

**A Japanese Officer's
Eyewitness Account of the Last
Great Campaign of World War II**

THE BATTLE FOR OKINAWA



Colonel Hiromichi Yahara

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COLONEL HIROMICHI YAHARA

Translated by Roger Pineau and Masatoshi Uehara

With an Introduction and Commentary
by Frank B. Gibney



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The Colonel's Prologue

April 1, 1945

On the morning of April 1, in the twentieth year of the Showa era, the island of Okinawa is rent by an earthshaking bombardment, vast and oddly magnificent in its effect, in preparation for the American army's landing attack.

At this time the commanders of Japan's 32nd Army are standing on the crest of Mount Shuri near the southern end of Okinawa's main island, quietly observing the movements of the American 10th Army. The commanding general of 32nd Army, Lieutenant General Mitsuru Ushijima, stands tall and composed, a fine figure of a man. The short, stout officer standing nearest to him, legs set defiantly apart, is his chief of staff, a man known for his fierce valor, Major General Isamu Cho. Ushijima's staff officers, binoculars in their hands, gaze calmly at the Kadena western shoreline, about twenty kilometers to the north. There, at that very moment, the enemy landing force is disembarking.

Since early dawn, the silhouettes of enemy troopships have darkened the coastline. Ten battleships and ten cruisers form the core of the attack force: Some two hundred lesser ships line up offshore. Stretching from Namihira to Heianzan, Kadena forms a seven- to eight-kilometer-long coast zone. There the heaviest gunfire is concentrated. Smoke and debris from the explosions and fires rise up to the sky. The enemy aircraft, looking like hundreds of oversized beans, conceal themselves in the convenient smoke screen before carrying out their bombing operations.

At 8:00 A.M. the enemy infantry disembarks from the thousand-odd landing craft, thrusting onto the shore. The sweep of the ordered military formation is impressive. It is as if the sea itself were advancing with a great roar.

Four divisions of the U.S. 10th Army, under the command of Lieutenant General Simon Buckner, now close in on the beach in succession. They take cover. They are most probably anticipating the famous "*banzai charges*" repeated time and time again throughout the Pacific island operation ever since the battle of Attu. In these assaults, masses of Japanese soldiers wearing frantic, weird expressions, brandishing swords, throwing grenades, and stabbing with bayonets, charge ceaselessly, jumping over the dead bodies of their fallen comrades while screaming "*banzai*."

But the Japanese atop Mount Shuri show no signs of using such tactics. The group simply gazes out over the enemy's frantic deployment, some of the officers joking, a few casually lighting cigarettes. How could this be? For months now the Japanese army has been building its strongest fortifications on the heights of Mount Shuri—and its adjacent hills. Here they will lure the American forces and confound them. Hence their air of nonchalance. The battle is now progressing exactly as expected. All the Japanese command need do is to await the completion of the enemy's landing at Kadena and watch them finally head southward.

General Ushijima and his staff are full of confidence. He who wields power is unperturbed, as the saying goes. Without the least bit of doubt or worry, the Japanese are nevertheless tense with the warrior's inner excitement at the thrill of preparing to cross swords with a mighty enemy.

As senior officer in charge of operations I should be the proudest of all. As their troops land with almost no resistance from the Japanese forces, what must the enemy commander and his staff be thinking? In my attempt to imagine the minds of my opponents, I am unable to suppress an ironic chuckle.

Contrary to their expectations, the enemy meets no resistance from Japanese troops. They will complete their landing unchallenged. Advancing with such ease, they must be thinking gleefully that they have passed through a breach in the Japanese defense. They will be wrong. In that eerie atmosphere, are they not suspicious that the Japanese army has withdrawn and concealed itself in the heights surrounding Kadena, with plans to draw the Americans into a trap? What a surprise it must all be. It is amusing to watch the American army so desperately intent in its attack on an almost undefended coast, like a blind man who has lost his cane, groping on hands and knees to cross a ditch. Observe the huge amount of firepower directed at Kadena: According to American military records, a total of forty-five thousand shells were fired from the big guns (over 5 centimeters) in preparation for landing. In addition

some thirty-three thousand rockets were launched with an uncountable number of bombs dropped from the air. From the viewpoint of the defenders it is exceedingly pleasurable to see this all wasted.

Spring in its fullness has already come to this southern island. The green hills and fields around Mount Shuri, where ten thousand Japanese soldiers wait concealed deep below the surface, shine brilliantly in the morning sun. It is all so splendid. The sea below is quiet and deep blue as the whitecaps breaking on the nearby reef draw a series of fractured lines that finally join together. The only sign of what lies ahead is an occasional enemy reconnaissance plane passing through the sky above Shuri—as if a reminder. Compared to the wildly menaced Kadena coastline, it is a world apart. The stillness of the Japanese 32nd Army, against the movement of the American 10th, makes a truly interesting contrast.

Yet, now, as they gaze casually at the American planes cutting across the sky, these high Japanese officers are suddenly seized by a gnawing sense of unease. Not one Japanese airplane has appeared over the battlefield. According to the original battle plans formulated in Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo, the leading actor in warding off the enemy attack on Okinawa would be the air force. Thirty-second Army was to play no more than a minor supporting role. It had been publicly stated that the best opportunity to destroy the enemy would be while he was still in his ships, before the troops had a chance to land.

Over the past week, Japanese aircraft had carried out attacks on the enemy fleet under cover of darkness, by moonlight and at dawn. Why now, with enemy landing craft swarming around the Kadena beaches, do they not overcome all obstacles, take advantage of this once-in-a-lifetime chance, and make an all-out concerted attack? Had the afternoon's "special attack" (suicide bombing) been canceled due to damage inflicted on us by enemy planes? No matter how unbelievable this thought might have been at the moment, the "special attack" planes nonetheless did not appear.

Postwar accounts of the battle have directed criticism against the Japanese army for its alleged negligence at having allowed the American forces to land. In contrast, there have been few discussions in which the Japanese air force's behavior on that day is adequately questioned. Could this be because a piece of the puzzle that would bring insight into the strategic plan is missing? Or has the truth of history become that difficult to grasp? Did the air force simply disappear without a trace—with no evidence of its activity?

This was truly an extraordinary prelude to the opening act of the battle

of Okinawa. The gigantic U.S. Pacific Fleet, with its ten battleships, ten cruisers, and auxiliary craft, formed the base of operations for the attack, along with units of the powerful British navy. The infantry now landing numbered some thirty thousand men. Thousands of enemy planes were in the air, with the poor Okinawans caught in the middle of it all. So extraordinary is this opening scene of what is to be a historic and decisive battle; it encompasses land, air, and sea. It is almost unbelievable.

The American army, having pumped huge quantities of ammunition into the undefended Kadena coast, now stabs at the beach. Our air force had announced it would destroy the enemy attack force while it was still in its boats. But no planes arrive at this decisive moment.

The Japanese infantry soldiers on Okinawa come out of their caves to stand on the slopes of Mount Shuri, overlooking the battle's beginning. They exchange ironic smiles, but they are puzzled. There was a perception gap, not only between the Japanese and U.S. forces, but also between Japan's own army and air force, who were supposedly working together! This is too much to imagine. What conclusion will all this bring? What tragedies will play out in the ensuing battle? Here the fate of Okinawa is brought to light.

Since the end of the Pacific war, many histories of the battle of Okinawa have been compiled in both Japan and the United States. Detailed versions have been published by war correspondents of both sides, writers, journalists, professional soldiers, and by persons who actually experienced the battle as well. Reading such accounts, which sing the praises of old comrades in arms and the bravery of the Okinawan people, gives me great pleasure. But the descriptions of the horrible, tragic conditions of the war are heartrending. Different perspectives on military tactics have often made me open my eyes, reflect, and see events in a new light. Many accounts have also shown a lack of knowledge. Or they have been weighted down by misconceptions.

My own role in the affair was that of staff officer in charge of operations. As such I participated directly in the design and implementation of the Japanese battle plan. Yet I have to this day declined to speak directly on this matter or to talk of the defeated soldiers—in deference to them. But having once given my life to military tactics, I must express my opinions here, aside from the question of how skilled I might have been in that field.

Twenty-seven years have passed since the war's end. The island of Okinawa has long since reverted to Japan. My memory gradually fades. Yet fortunately I had the foresight to keep a record of events during the war and just after. With these as my source, I present my appeal to the facts about the battle of Okinawa. Here I must say, "This is how it really was."

Two Views of Battle

By Frank B. Gibney

Hiromichi Yahara, Colonel, Imperial Japanese Army

With his Prologue, Colonel Hiromichi Yahara began a unique account of the last great battle of World War II in the Pacific. *The Battle for Okinawa* (published in the original Japanese in 1973 as *Okinawa Kessen*) is in many ways an extraordinary document. It is one of the few accounts of battle in the Pacific war to be written not by rank-and-file soldiers or historians but by an active member of the Japanese military high command.

Yahara, as he is quick to state, was senior staff officer of Japan's last fighting army, in charge of Operations—the rough equivalent of an American army G-3. A bright light of the General Staff, whose last post had been as an instructor at Japan's War College, Yahara became both the architect and executor of the entire Japanese defense effort in what was probably the Pacific war's bloodiest military encounter, lasting from April to July 1945. It was Yahara's concept of a yard-by-yard "war of attrition" (*jikyusen*) that made Okinawa such a hellish struggle. The purely defensive strategy was a complete departure from other Japanese island defenses, which had concentrated—with a notable lack of success—in attempts to "annihilate the enemy at the water's edge." By fighting for time, not victory, and doing so despite the obligatory grandiloquent sloganry of his communiqués, Yahara recognized far more clearly than his superiors in Tokyo the inevitability of final defeat.

Yet his book, while on its face "an appeal to the facts," is not a simple military history. Behind the cool-sounding narrative beats an intense, personal story. Here was a man with a grievance. He had been taught professionally to think of military operations as a kind of exalted chess game, but he lived to see his human counters scattered and slain around him, torn and

bloodied beyond all calculation. In the end his own operational narrative gives way to a desperate struggle in which survival and honor seemed to work at cross-purposes. His two generals, Ushijima and Cho, as we shall see, committed ritual suicide in the approved *samurai* tradition when the battle seemed totally lost, but only after ordering Yahara to avoid the planned final *banzai* charges and escape, if possible, to make a final report to Army and Emperor in Tokyo.

As things turned out, Yahara was captured by U.S. troops while posing as a civilian teacher and ended the war as a prisoner. This ran against all Japanese military tradition, which bothered him intensely. Throughout the Pacific war not the least of the reasons for so many military suicides was the soldiers' fear of lasting disgrace for their families if they were captured. Such fears were an ironic tribute to the "group think" that Japan's military cultists of the thirties and forties had fastened on a populace that was all too susceptible to it.

At forty-two, Yahara was, ironically, at the peak of his military career when the battle ended. The son of a small farmer in Tottori Prefecture in southwestern Japan, he took the requisite school examinations and qualified for the Military Academy, which then represented one of the few paths for social advancement open to country boys in Japan. In 1926, three years after his graduation, he entered the War College, where he led his class—in the military meritocracy, an obvious ticket to advancement. Bright, modest, and hardworking, he was an intellectualized new model of the wartime *gunjin* (military man), a word which evoked instant respect among the Japanese of that time, in contrast to its use as a virtual pejorative among later post-1945 generations. But he was more than that. From the time he was a young regimental officer, he had the unusual ability for someone in his class to stand apart from his surroundings and examine them with some detachment. This quality, combined with a strong disinclination to suffer fools gladly, often led to friction with his superiors, who wanted courage and obedience, above all, from their subordinates.

After service in the War Ministry, he spent two years as an exchange officer in the United States, including six months with the troops of the 8th Infantry and attaché service in Washington. ("Just like the Shoreham," he had said, with an ironic smile, when taken to his private living quarters after his capture.) Although in his account of the battle, he refers to the Americans simply as "the enemy," he knew us far better than his commanders did. He

was fully aware of the nonsense in the militarists' propaganda—so tragically believed by Okinawan civilians—that American soldiers would habitually kill, rape, and torture any prisoners that fell into their hands. Later, after staff duty in China and a teaching post at the Military Academy, he worked as an undercover agent and, on occasion, as an intelligence officer in Southeast Asia in the years leading up to the Japanese invasion of 1941. He knew the score, although superior knowledge never seemed to get in the way of his 1940s-style patriotism. For all his later exhortations to the troops on Okinawa, no one understood better than Yahara the flaws of Japan's military position. Not only had his superiors done badly, but they continued to repeat the mistakes of an earlier era. No modern army was crueler than the Japanese, but in no high command did the capacity for self-delusion flourish so abundantly. It was Yahara's particular curse to know how badly his army was destined to fail.

Yahara's problems with Japan's rockbound military hierarchy were embodied in the person of his immediate boss, Chief of Staff Isamu Cho. Through the stormy thirties, when the militarists riveted their hold on the country, Cho played a leading role in one of the "revolutionary" young officers' groups that attempted to set up a military dictatorship in the name of the Emperor.¹ He was actually arrested with other plotters during a secret meeting at a Tokyo *geisha* restaurant but was quickly released by the army command and transferred to a post in the Kwantung Army in China. There he helped to organize the military occupation of Manchuria in 1931. This led to Japan's establishing the puppet state of Manchukuo. Later his group provoked the clash on Peking's Marco Polo Bridge in 1937 that precipitated what Japan officially called the China Incident. Actually, this was a full-scale war—the invasion and exploitation of China.

Cho was almost a prototype of the politicized officers who managed to terrorize timid civilian governments into sanctioning the army's aggressions

¹His particular organization, the *Sakura-kai* or Cherry Society, resembled various other secret cabals of that time. National-socialist in nature, they were strongly antibusiness, antipolitician, and against the government bureaucracy. Strongly traditionalist, they emerged partly in reaction to the parliamentary Party governments of the "Taisho democracy" of the twenties; and they enjoyed the tacit support of many high-ranking army and, to a lesser extent, navy officers. They purported to establish a "pure" government under Imperial sanction and eliminate capitalist corruption. This they hoped to achieve by a campaign of selective violence. Such groups were behind the momentarily successful "young officers' " revolt of February 26, 1936, which was suppressed only after Emperor Hirohito, unexpectedly angered, ordered "loyal" army units to fire on the rebels.

on the Asian mainland. A ruthless nationalist, he reportedly took a leading role in engineering the mass killing of Chinese military and civilian prisoners in the Nanjing Massacre of 1938. In the field, he consistently favored attack, as opposed to Yahara's "war of attrition." His confidence in Japanese infantry superiority was unbounded. For all his fanaticism, he was superficially rather likable, gregarious, and ever ready to put politics aside for any local version of wine, women, and song. He respected Yahara's abilities; and in fact they got along rather well.

The colonel wrote his book in 1972, after long years of brooding about his last battle. Postwar living was hard for a career officer. Salary gone and pension worthless in the inflation of those days, he went back to the family home at Yonago, on the Japan Sea coast, to try to eke out a living for his wife and six children. He worked a small farm and found a supplementary income as a kind of salesman for a textile company, later setting up a small store. But he remained obsessed with the issues that Okinawa had raised in his mind. He managed to gather every scrap of literature he could find about the battle from both Japanese and American sources.

Part of his motive was defensive. His capture was regarded among surviving members of his army peer group as a disgrace. Defeat had not changed that mindset. Militarily, his reputation had suffered from the accusations of Major Naomichi Jin, the only other survivor of the 32nd Army staff. Jin, 32nd's air officer, had been ordered to report to Tokyo during the battle in an attempt to secure more air support, and he had succeeded in getting off the island. After the war, he loudly blamed Yahara for adopting a purely defensive strategy and giving up airfields that might have been the base for Japanese bombers and fighters. For Yahara, arguments like this amounted to nothing more than wishful thinking.

In a wider sense, however, the failure of the promised air support for Okinawa underlined the incompetence, indeed, the mendacity of Japan's top military leaders in sacrificing tens of thousands—military and civilian alike—to a hopeless cause. The colonel felt a continuing sense of national betrayal. And it grew with the years. When a reporter from the *Yomiuri Shimbun* came in 1970 to interview Yahara about the war, he found the story so fascinating that he urged Yahara to write a book.

Even almost three decades after the Pacific war ended, Yahara's perspective remained a very special one. Among the brave, but on the whole simple-minded, military officers of that day, Yahara was a rare bird indeed.

"A heretic," his Japanese biographer, Takeshi Inagaki, called him.² Keen-minded intelligence officers have their careers constantly at risk in almost any army. On the whole it is the line officer, "good with the troops," who is generally promoted first. This was nowhere more true than in Japan. The Imperial Army, the last big infantry army of modern times, was dominated by a kind of "blood and guts" offensive spirit. Since the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 it had never been beaten. Brutal in its discipline—corporals kicked privates, sergeants slapped corporals, and for that matter, majors slapped lieutenants—its philosophy, if it could be called that, held that Japanese "spirit," backed by a willingness to die for the Emperor, could overcome any material advantage possessed by an enemy. (The dearly bought victories of the Russo-Japanese War followed successes in China. And at the outset of the Pacific war, General Yamashita's early triumphs of pell-mell attack against the British and the Americans had reinforced the generals' confidence.) Except for the use of air power, modern tactics were, in the minds of its leadership, generally suspect. The Japanese army's pioneers in armored warfare, for example, received little support in their plans for tank divisions. For most Japanese commanders, a good bayonet attack was deemed the adequate response to most military problems.

Yahara thought differently. His was a world of high strategy; he had, after all, spent almost half of his military career at the General Staff and the War College. In his mind, action was useless unless based on cool, rational assessments of a situation. His exemplars were Western theoreticians like Carl Clausewitz or, reaching back to classical Asian tradition, Chinese intellectual "strategists" like Zhuge Liang of Three Kingdoms fame. *Bushido* (the Way of the Warrior) had no place in Yahara's military estimates. He had no illusions about the effectiveness of Japanese "spirit" against bombs and naval gunfire, unless it was carefully entrenched.

His superiors found him useful, which is why Yahara was chosen for difficult intelligence assignments. Ushijima and Cho valued him because he was the best brain their military culture could produce. But his pitilessly rational view of military situations was uncomfortable, stripping away as it did the bulk of the *samurai* bravery myths by which they lived—and were to die. In turn, Yahara felt isolated from his peers by his very perceptiveness.

²I am indebted to Inagaki's book *Okinawa: Higu no Sakusen/Itan no Sambo Yahara Hiromichi* (Shinchosha, 1984) for this comment, as well as for further information about Yahara's life after his return to Japan.

His frustration at the folly of Japan's military leadership deepened with the years. He wrote the book in the spirit of a man betrayed.

Frank B. Gibney, Lieutenant (jg) United States Naval Reserve

There is another perspective from which this book has been edited and in part written. That is my own. And since my life at several points intersected with Colonel Yahara's, it would be well to mention it now.

On Easter Monday, 1945—L plus one in the language of invasion—I left the navy attack transport on which we had sailed from Pearl Harbor, jumped down into an LCVP (for Landing Craft, Vehicles, and Personnel) bobbing in the offshore swells, and headed for the beach. It was my first landing. Unaware of 32nd Army's decision against a beachhead attack, all of us in the boat were excited, tense, and scared. We were also puzzled. Our small group of Intelligence specialists—army, navy, and marine officers—was attached to G-2, Headquarters 10th Army. Along with our fellow passengers, mostly construction engineers and air traffic controllers, we had been ticketed to disembark on L plus six or seven, after the infantrymen, artillerymen, and other more obviously useful combatants had landed to clear the beaches. Through some planning mistake, our ship had been ordered to land us far ahead of time, then clear the landing area to make one less target for the *kamikaze* suicide planes that had been spotted heading our way.

Thus it fell out that my colleague and Honolulu roommate, Lieutenant (jg) Kenneth C. Lamott, and I—Yale College, Class of 1944 and 1945, respectively—spent the late afternoon digging our flea-ridden foxhole on the Hagushi beach, just west of Kadena, listening respectfully to the naval gunfire against real or imagined Japanese positions and wondering whether we would be hit in a *banzai*-charge counterattack. We were also keenly interested in what we were expected to do. For the past year our work had been prisoner-of-war interrogation. Based at the Pearl Harbor POW Interrogation Center of CINCPAC (for Commander in Chief Pacific), we could claim by extension to belong to Admiral Chester Nimitz's staff (although we ranked about as low as possible on that well-populated totem pole). Our particular unit was the Joint Intelligence Center for Pacific Ocean Areas, called JICPOA for short. JICPOA was responsible for collecting and disseminating intelligence information in the vast Central Pacific theater of operations, which stretched from California to the coasts of Japan and China, with notable emphasis on the islands between.

Lamott and I were both recent graduates of the U.S. Navy Language School at Boulder, Colorado, an intensive yearlong course in the Japanese language, designed to be of military use. The very existence of such a school, along with similar army institutions, underlined the almost total lack of Japanese speakers (not to mention readers) in the United States at the start of World War II. (The considerable reservoir of linguistic talent available among mainland Japanese-Americans was denied us, since the bigotry of that time, masking as wartime security, had already imprisoned them in the infamous "relocation centers.") Students at the Boulder school included some Americans with Japanese backgrounds; for example, Lamott, the son of a missionary, had grown up in Tokyo. The majority of us, though, were recent college students who had been selected on the basis of real or fancied language-learning capability. (My own college major was classical Greek.) As things turned out, most graduates spent the war translating captured Japanese documents, deciphering code transmissions, or serving with Marine Corps combat units. A few of us had been selected, rather casually, to serve as interrogators.

Prisoners captured on Pacific islands were questioned in the field for immediate tactical information, such as "What was the size of the Nakagawa unit? Where is the attached artillery battery? How much ammunition is left?" Afterward they were sent to us for interrogation—both tactical and strategic in nature—on matters ranging from tank unit tactics to rear-area industrial sites. Because most Japanese language officers had little experience in questioning prisoners, we were often sent out on landing operations to interrogate POWs on the spot and, on occasion, escort them back to Pearl Harbor. Lamott had landed with the marines in their attack on Tinian Island, in the Marianas, where he was wounded in an unsuccessful effort to talk some Japanese soldiers out of their cave hideaways. I had participated in the marine invasion of Peleliu in the Palau Archipelago east of the Philippines and that past December had escorted a shipload of Japanese army and Korean military construction workers back to Pearl.

General Buckner's 10th Army was placed under the authority of Nimitz's Pacific command for the Okinawa operation; hence we had been sent from Pearl Harbor to set up an army-level Interrogation Center as soon as possible after the landings. After screening by front-line units for immediate tactical information, prisoners of war would be sent to us for detailed interrogation. In addition, POWs of particular importance should go to Army immediately.

Until then our major problem had been how to get prisoners. Less than a thousand had passed through our stockade at Pearl Harbor's Iroquois Point, many of them captured while unconscious or seriously wounded. So powerful was the militarists' indoctrination that the average Japanese soldier or sailor regularly chose to die rather than be captured. Soldiers and sailors were officially told that to be taken prisoner was a total disgrace for themselves and their families. Official propaganda warned Japan's people, civilians as well as military, that prisoners would be tortured and killed by Allied troops. This was not hard for them to believe in view of the widely known atrocities already perpetrated on captured Americans and Australians by the Imperial Army.

It was not always so. No official action was ever taken against the sixteen-hundred-odd Japanese officers and men released from captivity after the Russo-Japanese War, although they faced some popular displeasure. But by the time of the China Incident in the thirties, the revived cult of *Bushido* enjoined military men at all costs from surrendering. The folk history of that time held out as a glorious example one Major Kuga. Captured by Chinese soldiers while severely wounded in the 1931 Shanghai fighting, he was repatriated to Japan only to commit suicide, after long brooding, at the tomb of his old superior officer.

At the Pearl Harbor camp, when we asked POWs to give basic information that could be forwarded to Japan under rules of the Geneva Convention, the reply would almost invariably come: "*Naichi e namae wo shirasetakunai*" (I don't want my name sent to the homeland.) The words would rush out as their eyes filled with fear. Almost all the prisoners felt that disclosure of their captivity would bring down reprisals on their families. Their worry was manifest in their maddening use of false names. Most of the aliases were chosen hastily, in panic, and originality was not their strong suit. Kazuo Hasegawa, for example, was a famous *Kabuki* actor whose name was as familiar to Japanese of that day as Frank Sinatra's was to Americans. During any given POW registration we would turn up at least a dozen Kazuo Hasegawas. Many would later forget their new names, thus making identification difficult.³

The good side of this, from our point of view, was that Japanese pris-

³One such incident still stands out in my memory. Going through some forms filled out by POWs from the Marianas campaign, I found that one prisoner had scrawled the name "Amelia Earhart" in barely intelligible English script on the back of his registration. Here was tantalizing evidence that the missing American aviatrix had gone down in the Japanese-held islands when she disappeared on her prewar flight over the Pacific. We repeatedly called out the POW's name at roll call, but could not trace him.

oners, with only a few exceptions, showed few signs of security consciousness. It was not like interrogating SS-men. Assuming that a good soldier would not be taken prisoner, Imperial Headquarters had not bothered to instruct them what not to reveal under questioning. The good treatment given a prisoner was in itself surprising. It was completely different from the death and torture that his superiors promised would await captives of the Americans. He had been deceived. Add to this a sense of disillusionment in Japan's military invincibility and awe at American strength, and you had a numbing sense of loss; the more intelligent the prisoner was, the more intense.

Thus most prisoners, officers included, were quite willing to tell us all, or almost all they knew. (One man, we were told by the POW sergeants, had even threatened suicide because he had not been interrogated. Was he that worthless? It made for an interesting study in group relationships.) For those of us with no prior knowledge of Japan, our work at the POW camp and in the field was extremely useful. Very early in the game we were able to put aside the wartime American stereotypes of Japanese as nearsighted, buck-toothed fanatics with no minds of their own—an illusion that often proved dangerous to those fighting against them—and see them as individuals who were good, bad, indifferent, boastful, modest, honest, deceitful, intelligent, not so bright—once the carapace of their army's group thinking had been lifted. We tried to teach them something about the realities of the American "enemy." Many ended up writing leaflets for us advocating surrender and the promise of a future "democratic" Japan. In turn we learned a lot about the nation we were fighting, as well as the curiously formidable military machine that served it.

Thus equipped, Lamott and I trekked through the low hills and sweet potato fields until we finally came to the tents then being set up for XXIV Corps headquarters. We found the G-2 and offered our services, since our own army G-2 had not yet landed. We were fortunate, since no one at XXIV Corps had ever heard of us, to find an army colonel whom we had previously met in Honolulu. ("Good boys—know 'em socially," he witnessed.) No Japanese prisoners were yet forthcoming. For those first few days, in fact, there was very little actual combat. After the first U.S. forces to land had raced to secure the airfields, 6th Marine Division units probed their way north and XXIV Corps's divisions began working their way southward toward Colonel Yahara's entrenchments. As it happened, we found ready employment with XXIV Corps Artillery trying to discover just where those entrenchments were.

Throughout the landing bombardments, Japanese artillery had returned

scarcely any fire. Gunners obviously waited in their emplacements, but they were anxious not to give away their positions prematurely. So neither Corps Artillery nor the massed armada of fighting ships offshore had much to shoot at. Thousands of Okinawan civilians, however, many rendered homeless by the heavy shelling, were being gathered into improvised Military Government compounds, while thousands more remained in their homes in the sparsely populated northern two-thirds of the island. Sadly, even more civilians, heeding the orders of their governor and 32nd Army headquarters, had fled to the south, to take shelter with the Japanese troops. (Some twenty thousand Okinawans had been drafted into Home Defense units, the *boeitai*, to serve as army auxiliaries.)

Each night we would return to Corps headquarters laden with notebooks and sector maps to piece out possible emplacements from the construction workers' testimony. ("How big was the hole you dug there? Did the Japanese engineers pour concrete there?") After Artillery had made its educated guesses on gun locations, word would be flashed to the ships offshore. More naval gunfire would result, but to what effect we could not be sure. Meanwhile the defenders on Mount Shuri waited.

During that first week I had a chance to meet a great many Okinawans under rather stressful conditions. Their fields chewed up by the bombardment, their revered tombs that dotted the landscape—oddly graceful rounded stone structures shaped, as tradition had it, to resemble a woman's womb—destined to be wrecked for pillboxes or gun positions, their families scattered, high school boys and girls drafted to serve the Japanese army, they bore it all with the stoicism of an island people abused for centuries by pirates and typhoons. The Japanese treated them as second-class citizens. Racially distinct, although speaking a strongly dialect version of Japanese, they had preserved a cultural identity for centuries. Until their final absorption by Japan, they had their own kings and had indeed enjoyed the prosperity of maritime middlemen between China and Japan. Slower-moving and more relaxed than their Japanese cousins, they were now mostly small farmers and fishermen. Theirs was the poorest of Japanese prefectures. And their suffering transcended even that of Hiroshima, Nagasaki, or firebombed Tokyo. They were—and remain—nice, courteous people, remarkably patient under terrible hardship. Caught between two armies, they were the victims of both. But the worst of their experience was their ruthless sacrifice by their Japanese leaders.