

## THE KAMIKAZE PILOTS OF WORLD WAR II AND THEIR IMAGE IN AMERICAN MEDIA

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In October of 1944, during the late stages of World War II, Admiral Ōnishi Takijiro of the Japanese Navy proposed one final solution to Japan's situation: "to organize suicide attack units composed of Zero fighters armed with 250-kilogram bombs, with each plane to crash dive into an enemy carrier."<sup>1</sup> From that proposition the Special Attack Corps, or as they were commonly known in America, Kamikaze Corps, formed. In its ten-month lifespan roughly 3,000 pilots died trying to crash their planes into American ships. While not incredibly effective from a military standpoint – the success rate of attacks was approximately ten percent – the dramatic nature of the attacks created an enduring image, one that masked the true nature of the pilots. The kamikaze pilots were among the best and brightest in Japan; highly educated young men well-versed in literature and philosophy and each with their own reasons for participating in the program. Through analysis of their writings, it is clear that every pilot was completely aware of all the consequences of his actions and driven by a sense of duty to his family and his country.

The kamikaze pilots were a recognizable icon of the war, and the American propaganda machine seized upon that image and used it for a variety of ends. Throughout the course of the war and the years following the perception of the pilots changes, beginning with brainwashed fanatics and gradually shifting to acquire a sense of dignity and nobility in their actions. Through tracing the use of the word in popular American media, we can see how America absorbed the word and altered its meaning until it could be applied to a variety of other circumstances. However, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center raised issues on how the kamikaze pilots are delineated from modern-day Islamic terrorists. While similar in outward method, the aim and execution of the two groups remains dissimilar, as comparative analysis of Pearl Harbor and the 9/11 attacks illustrates.

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<sup>1</sup> Inoguchi, Rikihei, and Tadashi Nakajima. The Divine Wind: Japan's Kamikaze Force in World War II. Trans. Roger Pineau. Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1958. 4.