promises after the war. He

¹⁶ Wilbur D. Jones, Jr., Captain USNR (ret.) *Gyrene, The World War II United States Marine*. Shippensburg, Pa.: White Mane Books Publication, 1998. Pg. 26

was indoctrinated to the Marine Corps way either at MCRD (Marine Corps Recruit Depot) San Diego or Parris Island, South Carolina but his favorite stateside assignment was Quantico, and above all, he was most vulnerable at the loss of a buddy. His rifle was his wife. He had no intention of dying for his country and considered himself invulnerable to harm's way. Teamwork was his Bible and part of the Brotherhood of the Corps. His adversary was not too different.

Saipan, Iwo Jima, Chichi Jima, and Okinawa were part of Japanese soil and an extension of the homeland. To lose them was detrimental to Japanese security. By the end of 1944, the American long range B-29's were bombing Tokyo and other military targets in Japan itself. Japanese efforts became taxed and live combat grew more desperate. Strategically, Iwo Jima was the focal point to bring the war closer to its end. Its ownership would save countless lives. Japanese leadership recognized this possibility so recoiled in the only way it could. Defend Iwo Jima to the last man if necessary.

The battle for "Iwo" took more than a month of some of the fiercest fighting of the Pacific War and is the classic example of Island warfare at its worse mainly because of its size in relation to the utmost savagery that occurred there. "Iwo" brings to fruition two armies fully armed locked in an embrace of death that left a landscape descriptive of the surface of the moon. It was the island where the last banzai charge of sizeable force occurred but the carnage before it illustrates both Japanese and Marine conduct was at it best and its worst. It also gave a picture taken by the myopic eyes of Joseph Rosenthal (1/400th of a second) that would become an American icon. Perhaps the most poignant example of suicidal Japanese battlefield behavior is found in the "pep talk" given by Lt. General Tadamichi Kuribayashi to his men prior to the landings and perhaps spells out the Japanese attitude towards the entire war. The following

“Courageous Battle Vow” states: “Above all else we shall dedicate ourselves and our entire strength to the defense of this island. We shall grasp bombs, charge the enemy tanks and destroy them. We shall infiltrate into the midst of the enemy and annihilate them. With every salvo we will, without fail, kill the enemy. Each man will make it his duty to kill 10 of the enemy before dying. Until we are destroyed to the last man, we shall harass the enemy by guerilla tactics.”¹⁷

Kuribayashi’s speech speaks of socialized and institutionalized death internalized by a “bastardized” code, nurtured by a civilization whose feudal origins could not cope against a country capable of replacing its losses coupled with massive military industrialized output accustomed to competition, free enterprise, and a liberal government controlled by the masses. One can only speculate what went through this man’s mind when his binoculars saw the hundreds of ships surrounding his island that clear February morning in 1945 when wave after wave of amtracs approached his beaches laden with the hated “Anglo-Saxon monsters with human faces.”¹⁸ Surely he must have privately sensed that he was looking at the beginning of the end with such an enormous force to his front. It took Three Marine divisions to crack the inner defenses of an island that can only be described as a nightmare. It required a complete annihilation of the defending Japanese force. Robert Leckie says: “A thousand Japanese tried to break the Fourth Division’s lines on the right flank. They tried to infiltrate in order to re-gain Airfield Field Number One, where they would blow up equipment with the charges wound around their waists. But they were blown up themselves. The Marines killed 784 of these human bombs. It was the only break of the Iwo Jima campaign---784 Japanese could have exacted a fearful price within their caves and pillboxes but had come out to be killed easily.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Robert Leckie. *Strong Men Armed, the United States Marines vs. Japan*. New York: Da Capo Press, 62, pg 429.

¹⁸ Robert Leckie. *Ibid*, pps. 459-460.

¹⁹ Robert Leckie. *ibid*. pps. 463-464.

Iwo Jima had been traversed in eighteen days where progress could only be measured in inch by agonizing inch. Victory was in doubt from the very first day. “In all 5,885 United States Marines were killed on Iwo, or in the air above or sea around it. There were also 17,272 Marines wounded, 46 Marines missing and surely dead, 2,648 Marines felled by combat fatigue---as well as 738 dead and wounded Navy doctors and corpsmen.”²⁰ Even chaplains and Lt. Colonels perished. The Japanese suffered the loss of 21,000 warriors defending the front door to the Japanese homeland. Kuribayashi’s body was never found and it is believed he died in one desperate banzai attack with what was left of his command just before or just after the island was declared secure. Iwo had it all: intensified combat, two well-trained armies at their best with a battle ethic that meant nothing save to survive. There was no room for the Fifth Commandment nor the moral high ground and a time and place where it is all right to kill or die trying. Okinawa was just as bad. Japanese intentions were to inflict as many casualties as possible in hopes the American public would become outraged and pressure Washington to negotiate a peace settlement of some kind favorable to Japan. It never happened. America wanted vengeance and retribution for the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. Hiroshima and Nagasaki gave them the satisfaction they sought along with a “no qualification” for conditional surrender as an added fringe benefit but in the end it was a conditional surrender. The Emperor was allowed to stay in rule.

Onoda’s training was completely opposite the banzai tactic. At the Futama training facility “we were encouraged to think for ourselves, to make decisions where no rules existed. We learned that the aim was to stay alive and continue to fight as guerrillas as long as possible, even if this entailed conduct normally considered disgraceful. It was permissible to be taken prisoner.

²⁰ Hiroo Onoda. *No Surrender, My Thirty Year War*. New York, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 1974, pps. 33-34

We were not held liable by the army for having been captured. In secret warfare there is integrity for integrity is the greatest necessity when a man must deceive not only his enemies but his friends. With integrity---and I include in this sincerity, loyalty, devotion to duty and a sense of morality---one can withstand all hardships and ultimately turn hardship itself into victory. It is not rewarding work. Only insiders, however, would ever know that we had been engaged in secret warfare, and we would have to face the taunts of outsiders as best we could.”²¹ This was not the typical Japanese soldier. There were thousands of others, to some degree, who felt the same way. The Code of Bushido and the death mentality that went with it was not part of Onoda’s behavior in fighting for his country. He was indeed somewhat of a loner. He fought in a different manner than Cormier but for the same reasons nonetheless. Neither sought a crucible of death. They fought because they had to and survived to tell their stories.

“It had nothing to do with freedom, making the world safe for democracy. Democracy in the mind of a young Marine in 1941 was purely abstract. We thought Roosevelt was a hellava politician, but was he worth going to war for? We didn’t know what “geopolitical” meant. We fought because we HAD to. With Japan it was not a choice but a necessity. When some bastard punches you in the nose you have to fight back. We hated them for what they did at Pearl and Wake and the Philippines and what they would do else where and had to be stopped. We just couldn’t let them violate Betty Grable.”²² Cormier continues: “Hate is hate no matter why. Yes, our hatred was based on the color of their skin (we called it yellow but it was more brown), their physical appearance (bandy legged, coke bottle glasses, mostly stereotypical attributed), buck teeth, and their reputation as bastards in China. Adding to the hatred was Jap conduct in China witnessed by Marines and by them after Pearl Harbor when stories of their atrocities against our

²¹ Hiroo Onoda. *No Surrender, My Thirty Year War*. New York, New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. 1974, pps. 33-34

²²Clifton Cormier. Quoted from a private e-mail message dated 2005/06//30 Thu 04:34:51 EDT.

POW's of Wake Island and Bataan surfaced. Actually, we didn't trust their Nisei in California and Hawaii. We were always suspicious of treachery when I was in California well before the war. Also, the fact that they had those humongous battleships worried us. Who were they going to be used against."²³ It is very easy to get caught up in movements that are threatening in scope. The United States Marine brought with him to the Pacific a pre-programmed set of "barber shop" gossip that motivated him to fight more furiously. So did the Japanese soldier. Their eyes were programmed to see the other as hostile and threatening long before the first Japanese bomb fell on Pearl Harbor. In a kill-or-be-killed drama like the Pacific War, there is no room for fair play and very little margin for error when flavored by issues of racial superiority or inferiority. When the two met in live combat the killing was made a little easier with an edge of dehumanization lurking about. America saw Japanese intentions as armed conquest and Japan saw America as a country depriving it of its rightful place among nations. The differences between the two were as vast as the ocean that separated them and better left to academics for explanation. The differences between the two armies gives reason why men behave the way they do in combat.

"The Japanese army's main preoccupations were not in the Pacific, but on the mainland, and some of its most influential commanders knew little about an island war. After a hundred days of triumph, its soldiers would struggle, out of their element, for more than two years. Expansion in the Pacific would contribute little to the quest in China, and had serious risks attached. The war contemplated in the Pacific was, even at the beginning, on a larger scale than the Japanese economy could support, and it required resources that Japan simply did not have."²⁴ The loss of Guadalcanal was but a vision of what was to come. Half of the Japanese Army's Pacific forces

²³Clifton Cormier, Quoted from a private e-mail message dated 2005/07/24 Sun PM 02:50:16 EDT.

²⁴ Meiron and Susie Harris. *Soldiers of the Sun, the Rise and Fall of the Imperial Japanese Army*. New York: Random House, 1991, pps. 393-395.

died and were buried there. The starvation and other decimations would continue to war's end forcing both sides to behave in the most abusive and destructive ways.

Neither one of these two men really understood the other's culture and values at the most basic level. Cormier did not understand the concept of a god-emperor as the centerpiece of Japan's political and social system. Onoda believed Americans to be untrustworthy and deceptive and did his very best to maintain the integrity of his homeland in the far off Philippines. It was one thing to envision life without Hitler in Germany and quite another to imagine a nation without an hereditary ruler whose authority had descended to him from some distant pass. It would not go away easily. The Japanese were hated throughout Asia and eventually America since the turn of the twentieth century. Their individual destinies were bound to clash at some point in time.

The real culprit was the Pacific War itself. Battlefield behavior was different than in Europe. The differences between the armies and the nations that fought are varied, but war is not. War is a dimension that draws ideology, race, and cultures into armed conflict when diplomacy breaks down. War is failure to compromise and victimizes nations and the people who fight all under the umbrella we call patriotism or *Espirit de corps* or the *samurai spirit*. Whatever the case, wars will continue with the same infra-structure, only the weapons change. Wars are terribly expensive, highly organized, and are becoming less winnable. Onoda and Cornier were drawn into this scenario not by choice but by circumstances and each acted out their particular function with what they had. Each did their best and survived to tell their stories. Neither knew of each other nor never met but forever embraced between polarized opposites flavored by live combat.

The Pacific War is now history----the U.S. won, Japan lost. All who participated had lives to live and though the experiences are different, wanting to protect one's life will always remain the

same in combat. World War Two was global, vast, and extremely costly. Millions perished . The Corps got what it wanted by the hard way. Five years later “killroy” was on the high seas again taking him to some distant shore in some distant land called Korea. Somehow peace had been lost once again and it became his job to bring it back and the whole process started over. Cormier was there, Onoda was still entrapped in his imaginary war on Lubang totally oblivious to the real world. In short, war is not about victory or loss, but survival and the necessary behavior to achieve it.

Cormier speaks of his fears and admits them making him more human than ever. He achieved his retribution. Onoda, however, implies his fears. It is safe to assume with some accuracy, Onoda was fearful of survival and did not return home as a survivor because of the Japanese attitude toward surrender. He wanted to avoid the stigma associated with surrender and spare both himself and his family from the embarrassment it would create. Caught between his military training and cultural upbringing, he opted for isolation in the jungles of Lubang instead far from the accusing eyes of home while insisting a legal order from his former commanding officer and formally surrendering to Marcos to legitimize his capitulation. It was his closure. This also makes him human. Ironically, upon his return he found to his dismay an “Americanized” and prosperous Japan with his beloved emperor still in rule.

The Pacific War was not only a clash of cultures but cultural diversity under extreme stress creating its own casualties devoid of the trigger’s squeeze. At the same time this story makes us look at ourselves with a different view asking different questions requiring different answers of which we may never be aware. Onoda may well be the last great samurai and Cormier a credit to his Marine Corps. Both were manifest!

End

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Vita

John E. Domingue was born July 14, 1939. His formal education was in the Jefferson Davis Parish Public School System from 1945 to 1954. From 1954 to 1958 he attended and graduated from Catholic High School in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. From 1958 to 1960 he attended Louisiana State University and was a member of the LSU Band during the national championship days. Mr. Domingue served with the United States Air Force and was honorably discharged in 1966. From 1963 to 1966 he attended the University of Southwestern Louisiana (Lafayette) earning a Bachelor of Music Education degree and a Master of Education degree. He taught instrumental music in the St. Martin and Lafayette Parish Public School System for the next 30 years. He belonged to several professional organizations including the Louisiana Teacher's Association, Louisiana Music Educator's Association, Louisiana State Chairman to the National Band Association, and held offices in the Southwestern Louisiana Band Director's Association. He retired from teaching in 1994. Returning to his beloved LSU in 1990, Mr. Domingue is pursuing a second master's degree in the area of liberal arts. He expects to graduate in December, 2005, along side his daughter Robin.

His hobbies are military history with a special interest in the Pacific War, reading, drawing, military music, and LSU football. He is the father of four children and grandfather to one. He lives in Scott, Louisiana, with his bride of 43 years, Dianna, and claims her to be the better half of the contract. He is a life-time member of the Louisiana Retired Teachers Association.

His future plans are to continue private studies of various interests.