Foreword by
Rear Admiral Doniphan P. Shelton, USN (Ret.)

TIDAL WAVE

FROM LEYTE GULF TO TOKYO BAY

THOMAS McKELVEY CLEAVER

Author of
THE FROZEN CHOSEN *and* PACIFIC THUNDER

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Front cover: USS *Bunker Hill* on fire following *kamikaze* hits, May 11, 1945. This view aft down the flight deck shows her crews fighting fires. (Naval History and Heritage Command)

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FOREWORD

My friend Tom Cleaver is very good at putting a lot of detail into a very readable book – as is the case in Tidal Wave, the story of World War II from Leyte Gulf until the signing of the peace treaty aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay.

I would like to add just a few lines to his account of the *kamikaze* attack on USS *St Louis* (Cl-49) on November 27, 1944, at 1000 hours.

One of the four *kamikazes* that hit us went down the hangar spaces aft causing a number of explosions and AvGas fires. The good thing was that the fire mains were ruptured and put out the fires almost as soon as occurring. The bad thing was that the Shore Party beer was stored there – a complete loss.

As Tom points out, the *kamikaze* that hit us port side at the waterline was the most dangerous. It put us dead in the water, no power, we could not shoot. The bulk heads between No. 1 and No. 2 boiler operating spaces flexed. We were lucky that when the *kamikazes* returned in the afternoon they inexplicably left us alone.

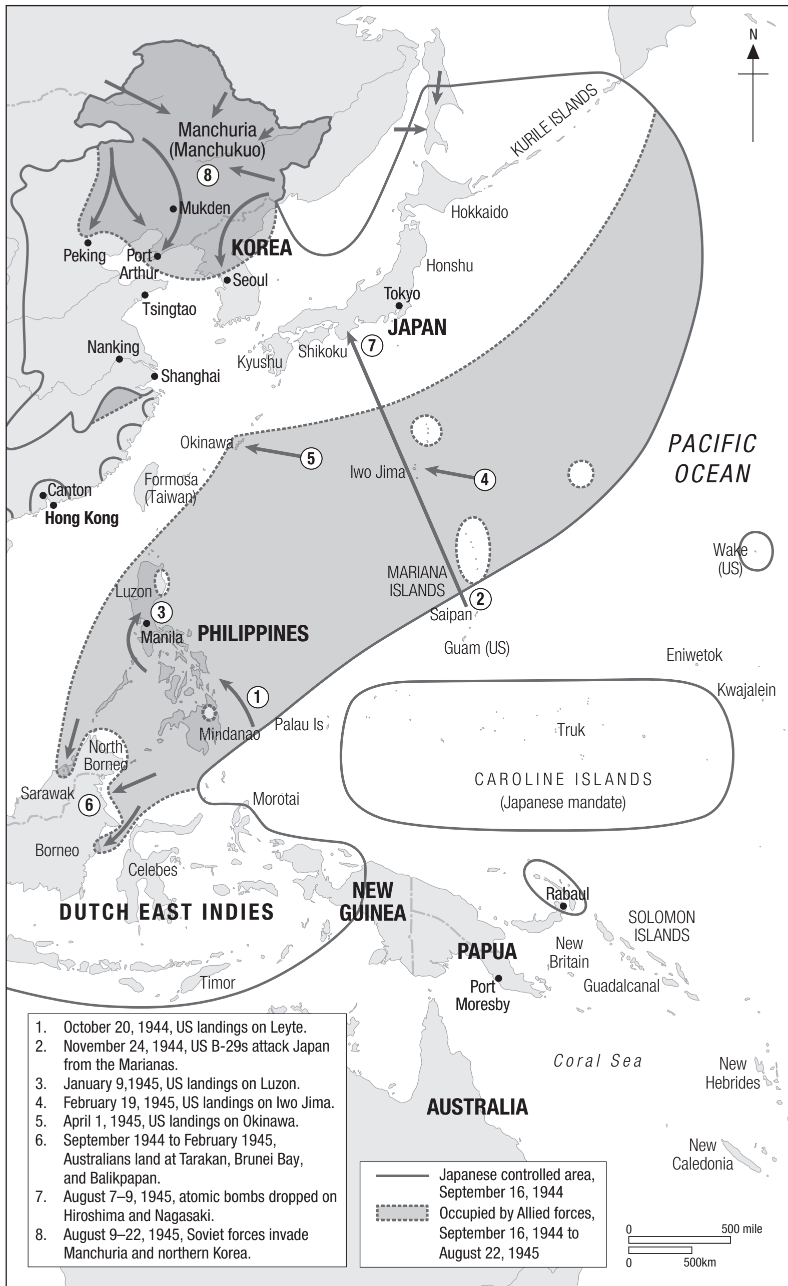
Our damage control parties did a miraculous job in shoring up the flexing bulkheads and at 2200 hours, we got under way at 4 knots for the dry dock at Manus Island, 1,500 miles away. There we made sufficient repairs to steam back to the Long Beach, California shipyard for complete repairs, after which we returned in time for Okinawa, and our participation as part of the Third Fleet task force off Southern Japan prior to the anticipated landings on mainland Japan. Through my No. 2 turret periscope, I had a close up view of the *Franklin* when it was hit.

We were anchored in Buckner Bay, Okinawa when the first atom bomb was dropped. I breathed a sigh of relief we would not face the *kamikaze* off Kyushu.

Tidal Wave is fascinating reading. Read it and be informed.

Doniphan P. Shelton RADM USN (Ret)
Delmar, California, 2017

The Allied Counteroffensive, September 1944 to August 1945



PROLOGUE

This volume, *Tidal Wave*, tells of a much different war than that in my previous book, *Pacific Thunder*. *Tidal Wave* takes up the story at the moment the US Navy had achieved the goal for which it had planned and worked for 20 years: the destruction of the Imperial Japanese Navy, a victory that immediately rang hollow when the admirals and crews discovered they were now facing an enemy willing to see itself totally destroyed in a fight to the death. The *kamikaze* was the most terrifying phenomenon any Westerner faced, since it flew against every Western philosophical belief about the conduct of war and the sanctity of life. Men came to hate the enemy in a deep, personal way they had not before, even after taking an oath of personal vengeance on seeing the destruction wrought at Pearl Harbor. The captain of the battleship *Missouri* faced a near-mutiny for his decision to give the remains of the Japanese pilot who crashed his airplane into the ship the honorable burial accorded to an honorable enemy. The final ten months of the war saw more death and destruction than had been inflicted since the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the end of the war saw the most terrible weapon in human history unleashed on Japan, the necessity of which is debated to this day. This is the story of how a bloody war became bloodier and barely escaped turning into a cataclysmic apocalypse.

I first visited Japan 19 years after the end of the war. The war was recent enough that its reminders were still easy to find, both in Japan and the other countries I visited that had experienced the bloodiest war in human history.

I was fortunate that my sister had a pen pal in Japan. Yoshiko Tsuruta was my "astral twin," born at the same time as me, who was now a student at Tokyo University of Education (now known as the University of Tsukuba). She was eager to meet a "real" American, and I was privileged to get an insight into the country and its people that most *gaijin* (foreigners) rarely experience, since her family shared her curiosity. The Japanese are intensely private people – they could not be otherwise in a country so

densely populated – and even good friends rarely visit each other's homes before they have been friends for many years. I was invited to stay with Yoshiko and her family from the first time I arrived in the country, and during the 18 months I spent in the Far East, I used up most of my leave time making other such visits. While in their home, I followed the rule "when in Rome, do as the Romans do." I lived in the Japanese manner, sleeping on a tatami mat with a wooden block for a pillow, learning to use chopsticks, and even by the end successfully managing to adapt myself to the Japanese toilet, something few Westerners ever manage. By the time I returned home, I felt I had an understanding of the country and its people that was foreign to most of my fellow sailors.

Over the course of these visits, the subject of the war came up early. On my first visit, I was taken to see the *Mikasa*, Admiral Togo's flagship at the Battle of Tsushima Strait that established Japan as a major power, there in her concrete drydock outside the Yokosuka Naval Base. The ship is a monument to Imperial Japan, and more specifically to its navy. To say I felt a bit strange visiting while wearing the uniform of the navy that had defeated that navy, a lone American among a throng of Japanese, would be an understatement. As I looked at the models of Imperial Navy warships that lined the bulkhead, I thought to myself: "... sunk at Guadalcanal... sunk at Midway... sunk at Philippine Sea... sunk at Leyte..." (I was even then a serious student of the Pacific War and had been for as long as I can remember). Afterwards, over lunch, Yoshiko asked me why we had fought the war. She proceeded to tell me the Japanese version of the history of the Pacific War. The two stories – American and Japanese – could not be more different if they had taken place on different planets.

We ended up spending the afternoon in that teahouse as I told her the American history of the war, including the history of the Japan–China war that preceded Pearl Harbor. She was shocked at what she heard, but to her credit she wanted to learn more. At her school, she eventually met Professor Saburō Ienaga, perhaps the most interesting Japanese academic historian of the war, author of *The Pacific War 1931–1945*. Professor Ienaga first wrote about the war in 1947 in a work titled *New Japanese History*, which was the first to deal with Japanese war crimes. The work was censored in 1953 by the Japanese Ministry of Education for what

was called "factual errors and matters of opinion" regarding those crimes. Ienaga sued the Ministry for violation of his freedom of speech, with the result that *The Pacific War* was published in 1961 (it was only translated into English and published in the United States to little notice in the 1980s). Ienaga was later nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999 and 2001 by Noam Chomsky, among others, for his work.

Yoshiko read the book, and the war became a topic she and I discussed honestly, attempting to reconcile Japanese and American memory. She did not share that with her family or friends, since the topic was so shocking to Japanese sensibilities. To this day, unfortunately, Japan has yet to come to terms with this history in the way Germany has come to terms with Hitler and the Nazis. The current government, which has as its goal changing the postwar pacifist constitution – is even less interested in historical truth than its predecessors.

About a third of my overseas tour was spent at Okinawa, where we were based. As a budding historian, I made several visits to the south end of the island, where the major fighting had occurred. Eighteen years of monsoonal rains had yet to wash away the remains of the trenches, which were reminiscent of World War I battlefields. There was no place one could step without putting foot on some remnant of the battle; bullet casings were everywhere. I stood on what was at that time called "Hacksaw Ridge." I leaned down to pick up what I thought was a strange stone, only to be startled by the realization it was a human bone fragment. We visited Kerama Retto, "the graveyard of ships," where a senior petty officer I worked for who had been there during the war told me one could "smell the stench of death in the air" when the wind was right before seeing the island itself.

I also visited other cities in Japan, most notably Hiroshima and Nagasaki. However, the first time I realized the real scope of the destruction inflicted in the war came when we were in the port of Kobe several weeks after having first met Yoshiko and her family. A shipmate and I went walking along the Ginza (every Japanese city has one, not just Tokyo) and eventually discovered as sunset was coming that we had wandered far away and were now lost in a residential suburb. We turned the corner and confronted a sight I have never been able to forget. There

was a huge empty field, covered with straggly low vegetation, out of which stuck twisted fire-blackened girders. It reminded me of a science-fiction portrayal of what things would look like following an atomic war. I was later to learn that those 1,500 acres were the last part of the city that had yet to be rebuilt from the fire raid of March 16–17, 1945, almost 18 years to the day before our discovery. When I spoke of this in a later visit with my friend, she told me her family's story of surviving the Tokyo fire raid on March 10, 1945 that had begun the B-29 firebombing campaign. The story of how her mother saved her older brother while pregnant with her by jumping into a drainage canal is still chilling to recall.

My visit to Nagasaki in 1964 changed much of my perception of Japan. When we docked, the pier was filled with young Japanese students. There were anti-US protests in Japan at the time over the renewal of the Security Treaty, and we thought that was what we were seeing. We could not have been more wrong! They were there as citizens of Nagasaki to do what the people of Nagasaki have done ever since the war: welcome foreigners and try to establish ties of friendship and brotherhood. I learned the Christian history of Nagasaki and the island of Kyushu from another young Japanese woman as she took me to visit the house where Puccini had written "Madame Butterfly" and to the Atomic Museum, where I stared into the upturned helmet of a Japanese soldier and realized the "ivory" that lined its interior was not ivory.

The story of how the people of Nagasaki responded to the bombing is little known outside of Japan. It bears telling. After the war, there was much discussion of how to prevent such a disaster happening again, led by the Christian churches. Eventually, a decision was made that the city should devote itself to the promotion of "international brotherhood" as the only way of achieving this. Many cities around the world are dedicated to this or that purpose; the overwhelming majority of the residents have no knowledge of that. The people of Nagasaki do know. If they see a stranger on the street, they will do the very un-Japanese thing of coming up to you and asking if they might help, could they perhaps buy you a cup of tea and rice cakes? I don't think there has ever been an act of truly Christian forgiveness on such a scale anywhere else. It most certainly stands in stark contrast to Hiroshima, which adopted the stance

of international victim and still seeks to make an American feel guilty standing at the Ground Zero memorial.

This experience is why I chose to use this book to tell the story of the unknown bomb and the city it destroyed. It's really unsurprising when one studies the event that the Air Force gave it as little publicity at the time as it did. It's almost surprising that "Bockscar," the B-29 that carried the bomb, was preserved at the US Air Force Museum. Needless to say, the story of how Nagasaki – the most Christian, pro-Western, anti-Imperial city in Japan – was destroyed as the alternative to abandoning the bomb over the ocean, is not what one will read in that museum. It is a tale of the purest irony.

To this day, the question of the use of the bombs can stir controversy. As an American, it is not hard to be conflicted. The official explanation was that it ended the war without the loss of millions more, and this explanation is not without merit. I know personally of two men who were both important in my life whose lives were very likely saved by the bombs. One was Gunnery Sergeant James F. Eaton, later my father-in-law, who was scheduled to hit the beach on Kyushu in November 1945 in the first wave when the First Marine Division landed. The other was Chief Petty Officer L. Thomas Cleaver, my father, who had survived the sinking of his radar picket destroyer at Okinawa only to receive orders at the end of his survivor's leave back to another such ship to participate in the invasion. He was so certain he would not survive that the day he received those orders, on my first birthday, he sat down and wrote a letter to me that I only found 45 years later on his death when I went through his papers. In it, he told me who he was, why he had gone to war, and what his hopes were for his only son in the future. It was written so I would know who my unknown father was. Fortunately, I was able to know both these good men in the years after.

Marine Colonel William E. Barber, who I came to know while researching what became *The Frozen Chosen*, told me how he and the other officers of the 6th Marine Division had gone to the Kyushu beach they were scheduled to land on after they arrived for occupation duty in September 1945. The defenses were still there, and they were able to

talk to the Japanese officers who would have directed the defense. At the end, it was the considered opinion of every officer from the commanding general to the most junior company commander (Barber) that they would not have overcome those defenses, and that there would have been no way to evacuate any survivors from the beach. Yes, the official explanation for the bombs carries truth.

However, there are other aspects to the war's ending. Given that in the end the Allies allowed Hirohito to remain Emperor of Japan, which was the one sticking point to the Japanese leaders when they received the Allied peace proposals, there is a case to be made that the war could have ended at least a few months earlier after the taking of Okinawa. The role of the Soviet Union, which entered the war on August 9, 90 days to the day after the end of the European war as Stalin had promised to do at Yalta, is one that is largely ignored in the United States. Yet the Japanese knew the Soviets could invade northern Japan with little opposition 90 days before the American Kyushu landings; their knowledge of what had happened in Germany in the division of the country between the Western Allies and the Soviets was a major factor in the Emperor's decision to stop the fighting before this invasion could happen. The Japanese government was debating the Soviet invasion of Manchuria that had happened at midnight, when they received word of the Nagasaki bombing. For them, Nagasaki wasn't as important as the news of the Soviet troop buildup on Sakhalin Island for an invasion of Hokkaido.

In the end, the Pacific War validated every argument made by those who believed in the potential power of naval aviation, which is the centerpiece of this story.

Thomas McKelvey Cleaver
Los Angeles, California, 2018

CHAPTER ONE

THE FINAL BATTLE

The first quarter moon hung in the western sky gleaming dimly through scattered clouds over the Pacific; the moonlight was sufficient to illuminate the many wakes of the huge formation of ships below. At 0300 hours, an observer would have heard the calls to reveille echoing across the still-dark sea throughout the darkened fleet.

In the big boxy aircraft carriers that steamed in the center of the formations, crewmen crawled out of their racks in humid bunking compartments and began pulling on their dungarees; young pilots stumbled to their feet in their cramped staterooms and threw lukewarm water on their faces to awaken fully before staggering off to the wardrooms for a quick breakfast. The fleet had sortied from Leyte Gulf in the Philippines on July 1 for what would turn out to be its final deployment of the war, and the limited supplies of fresh food taken aboard then were running out now, six weeks later. Spam sandwiches and the chipped dried beef in gravy over toast known universally as "SOS" ("shit on a shingle") were once again making their appearance on the menu. Below decks, enlisted men shuffled through chow lines.

The wail of alarms across the fleet brought crews to pre-dawn General Quarters. Crews tumbled into the gun tubs and unlimbered 20mm and 40mm antiaircraft guns in readiness as they strained

their eyes into the western sky where the Pacific sunrise lit building cumulus clouds in all quarters. The fleet had not been subjected to *kamikaze* attack in several days and was just returning from a day spent out of range, while the carriers refueled their thirsty escorts. Would today be the end of that pause?

It was Wednesday, August 15, 1945, just another of many long tiring days faced by the men of the United States Third Fleet. In recent days, rumors had raced through the destroyers, cruisers, battleships and aircraft carriers of the mightiest fleet the world had ever seen that the war could end at any time. Those who passed on the rumors were quickly reminded by their salty seniors of the old navy saying, "Believe nothing that you hear, and only half of what you see."

Task Group 38.4, commanded by Rear Admiral Arthur W. Radford with his flag aboard *Yorktown* (CV-10) and composed of the fleet carriers *Shangri-La* (CV-38), *Bon Homme Richard* (CV-31), and *Wasp* (CV-18), accompanied by the light carriers *Independence* (CVL-22) and *Cowpens* (CVL-25), exemplified the fast carrier striking force in the summer of 1945. Centered around six carriers, it was numerically the strongest task group in Task Force 38. The squadrons aboard the six carriers included a total of 133 Grumman F6F-5 Hellcats, including 36 dedicated night fighters aboard "Bonnie Dick"; 137 Vought F4U Corsairs, including 36 brand new F4U-4s, aboard *Wasp*; 45 Curtiss SB2C Helldiver dive bombers, including 15 of the latest SB2C-5, aboard *Wasp*; and 80 of the newest TBM-3 Avenger torpedo bombers. Able to strike the enemy by day or night, Task Group 38.4 packed more punch than the entire prewar carrier force combined. Altogether, Task Force 38 was centered around ten fleet carriers and six light carriers in three task groups.

The British Pacific Fleet, assigned as Task Force 37, had joined Task Force 38 on July 16, augmenting the force with four fleet carriers carrying 200 additional aircraft: Supermarine Seafire IIIs, Fairey Firefly Is, Grumman Avengers and Hellcats, and Vought Corsairs. Unfortunately, three of the British carriers had been forced to retire three days before to the advanced British base at Manus

Atoll in Admiralty Islands south of the Philippines, known to the sailors of the Royal Navy as "Scapa Flow with bloody palm trees," owing to the lack of British tankers for replenishment. The carrier HMS *Indefatigable*, with her escort, the battleship HMS *King George V*, cruisers HMS *Newfoundland* and *Gambia*, and destroyers HMS *Barfleur, Wakeful, Wrangler, Teazer, Termagant* and *Tenacious*, and HMAS *Napier* and *Nizam*, remained with the Americans as Task Group 38.5. The Seafires of 24 Naval Fighter Wing, operated by 887 and 894 squadrons, had the best low-altitude performance of any fighter in the fleet and were the first line of defense against Japanese low-altitude *kamikaze* attacks.

Aboard *Yorktown*, veteran of the early days of the Central Pacific Campaign that had taken the fast carrier force from a tentative raid on Wake Island by four carriers only 22 months earlier to regular strikes against targets on Honshu and Hokkaido islands since July 10, the young pilots of VF-88, Fighting-88, made their way to the squadron ready room for the morning briefing. Air Group 88 was one of the newest in the fleet, having come aboard *Yorktown* at Leyte only in the past June, while the fleet licked its wounds and caught its breath after the battle of Okinawa, site of the worst losses since the early days in the Solomons three years before. VF-88 had taken heavy losses in the six weeks since Admiral William F. Halsey, Jr. had brought the fleet to the waters off Japan, with ten pilots now gone, including squadron leader LCDR Charles Crommelin, lost in a freak midair collision with his wingman over Hokkaido 30 days earlier – the last of four legendary brothers to die in the Pacific War. They were unsure of Lieutenant Malcolm W. Cagle, the former squadron executive officer who now led them; the combat-experienced division leaders who had joined the squadron during training in the past year doubted that Cagle, who hadn't become a naval aviator until 18 months earlier and whose flying experience had been confined to the Training Command until he was given the plum position of squadron XO, could fill Crommelin's shoes. These experienced men were "AvCads" – reservists commissioned for the duration of the war after graduating from flight school –

while Cagle was a "ringknocker," an Annapolis graduate. They knew that as a "regular" Cagle was the beneficiary of the rule, "The Navy takes care of its own." Over the next 30 years, Cagle would make a name for himself as a senior aviator in the Korean War and a carrier commander in the Vietnam War, eventually attaining the rank of vice admiral and retiring as Commander of Naval Education and Training at Pensacola, the home of naval aviation. But that was the future. Today, Lieutenant Cagle's leadership ability was in doubt. When the popular Crommelin went down and Cagle became the commander, he told the pilots that if they had any suggestions, he'd like to hear them; no one replied, since as one recalled, "We observed body language that said 'I don't want to hear it.'"

The squadron's assignment this morning wasn't that different from previous missions, but the men were electrified by Cagle's announcement that the Japanese were likely to surrender today, though the exact time was not yet known. The mission was to prevent an aerial *banzai* attack by any Japanese fliers who refused the orders of their emperor to surrender. Two divisions – eight F6F-5 Hellcats – would join up with eight other Hellcats from *Wasp*'s VF-86 and a further 16 F4U-1D Corsairs from *Shangri-La*'s VF-85 and VBF-85 to attack airfields in the vicinity of Choshi, the easternmost city of greater Tokyo. The eight Fighting-88 Hellcats were to split into two groups when they reached Tokurozama Airfield. Two pilots would stay high to receive and relay the hoped-for ceasefire message that might be broadcast at any time. The others – Lt(jg)s "Howdy" Harrison, Maury Proctor, and Ted Hansen, and ensigns Joe Sahloff, Wright Hobbs, and Gene Mandenberg – would strafe anything they found on the airfield. Launch was set at 0430 hours.

A few miles away from *Yorktown*, Task Group 38.1 was readying for battle as flight deck crews aboard the task group's two light carriers, *Belleau Wood* (CVL-24) and *San Jacinto* (CVL-30), each prepared a division of F6F-5 Hellcats for a final patrol over Japan. Aboard *San Jacinto*, four F6Fs of VF-49 were ready for takeoff.

Aboard HMS *Indefatigable*, the flight deck was abuzz with activity as men worked in the pre-dawn grayness to ready the Seafires for their

first offensive operation since returning to the waters off Japan in mid-July. Three Seafire IIIs of 887 and four of 894 Squadrons were assigned to escort six Avengers of 820 Squadron and four Fireflies of 1772 Squadron for a dawn strike against the *kamikazes* at Kisarazu Airfield, 30 miles south of Tokyo. This was officially the last air strike by units of the Fleet Air Arm in World War II. Like VF-88's assignment, the mission was being flown to prevent any attempted attack on the Allied fleet as it steamed a hundred miles east of Tokyo Bay.

With their briefings completed, the pilots and aircrews of the four squadrons made their way up to the flight deck to man their aircraft. Among them was Sub-Lieutenant Fred Hockley, assigned for this mission as flight leader of the four Seafires from 894 Squadron, which would fly close escort. Son of a foreman with the Cambridge water board and heavily involved in his local church and competitive swimming before the war, Hockley had joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve when the war broke out and trained as a naval fighter pilot. He was a combat veteran now, having flown the Seafire III in operations over southern France a year ago and against the Japanese since the Palembang strikes in January 1945 that marked the arrival of the British Pacific Fleet. As he slipped into the Seafire's tight cockpit and adjusted his Sutton harness, Hockley thought to himself how lucky he was to be in command of the last Fleet Air Arm fighter mission of the war – it would be a tale to tell the grandchildren he hoped someday to have.

The three 887 Squadron Seafires that would fly high cover were led by Sub-Lieutenant Victor Lowden. Born in Bangkok, where his father worked as an accountant, and educated at St John's College, Cambridge, Lowden had arrived in the Pacific and joined 887 in May while the Royal Navy was engaged in stopping *kamikazes* based in the Sakishima Islands from attacking the Allied fleet off Okinawa. Since the fleet's return from Australia the month before, he had engaged in combat over Shikoku and Honshu and attacks on shipping and shore installations near Sendai.

Takeoff for Task Force 38 on this last day of war commenced just as the sun appeared over the eastern horizon, though the sea was still

dark. Throughout the fleet, pilots lifted off their carriers and climbed up into the morning light, each man hoping that the recall order might come before they arrived over the enemy coast. Nearly 200 American and British aircraft were headed for the Japanese capital.

At about 0530 hours, Hockley could just see the dark mass of the coast of Honshu ahead through the thickening clouds. At that moment, the Avenger leader passed the word that they were aborting the attack on Kisarazu Airfield owing to the poor weather and would attack their secondary target, a chemical weapons factory at Odaki. When Hockley pressed his radio switch to reply, he discovered when no one responded that his radio transmitter had malfunctioned; moments later the receiver also died. Nevertheless, he decided to press on with the mission, relying on hand signals to his wingman, Ted Garvin, who could relay his instructions via radio. He looked over at Garvin and tapped his helmet headphones, to indicate radio problems.

Leading the four Fighting-88 Hellcats inbound to Choshi, division leader "Howdy" Harrison spotted the great volcano Fujiyama, its snow-capped peak gleaming in the early morning light high above the Tokyo plain and the waters of Tokyo Bay. The seven other *Wasp* Hellcats and the 16 *Shangri-La* Corsairs were dark silhouettes in the brightening sky. High clouds were now visible in all directions.

As the Allied flyers pressed on toward their targets, Japanese radar picked up the formations and the alert was sounded at the airfields that dotted the Tokyo region.

Atsugi Airfield east of Tokyo was the main base for the Imperial Naval Air Force in the capital region and was home to the 302nd Kokutai (air group), one of the last remaining elite units of the Imperial Japanese Navy. The group had been created in March 1944 to provide defense for the capital against the expected B-29 raids. Two of the group's three *Hikotai* (squadrons) were equipped with the Mitsubishi J2M3 *Raiden* (Thunderbolt), known to the Allies by the code name "Jack." The J2M3 was optimized as a bomber interceptor and was at a disadvantage when it entered combat with Hellcats, Corsairs or P-51D Mustangs. Thus, the third squadron

flew the venerable A6M5c *Zero-sen*, which was still the main air superiority fighter for the IJNAF, despite its manifest obsolescence, to protect the heavier interceptors. The pilots of the 302nd *Kokutai* thought of themselves as dedicated Samurai; there was no thought of surrender among these men who were willing if necessary to crash their airplane into one of the silver giants attacking their homeland.

Commander of the 302nd was 23-year-old Lieutenant Yukio Morioka, the youngest Japanese air group leader of the war. Originally trained as a dive-bomber pilot in 1942, Morioka had missed the great carrier battles and had taken the opportunity to become a fighter pilot in the spring of 1944 when he was assigned to the 302nd. He had been trained in flying the Zero by the group's leading ace, Ensign Sadaaki "Temei" Akamatsu, a man who was infamous in the Imperial Navy. A Navy pilot since 1932, he had seen action over China, where he quickly became an ace, and had been one of the high scorers in the early days of the Pacific War. He had a wicked reputation as an undisciplined rebel and womanizer, and had been broken in rank several times. Now, however, his wild flying skills stood him in good stead and he was the only IJNAF pilot who preferred the J2M3 *Raiden*, having once shot down three P-51s in one mission while flying one; he had shot down nine F6F Hellcats since the first American naval air strikes against Tokyo back in February. He was considered the "old master" by the other pilots of the 302nd, who listened closely to his advice to use "hit-and-run" tactics against the Americans. In eight years of combat, Akamatsu had yet to get so much as a scratch from the enemy.

The 302nd had engaged in combat with B-29s from the Marianas since their first appearance over Japan the previous November. On January 23, 1945, Morioka had nearly died, when a gunner aboard a B-29 of the 73rd Bomb Wing he was attacking shot off his left hand. It was considered a miracle that he had been able to land successfully despite shock and loss of blood. After a brief stay in the hospital, he was fitted with an iron claw with which he could control the throttle of his fighter, and returned to combat in April. As of this morning, he was the victor over four American aircraft. On August 3, he

shot down the P-51D flown by 2nd Lt John J. Coneff of the 457th Fighter Squadron of the Iwo Jima-based 506th Fighter Group in a wild fight over Tokyo Bay to thwart the rescue of Captain Edward Mikes of the 458th Fighter Squadron; ten days later, on August 13, he led four Zeros that chased and shot down an American Navy PBY-5A Catalina that had just taken off after rescuing a Hellcat pilot in Tokyo Bay outside the Japanese Navy base at Yokosuka.

With the warning of the coming Allied air attack, Morioka manned his A6M5c Zero, known to the Allies as a "Zeke-52." He took off quickly with his wingmen, Ensigns Mitsuo Tsuruta, Muneaki Morimoto and Tooru Miyaki, close behind and followed by a second flight of four Zeros as they climbed into the brightening sky. Akamatsu's formation of four J2M3s trailed Morioka's Zeros as they climbed through halls of clouds.

The pilots of the 302nd *Kokutai* knew nothing of what had happened to their country in the previous nine days since a lone B-29 devastated the city of Hiroshima on August 6 with an atom bomb, followed three days later by the devastation of Nagasaki with a second atomic blast. This second bomb coincided with the launching of an offensive in Manchuria, by the previously neutral Soviet Union, that was advancing quickly through the ranks of the vaunted Kwantung Army, now a ghost of itself after its best units had been withdrawn to stand against the expected invasion of Kyushu. Since the Hiroshima attack, Japanese leaders had remained locked in intense debate about whether surrender was an option and, if it was, then what form it would take. The very thought of surrender disgusted many in the senior military leadership. Just the previous day, an attempted *coup d'état* by the Japanese Army had been discovered and crushed.

On approach to Odaki, the Fireflies and Avengers dropped to 1,000 feet over the flat plain and bored in for their rocket and bomb runs. Just at that moment, two Zekes were spotted below the bombers. Sub-Lieutenant Randall Kay, leader of the second 894 pair, called out that they were probably decoys. A moment later, Kay spotted 12 Zekes that appeared out of the clouds, flashing past the three 887 Seafires 3,000 feet above the four 894 fighters.

With his radio out, Fred Hockley didn't hear Kay's shouted warning "Break! Break!" and realized the formation was under attack only when he saw his wingman break sharply away from him to the right. Hockley was a moment too late flinging his Seafire after the others. Suddenly, his fighter was wracked by the heavy hits of 20mm shells from the Zeke he saw in his rearview mirror, locked on his tail. Holes appeared in his wing and engine cowling, followed by smoke. The Seafire was mortally injured.

Hockley managed to pull away as his attacker turned to face another Seafire. He pulled back his canopy, unfastened his Sutton harness, pushed open the cockpit side flap and bailed out. Falling clear of the fight, he opened his parachute. In a matter of moments he hit the ground hard, outside the village of Higashimura. It took a moment for him to catch his breath and disentangle himself from his parachute. When he stood up, he faced a very surprised and very scared Japanese air raid warden. Fred Hockley raised his arms in surrender. Engines with their throttles pushed to the maximum screamed overhead and he glanced up at the last battle the Fleet Air Arm fought in World War II.

Victor Lowden saw the 12 Zekes flash past as they dove on the four Seafires below. Instinctively, he winged over, followed by his wingmen, Sub-Lieutenants Gerry "Spud" Murphy and W. J. "Taffy" Williams. Selecting a target, Lowden pressed the fire button on the spade grip of his control column as he closed to 800 feet behind the enemy fighter. 20mm cannon shells struck the Zeke until, when about 450 feet ahead, it fell away in flames. Clearing his tail before latching onto a second, Lowden closed in and opened fire. After the first burst, his port cannon jammed and the Seafire yawed from the recoil of the starboard gun with each shot. Stomping on the rudder and ailerons, Lowden shot down the second Zeke with three bursts from 250 yards before turning after a third enemy fighter. Lowden's wingman, "Taffy" Williams, also shot down a Zeke and now opened fire at Lowden's third opponent, which quickly went down under their combined fire. The two Seafires and the surviving Zekes twisted and turned, firing for only a brief second at one another as an enemy

appeared and then disappeared in their sights. Three managed to get on Lowden's tail and he hauled his Seafire around in a maximum rate turn, firing at each in succession and damaging two before his speed decayed and gave the Zekes the performance edge just as his remaining cannon fired its last shot and he was out of ammunition. Lowden quickly nosed over into a maximum-performance dive and outran his pursuers.

The three surviving 894 pilots stuck with the Avengers as the fight developed. Hockley's wingman Ted Garvin was hit and had one cannon jam when his drop tank failed to jettison. He still managed to damage one that fell away out of the fight and that he lost sight of in the clouds. Randy Kay shot down one of two Zekes attacking the Avengers with a 60-degree deflection shot, then blew the tail off the second while his wingman, Sub-Lieutenant Don Duncan, hit two that retreated damaged from the fight and then finished off a third despite getting a cannon jam.

"Spud" Murphy found himself behind a pair and quickly dispatched one while then getting locked in a turning fight with the remaining fighter. G-force pinned him in his seat as he managed to pull the nose of his Spitfire ahead of the Zeke and put a burst of 20mm into the enemy, which struck the engine and cockpit, and caused it to plummet down. He later remembered the battle:

> The enemy approached our Avengers in fairly close starboard echelon, but flying in line astern. They peeled off smartly in fours from down sun and headed for the Avengers. One section of four appeared to be coming head-on for us, but I didn't observe their guns firing. Their original attack was well-coordinated, but they seemed to lose each other after that, and could not have kept a good lookout astern.
>
> I opened fire with my flight leader from the enemy port quarter and saw strikes on the fuselage of the enemy, which was finished off by the flight leader. I disengaged from above to attack another Zeke 500 feet below. I closed in from above and astern, obtaining hits on his belly and engine. His undercart fell down and smoke and flame

> were coming from the engine, but I was closing too fast and overshot. I pulled up to re-attack number two and saw a lone Zeke at the same level doing a shallow turn to starboard. He evidently didn't see me and I held fire till I was some hundred yards away. I observed immediate strikes on his cockpit and engine, which burst into flames. He rolled on his back and plummeted in flames into a cloud.

As fast as the fight had happened, it was over.

While the Seafire pilots fought off the Zekes, the Fireflies and Avengers hit their target squarely and pulled out low as they made their escape. The six Avengers came under fire from four other enemy fighters, with another eight closing in. One Avenger was badly hit but remained in formation while his wingman's turret gunner hit one of the attackers. Suddenly, four dark blue American Hellcats dove into the fight. The British pilots were unaware of the identity markings on the Hellcats, but they were the four VF-49 Hellcats from *San Jacinto*. The arrival of the four Americans broke up the Japanese attackers, and they quickly shot down four.

Above, the four Hellcats of VF-31 maintained top cover. Division leader Lieutenant Jim Stewart saw the other Japanese fighters evade the Fighting-49 Hellcats. "Let's go!" he yelled and dove after the enemy, followed closely by his wingman and by section leader Lt(jg) Edward "Smiley" Toaspern, a five-victory ace on his second tour with the squadron. Seeing the enemy fighters split up, the two section leaders split apart, with Stewart going after one pair while Toaspern pulled in behind the second. A burst from his six .50-caliber machine guns exploded one and he then hit the other, which caught fire and fell away. In the meantime, Stewart exploded one Zeke while the other disappeared in the clouds. The other enemy fighters quickly retreated into the clouds.

The four VF-31 pilots quickly joined up with their comrades from VF-49 and continued toward the target. Thirty-five minutes later, word came from the air officer on *Belleau Wood* to abort the mission and return to base. Japan had just surrendered and the war was over.

None of the British or American pilots was checking his watch as he fought, but Sub-Lieutenant Gerry Murphy of 887 Squadron, VF-31's Lieutenant Jim Stewart or Lt(jg) Edward Toaspern was the last Allied fighter pilot to shoot down an enemy fighter before the Pacific War was officially declared over.

Just because the war had been officially declared over did not mean the fighting stopped, however.

Lieutenant Paul Herschel was leading his division of four VF-6 Hellcats home to *Hancock* (CV-19) after getting the recall order when they were jumped by seven enemy fighters. They shot down a Zeke and two Jacks without loss and continued back to their carrier without further incident.

VF-88's Hellcats weren't as fortunate. At 0645 hours, the eight Hellcats and their *Shangri-La* shipmates were over the target. "Howdy" Harrison led his six Hellcats low over Tokurozama, just as the word was passed the Japanese had surrendered. Proctor's wingman Ted Hansen recalled thinking, "Oh God, let's get our fannies out of here." The six Hellcats were hit seconds later from behind and above by 17 Japanese fighters the Americans identified as several Kawanishi N1K2-J "Georges" and Nakajima Ki. 84 "Franks" as well as several Zekes and Jacks. If there were Franks present, they must have been part of a JAAF formation that stumbled on the fight at the same time as the other attackers, since the two air forces never operated together.

Turning into the attackers, Harrison opened fire. In the opening head-to-head pass, Hansen shot down what he identified as a Frank that tried to ram him, and splashed a second. A third Frank lost its wing to Maury Proctor's fire. Losing track of Mandenberg, Harrison, and Hobbs, Hansen and Proctor joined up and soon spotted a Jack on Joe Sahloff's tail, which Proctor exploded. Clearly in trouble with his fighter trailing smoke, Sahloff turned for the coast, but was never seen again.

As Proctor turned away from the exploded Jack, he was bracketed with tracers. He made a tight right turn that gave Hansen the shot to nail the Frank on his tail. As he reversed course, Proctor saw two other enemy fighters on fire. More

importantly, six others in front of him and one turning behind him were still full of fight. He managed a killing belly shot when the formation of six pulled into a climb, then quickly ducked into a cloud to evade the one behind. When he popped out moments later, the sky was empty. As he flew toward the coast, he attempted to contact the others and thought he heard Hansen. Hansen heard nothing and thought he was the sole survivor until Proctor appeared overhead five minutes after he trapped aboard *Yorktown*.

The fight over, Tokurozama went into the historical record as the war's last substantial air battle. While the six pilots claimed nine kills, it came at the high cost of four missing and finally listed as presumed dead: Harrison, Hobbs, Mandenberg, and Sahloff.

Not long after Hansen and Proctor trapped aboard *Yorktown*, Jim Stewart's VF-31 division landed aboard *Belleau Wood*. At about the same time, Victor Lowden, who had narrowly escaped being attacked by American Corsairs on his return flight by dropping his landing gear and rocking his wings to show the prominent US-style roundels, touched down on *Indefatigable* with an overheating Merlin engine, owing to a hit in the radiator; it was the last of the British strike force to do so after the badly damaged sixth Avenger ditched near the carrier's plane guard destroyer.

While Japanese records are incomplete regarding which units were engaged where on this last day of the war, 302nd *Kokutai* commander Lieutenant Morioka claimed he shot down one of six F6F Hellcats the 302nd came across "near Atsugi," which is very close to the reported location of the VF-88 Hellcats when they were hit. It is now considered likely that the 302nd *Kokutai* fought with both the VF-88 and VF-6 Hellcats, which both reported being attacked by a mixed formation of Zekes and Jacks, a formation flown only by the 302nd, while a squadron of the 343rd *Kokutai* which was equipped with the N1K-2J *Shiden* (George) and perhaps an unidentified Japanese Army Air Force unit equipped with the Ki.84 *Hayate* (Frank) were also involved

in the VF-88 battle. The Seafires from *Indefatigable* appear most likely to have engaged Zeros of the 252nd *Kokutai*, which was based at Atsugi that summer. Lt(jg) Tadahiko Honma, a pilot of the 304th Hikotai of the 252nd *Kokutai*, was shot down in his A6M5 by a Seafire on August 15, 1945. Chief Petty Officer Yoshinari of the 252nd was credited with shooting down Fred Hockley's Seafire.

At noon, while the men aboard the ships of the Third Fleet celebrated their survival, the Japanese people heard a voice almost none had ever heard before. It was the voice of Emperor Hirohito.

> After pondering deeply the general trends of the world and the actual conditions obtaining in Our Empire today, We have decided to effect a settlement of the present situation by resorting to an extraordinary measure.
>
> We have ordered Our Government to communicate to the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union that Our Empire accepts the provisions of their Joint Declaration.
>
> To strive for the common prosperity and happiness of all nations as well as the security and well-being of Our subjects is the solemn obligation which has been handed down by Our Imperial Ancestors and which lies close to Our heart.
>
> Indeed, We declared war on America and Britain out of Our sincere desire to ensure Japan's self-preservation and the stabilization of East Asia, it being far from Our thought either to infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or to embark upon territorial aggrandizement.
>
> But now the war has lasted for nearly four years. Despite the best that has been done by everyone – the gallant fighting of the military and naval forces, the diligence and assiduity of Our servants of the State, and the devoted service of Our one hundred million people – the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage, while the general trends of the world have all turned against her interest.

> Moreover, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is, indeed, incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should we continue to fight, not only would it result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization.
>
> Such being the case, how are We to save the millions of Our subjects, or to atone Ourselves before the hallowed spirits of Our Imperial Ancestors? This is the reason why We have ordered the acceptance of the provisions of the Joint Declaration of the Powers.
>
> The hardships and sufferings to which Our nation is to be subjected hereafter will be certainly great. We are keenly aware of the inmost feelings of all of you, Our subjects. However, it is according to the dictates of time and fate that We have resolved to pave the way for a grand peace for all the generations to come by enduring the unendurable and suffering what is unsufferable.

It was still unclear if the Japanese military would follow the order of their emperor. At the same time the emperor spoke, VF-31 launched four divisions of Hellcats – 16 fighters – to relieve the Combat Air Patrol (CAP) over the task group. At 1400 hours, radar aboard *Lexington* (CV-16), flagship of Task Group 38.1, picked up a lone bogey closing on the fleet. Admiral Halsey gave the order "Shoot it down, not with hostility but with compassion."

Ensign Clarence Moore spotted the intruder and identified it as a Judy, the American code name for the Yokosuka D4Y3 *Suisun* (Comet) dive bomber that was the most commonly used *kamikaze* attack aircraft. Ensign Moore turned in behind the Judy and set it afire with two short bursts. The Judy crashed into the ocean below, the last Japanese aircraft shot down by a US Navy fighter pilot in the Pacific War.

While all this was happening, a unit from the Imperial Japanese Army's 426th Infantry Regiment arrived in the village of Higashimura to take custody of Fred Hockley. He was taken to the regiment's nearby headquarters and placed in a jail cell. Hockley was present

when the men heard the voice of their emperor, telling them to "endure the unendurable" and to surrender. A colonel came to the jail and informed him of the emperor's orders. Later that evening, the cell door opened to reveal a group of Japanese officers led by a major. Hockley was removed from the cell and marched into the nearby woods, where he was forced to kneel. On the major's order, one of the junior officers beheaded Hockley with his samurai sword. The body was hidden in a shallow grave. A few days later, fearful that his body would be found when Allied occupation troops arrived, those who had committed the murder returned and dug up Hockley's body, then burned it. It did them no good, as other soldiers who disagreed with the commission of the war crime informed Allied authorities; the major who gave the order and the junior officer who carried it out were arrested in October 1945. Following a brief trial, they were hanged as war criminals in November.

Whoever had fired the last shot of the war, the bloodiest six years of recorded human history had finally come to an end. While 80 percent of the deaths in the war had happened on the Eastern Front, fighting in the Pacific had been intense and bloody, with no quarter asked or given in a battle against an enemy that preferred death to surrender. The last ten months of the Pacific War, from the victory at Leyte Gulf to the strikes on Tokyo, had been the bloodiest of the four-and-a-half-year conflict.

CHAPTER TWO

OCTOBER 25, 1944

By 1000 hours on the morning of October 25, 1944, the United States Navy had accomplished the task for which it had been created over the previous 20 years: the defeat of the Imperial Japanese Navy, which at this moment no longer posed a credible threat. *Zuikaku*, last survivor of the six aircraft carriers that had attacked Pearl Harbor 34 months earlier, lay on the bottom 100 miles north of Cape Engaño along with the carriers *Chitose* and *Zuiho*. *Musashi*, one of the two largest battleships in the world, was sunk in the Sibuyan Sea. The battleships *Fuso* and *Yamashiro* had been destroyed in Surigao Strait. Admiral Kurita's Center Force had been stopped in a desperate battle off the island of Samar and was in retreat through San Bernardino Strait. Other than the one-way mission that would be undertaken by the battleship *Yamato* in the Okinawa campaign six months later, no other Japanese capital ship would seek combat with the US fleet for the remainder of the war. The victory that had been planned over the preceding two decades had been achieved. British historian J. F .C. Fuller, writing in *The Decisive Battles of the Western World*, described the outcome of Leyte Gulf: "The Japanese fleet had [effectively] ceased to exist, and, except by land-based aircraft, their opponents had won undisputed command of the sea."

For Japan, the defeat in the Philippines was catastrophic. The Imperial Japanese Navy had suffered its greatest ever loss of ships and men in combat. The defeat meant the inevitable loss of the Philippines. This meant in turn that Japan would be all but completely cut off from the territories in Southeast Asia that had been occupied in 1942, which provided resources vital to Japan, most particularly the oil needed for her ships and gasoline for her aircraft, not to mention foodstuffs for the Japanese population. Admiral Yonai, the Navy Minister, said when interviewed after the war that he realized the defeat at Leyte "was tantamount to the loss of the Philippines." As for the larger significance of the battle, he said, "I felt that it was the end."

Forty-seven minutes after Admiral Kurita turned his fleet back to San Bernardino Strait, the naval war in the Pacific changed irrevocably when the *Shikishima* Unit of the Imperial Japanese Naval Air Force's 201st Air Group found the carriers of Task Unit 77.4.3, known as "Taffy-3," north of Samar Island at 1047 hours. At 1053 hours, an A6M5 Zeke dived on *St. Lo* (CVE-63). The Zeke pulled up at the last moment to correct the dive and the airplane hit the center of the flight deck. The 250kg bomb penetrated the port side of the hangar deck and exploded in the midst of several aircraft being refueled and rearmed. A gasoline fire quickly erupted, followed by six secondary explosions that ended with the detonation of the torpedo and bomb magazine. Engulfed in flames, *St. Lo* sank 30 minutes later. Of a crew of 889, 113 were killed or missing; 30 survivors later died of their wounds. The 434 survivors were rescued from the water by the destroyer *Heermann* and the destroyer escorts *John C. Butler*, *Raymond*, and *Dennis*. It was a portent of the storm to come that would be seen as a battle against the *kamikaze*, named for the typhoon winds that sank the invasion fleet of Kublai Khan in 1274. Over the remaining ten months of the Pacific War, 3,860 Japanese pilots would attack Navy ships; some 733 of them would hit their targets. By June 1945, Admiral Nimitz would write a letter to the Joint Chiefs of Staff in which he stated for the record that the Navy could not support an invasion of Japan in the face of this threat.

Had it not been for the Soviet invasion of Manchuria and the use of two atomic bombs that led to the Japanese decision to surrender, the human wind of the 20th-century "divine wind" might have prevented the planned American invasion of Japan, or at least seriously delayed it while the Soviets invaded the country from the north.

"Suicide attacks" had happened throughout the war, carried out by pilots of both sides, and were individual impromptu decisions made by men who were prepared to die, generally when their airplane was so badly damaged that further survival was impossible. On December 7, 1941, Lieutenant Fusata Iida, flight leader of the 1st *Shotai* aboard the carrier *Soryu*, dived his A6M2 *Zero-sen* into the main hangar of Kaneohe Naval Air Station on Hawaii during the Pearl Harbor attack when he discovered his gas tank had been hit and he had no way of returning to the Japanese fleet. He had told his men before they left *Soryu* that if his plane was badly damaged he would crash it into a "worthy enemy target."

What differentiated events such as these from what was called "*kamikaze*" was that they were voluntary, and that such action by these pilots was not expected by their superiors. While the term "*kamikaze*" would be the word that described the ten-month battle as remembered by Americans, the formal term used by the Japanese for a unit assigned to suicide attack was *tokubetsu kogeki tai*, or "special attack unit." This was abbreviated to *tokkotai*. In the Imperial Japanese Navy, the official term for these "special attack units" was *shinpu tokubetsu kogeki tai*, "divine wind special attack unit." The Japanese only informally used the word *kamikaze* during the war, but it became widely used after the conflict owing to the wide understanding of the word in other countries.

When Allied forces assaulted Suluan Island on October 17, which began the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the Imperial Japanese Navy's First Air Fleet was based at the former American airbase of Clark Field, known to the Japanese as Mabalacat, outside Manila. At the time the unit had only 40 aircraft: 34 A6M Zeke fighters of various sub-types, three B6N *Tenzan* (Jill) torpedo bombers,