

Drop the Atom Bomb: American Military Commanders

Teacher Created Materials, Inc. World War II.

There is only one position to take on this issue. The United States has developed a weapon of mass destruction, and as long as the Emperor of Japan and his military leaders stubbornly refuse to surrender unconditionally, the atomic bomb (“Little Boy”) and the plutonium bomb (“Fat Man”) must be options for putting an end to the Pacific War. The Japanese have given every indication that they are prepared to fight to the bitter end to defend their homeland. Every square foot of Shikoku, Kyushu, Honshu, and Hokkaido will be turned into a fortress; and every Japanese man, woman, and child will be called upon to give their lives in the defense of the home islands.

The mindless fanaticism of the Japanese people will result in one million American casualties and prolong the conflict by one or two years. The logistics required to invade the islands, if our previous experience is any indication, will make the Normandy D-Day landings look like a lark. The war we’ve been fighting in the Pacific must guide our decision. On the 15th of June last year, American forces took the island of Saipan. The Japanese had a garrison of 30,000 soldiers there. Out of the 22,000 civilians based on Saipan, two out of three died. Japanese soldiers fought to the bitter end and refused to surrender, and civilians killed their own children and committed suicide rather than give up. The invading forces took 16,000 casualties, and 3,426 Americans were killed. Virtually no Japanese prisoners were taken. When the Marines hit the beaches at Tarawa, there was a garrison of 4,500 crack Japanese troops; however, when the island was finally secured, only 17 were still alive. We lost 991 Marines taking that small sandy atoll, and 2,311 were wounded.

On Tinian, in the Marianas, 195 Americans were killed, and close to 6,000 Japanese were annihilated. Peleliu was another horrible example of the difficult fight we have in the Pacific; 11,000 Japanese fought to the death, and Americans committed 1,800 to the grave and over 8,000 to the hospital. The closer our forces advanced towards the Japanese home islands the more ferocious the resistance we meet. The Iwo Jima landings took place on February 19, 1945. Iwo Jima had a garrison of 21,000 soldiers of the Imperial Army, and of that number our soldiers only took 216 prisoners. More than 18,000 Japanese soldiers gave their lives to stop the invaders, and it took five weeks of brutal combat for the Americans to get the job done.

On April 1, Easter Sunday, Americans landed on Okinawa. When fighting ended on July 2, 110,000 Japanese soldiers had died, and only 11,000 surrendered. Close to 28,000 Japanese soldiers were incinerated by flamethrowers or blown up by grenades as they fought in tunnels and buried bunkers, refusing all offers for surrender. There were 75,000 civilian casualties, many of them suicides. At Okinawa our battle fleet encountered the largest concentration of *Kamikazes*, the “Divine Wind” suicide pilots the Japanese believed would save them from invasion. The Japanese launched flights of 1,000 planes to attack our fleet, with 350 aircraft attacking the ships simultaneously. From April through June, there were 3,000 raids, and 1,500 *Kamikazes* were killed. Even though nothing larger than a destroyer sank, we lost 36 ships, and 375 ships were knocked out of the war. In the course of the Iwo Jima-Okinawa campaign, the costliest in the Pacific, 12,500 of our boys died, and 36,500 marines, soldiers, and sailors were wounded.

It does not take great wisdom to see that Japanese leadership has not given us many options for action. It would be criminal to plan an invasion of the Japanese home islands that would result in one million American casualties. The fanaticism of the Imperial Japanese Army is evident. Their soldiers do not surrender. They fight to the bitter end, and they take our men with them. Were the Japanese home islands invaded, the American people would be stunned by the sacrifice they would be called upon to make. So, “unconditional surrender” it remains, or else.