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National Geographic: Untold Stories of World War II

By Unknown

In a century riddled with unrest,
World War Two remains the epic tale...
an event of unparalleled impact.
Even now,
we are uncovering new information.
about secret weapons...
and villainous tactics,
about extraordinary heroism...
and boundless shame;
about a time when one life
or one bullet, or one bomb
separated infamy and glory...
defeat and victory...
tyranny and freedom...
untold stories of World War II.
On the 16th of July, 1945...
a bomb exploded in the American desert
a very different kind of bomb.
The furious energy of
the atom had been unleashed.
That power might have landed
in the wrong hands,
had a few brave men not waged a secret
war against Germany's atomic program.
At the height of the Second World War,
Germany's Nazi Party
marched toward global domination,
led by its ambitious,
remorseless leader.
Adolph Hitler had the will
to conquer the world.
All he needed was the weapon.
And he had found the means to make one
in the most unlikely place.
It was here,
in the snow-packed mountains of Norway,
that a handful of soldiers on
skis fought to stop Hitler's dream
of possessing the ultimate weapon.
Old men now,
they remember how they risked their
young lives for the cause of liberty.
They would stop at nothing
in order to conquer the world.

So the feeling that they had to be stopped became very, very strong.

We were quite certain that if we are caught by Germans, we would all have been executed.

It would take three daring attempts before they succeeded.

April 9, 1940.

German warships penetrated Oslo Fjord.

The blitzkrieg had come to Norway.

Within two months, the besieged nation was forced to surrender.

Well, it took some time to realize it, actually.

But when Autumn 1940 came, and the darkness came in over Norway, you certainly realized that it was not the same Norway you had the year before. To understand it, you need to have the experience of being occupied.

To live in an occupied country is the most distressing thing you can do.

A vast occupying army flooded the country.

The Nazis now controlled all aspects of Norwegian life.

No actual war between each Norwegian and each German.

We had to do the best out of it.

I think that was the common opinion.

Inside, of course,

most Norwegians hated them.

They introduced Gestapo in Norway,

when they understood that

resistance was coming

started arresting people,

torturing people,

killing people, et cetera et cetera.

And then we certainly understood what an occupation meant to people.

Hitler's grasp extended

into every corner of the country.

In this remote Norwegian valley,

the Germans seized

a very special prize
the Norsk Hydro factory.
Surrounded by mountains,
the factory had been built on the face
of a cliff overlooking a deep
and impassable gorge.
For the Nazis,
it was an ideal location
for a wartime project difficult
to bomb and easy to defend.
But, to the generals in Berlin,
Norsk Hydro offered even more.
In 1940, it was the only
hydroelectric plant in the world
producing large amounts
of an extremely rare substance:
deuterium oxide,
also known as heavy water.
As soon as they took control
of the plant,
production went into high gear.
When word reached Great Britain,
a powerful sense of foreboding swept
through the allies.
As the most likely target
for a German A-bomb,
Britain faced the greatest peril.
Is it possible they do not realize
that we shall never cease
to persevere against them until
they have been taught a lesson
which they and
the world will never forget?
Winston Churchill's spirited defiance
of the Nazis became a rallying point
for resistance fighters from
all over conquered Europe.
Young Norwegians eager
for combat joined the army
of exiles gathering in Britain.
There was no sacrifice that was
too big to try to get the Germans out.
The British created
a secret organization

the Special Operations Executive
to fan the fires of resistance.
You volunteered and you were trained
by the British to go back to Norway
and work behind the lines
on sabotage instruction,
reporting radio information,
wireless operating,
and that sort of thing.
A few young resistance fighters would
return to Norway undercover,
armed with a plan to destroy
the heavy-water factory.
They were country boys and city kids,
engineers and outdoorsmen,
university students
and career soldiers.
Shock troops in a clandestine
war against Hitler's a-bomb,
they would become legends
in their homeland.
And some of them would even star
in this 1948 movie
chronicling their real-life exploits.
Scenes from this film give a revealing
glimpse of the daring mission.
October, 18, 1942
Four of the men returned home
in dangerous night parachute jump.

Their mission:

to guide a British explosives team
to the heavy-water plant.
When we were leaving
for the dropping zone,
you felt that some
of the people sending you
didn't expect to see you once more,
so we had to more or
less cheer them up and say,
It's not that this easy
to get rid of us.
We'll be back. Just wait and see.
Our target is

the heavy-water production.
That was all. They said it's important
and we have to destroy it.
I knew that the heavy water
was important
for the Germans' weapon production,
but in which way I had no idea.
The commandos' first objective was to
establish a secret landing field
on the Hardangervidda,
a huge plateau north of the factory.
Crossing that bleak expanse,
the Norwegians took over an empty cabin
and made radio contact with England.
The operation could begin.
For the first sortie, the British sent
a force in gliders towed by bombers
a plan that needed clear weather.
But over Norway, clouds, winds,
and snow had cut visibility
to near zero.
For the Norwegians on the ground...
the flight had become
a disaster waiting to happen.
I tried to get a connection
with England
and warn them that
at that time it wasn't possible.
And then, suddenly,
I heard interference in my headphones
and I knew they were not far away.
And shortly after, we also heard
the engines on the aircraft,
and it came dead on us,
passed over us and disappeared.
After about half an hour,
the next plane with a guide glider came
and it came right to us correctly,
turned, and went away.
The British troops never arrived
at the rendezvous point.
We got a message from
London that both gliders
and one of the Halifaxes had crashed

in the mountains.
That was the end of
the Freshman operation.
It was a complete disaster.
The soldiers who survived the crash
were rounded up and executed.
The Allies' secret war against the
heavy-water factory was now exposed.
To avoid detection,
the commandos withdrew deeper
into the Hardangervidda.
For weeks, perhaps months,
they would have to live off a land
where little existed but snow and ice.
When this mission
of the gliders failed,
we had actually no supplies
for further stay in the mountains.
So we were dependent upon reindeer,
but at that moment, there were few
or no reindeer at all in our area,
because of the wind directions.
It was so very difficult
to get the reindeers,
but the day before Christmas,
Jens, he shot a reindeer.
Jens learned that if you take
the stomach of a reindeer,
you get vitamins
from the reindeer moss.
So we cut up the stomach and
took out the reindeer moss,
the contents, and mixed it
with blood and everything,
and made a nice porridge mixed
with brain.
And we were eating it
and it probably saved our lives.
So on Christmas Eve...
we had a real fun party.
We chatted; we had a good time
at Christmas Eve.
I remember well.
You know your comrades outside

and inside.

You know what he is going to say
before he opens his mouth.

They had endurance, they had the will
to hold on when there is nothing
in you except the will which says
to hold on.

They would have to hold on through
the darkest months of winter.

But each day the Nazis' supply
of heavy water was growing,
drop by precious drop.

London had to make a move.

A second Norwegian squad,
specially trained in explosives,
would drop onto the Hardangervidda
and join their comrades
in an assault on the heavy-water plant
February, 16, 1943
under cover of night
the six new men landed.

Now the commandos were ready to strike
a blow against Hitler's A bomb
if they could penetrate the factory's
formidable and deadly defenses.

To the commandos, the heavy-water
plant appeared impervious to attack.

To reach the factory, the saboteurs
had to cross a deep, narrow gorge.

There was only one road in.
over a suspension bridge.

And the bridge was patrolled 24 hours
a day by German soldiers.

Any direct assault would be doomed.

But the chasm itself, with its steep,
icy wall, lay unguarded.

Someone said he thought it was rather
impossible to cross that gorge.

But it was decided that one should
go down in daylight and find out.

In daylight,

I went down into the valley.

I climbed down the gorge,
crossed the river,

and started climbing up
on the other side.
And then the same way back up
to my friends up in the mountains...
and told the fact that was possible
to cross the gorge.
You felt that this may be serious,
very serious for you,
and you accepted that
you might not come through.
We climbed down the river and up
on the other side,
and our plan was to get in position
for the attack by 11:30,
because at 12 o'clock at night,
there was guards down
at the suspension bridge.
We wanted to see the German guards
being relived,
coming up in the factory area,
and enter the barracks,
before we went inside.
We all thought we would be discovered
when we forced the gate.
But nothing happened.
Two of us carried a full set
of charges,
in case one should be shot,
there should always be a reserve.
The task for the demolition team:
To attach explosives
to the heavy-water cells,
located in a basement room.
Meanwhile, their comrades
on lookout waited.
Each passing moment increased
the chance of discovery.
If we had been discovered,
I knew that during such circumstances
you have to act.
Do I shoot? A shot would, of course,
maybe spoil the whole operation.
Inside, they overpowered
a Norwegian workman.

Holding him at gunpoint,
the saboteurs placed their charges,
pausing only to decide how much time
they would need to escape
before the blast.
Suddenly, they were interrupted
by their captive.
He broke in and said, It's all right,
you may blow the factory,
that's all right.
But may I have my glasses?
Because it's hopeless to get
new glasses in Norway today.
And you would have thought that
you probably said, Damn your glasses!
We have no time for looking
for glasses!
But instead,
you dropped what you were doing
and you searched all around
the room and you found
you found the-the holster for
his glasses and gave him and he said,
thank you very much,
and so we went on with taping the fuses.
So far, they had beaten the odds.
Now the commandos had only seconds
to make their escape.
And after a few minutes one minute,
maybe two minutes they were there,
with us on the railway line.
And we ran the same way back
as we had come in.
The road conditions and
the snow condition were excellent...
because on the railway,
quite a lot of the snow had blown
away on the other side,
and that was frozen solid ground,
and we didn't put a mark.
So everything was actually on our side
With determination, skill, and daring,
the saboteurs had dealt a
crippling blow to their enemy

without losing a man.
But heavy water had become
a German priority,
and within six months,
the factory was back in operation.
The Allies had to assume the worst:
Nazi scientists were closer than ever
to building a bomb.
Another attack on the factory
was set in motion
this time, from the air.
In a bold noonday raid,
hurled destruction at the plant.
The raid damaged factory buildings and
killed civilians in a nearby shelter.
But the heavy water, secured in
the basement, went untouched.
With production halted,
the Germans decided to move
the operation to the safety
of the Fatherland,
and inadvertently gave the commandos
one last chance to destroy it forever.
We had got information
from London that the Germans
had planned to take down
the remaining heavy water.
Team members secretly scouted
the route.
The heavy water would be loaded
onto railway cars
and taken by train to Lake Tinnsjø.
Here, the cars would go aboard a
passenger ferry
for the two-hour trip across the lake.
A well-placed charge could sink the
ferry, and with it all the heavy water.
But sinking a public ferry
meant paying a terrible price.
Our conclusion was that the sinking
of the ferry
was about the only possible solution.
It would have to be civilian sabotage,
which was naturally a

very serious thing to deal with.
There was no doubt in our mind
that there were going to be
human lives taken,
and furthermore, it could be anybody.
And Rjukan was a small town,
and it was really
almost like all family.
Fearing neighbors and
friends might die,
the Norwegians sent
an urgent message to London.
The British reply was immediate
and uncompromising.
It has been talked over
and the conclusion is they heavy water
has to be-to be destroyed.
Good luck and when you get such a
message from London, you have to do it
Not to be.
They were sad.
But everyone in my family
was scared to what they hear.
I couldn't do anything about it.
The Germans never put any guards
on the ferry.
They were watching their barrels
on the railway.
But the ferryboat itself
was not guarded at all.
At ten o'clock
on a quiet Sunday morning,
the ferry men cast off
from the dock on schedule.
Forty-five minutes later,
at the appointed spot,
a blast tore through the bottom
of the boat.
It was a very, very bad blow,
and the ferry rapidly rose,
and the cargo on the ferry-there
were railway wagons, you see
so they rushed down and
tilted the ferry still more.

Within moments, the mortally damaged ferry had sunk beneath the surface, carrying with it innocent passengers and Nazi Germany's atomic ambitions. And the heavy water being on board went down with the ship and it's still on the bottom of the Tinnsjo Lake.

Later, the Allies would learn that the Nazis were never close to an atomic breakthrough. The U.S. won the A-bomb race. Within months of the German defeat, America dropped the first atomic bomb. But in the Allies hands, the bomb helped to win a war, not perpetuate one.

If Hitler had the bomb, he might have used it to devastate the world. The Norwegian resistance fighters did their part to stop him. Their mission was one of the greatest feats of sabotage in military history something that had to be done, at all costs, and was.

You have to fight for your freedom and for peace.

It's not something that you have every day. You have to fight for it every day, to keep it.

It's like a glass bowl; it's very easy to break. It's easy to lose.

Half a world away, on December 7, 1941 American learned the cost of freedom, when Japan devastated Pearl Harbor. That sneak attack included the stealth weapons of their day midget submarines

They were sleek, deadly, and, until now, consigned to history. The National Park Service and the U.S. Navy

have searched for the wreck
of a Japanese midget submarine.
An hour before the
Japanese savaged Pearl Harbor,
a U.S. destroyer sank the tiny vessel.
The encounter could have
warned American forces
that bombs and torpedoes were
about to rain on Battleship Row.
But it did not.
Marine archeologist Dan Lenihan
directed the hunt for the midget sub.
Jim Delgado was the project's historian
Their collaboration grew out
of earlier research
below the surface of Pearl Harbor.
They searched for evidence
of a bygone conflict
a battle waged underwater
by five midget submarines.
One sub played a special role.
It was particularly exciting about the
midget sub that's outside the entrance
It would have represented the
first exchange of hostilities
between the United States
and Japan in World War II.
And, because, remember,
that this sub was sunk
an hour before
the planes attacked Pearl Harbor.
An incredibly important,
significant find if we could do it.
The search for the midget sub
focused on a square mile
of debris-laden bottom.
The area is a graveyard of war relics,
like this old Navy plane.
A thousand feet down, in the darkness,
everything begins to resemble a sub.
But what they're looking for is
eighty feet long and six feet across.
It carried two torpedoes and was
manned by an officer and a navigator.

They were going to come on in,
sit, and wait.
And then, when the attack occurred,
when the planes came in,
when all hell broke loose
in Pearl Harbor, they would surface,
fire their torpedoes,
and wreak as much havoc as they could,
swing around Ford Island,
head back on out, and rendezvous
with their mother subs to be
taken back to Japan.
The mother ships moved into position
off Diamond Head before midnight,
December 6, 1941.
They arrived ahead of
the Imperial Navy task force.
Each mother ship had a
midget sub strapped to its hull.
The larger craft would release
the midgets before dawn
and retrieve them after the attack.
But the tiny vessels would
never return from the battle
a clash of giants that
had been brewing for years.
From Manchuria to French Indochina
in less than a decade,
Japan had rolled up a long list
of conquests across Asia.
Despite an Allied embargo on war
materials, she was growing stronger.
By late 1941,
the vast resources of Southeast Asia
lay before the "Rising Sun".
Their only protection:
a scattering of British
and Dutch outposts
and the U.S. Pacific Fleet.
I think there was a general sense
that war would break out.
I don't think anybody expected that it
would take place here at Pearl Harbor.
Successfully surprising an island

fortress four thousand miles away
also seemed impossible
to Japanese leaders.
But admiral Isoroku Yamamoto
convinced them this daring raid
was the only way to disarm
the "sleeping giant".
Japan had to
smash American's Pacific Fleet,
even if that meant attacking its
home base in Oahu's natural harbor.
Japanese pilots trained hard through
the fall of 1941.
So did the crews handpicked
to pilot the midget subs,
the fastest boats of their kind.
Soon they would have their chance
for glory.
In Washington,
Japanese diplomats continued
to seek peace through negotiation
until the final hour.
Not even Japan's ambassador knew
of the coming attack.
December 7, 1941.
As Oahu slept, the Japanese task
force brought 350 attack planes
into striking distance of Pearl Harbor
just two hundred miles away.
In Washington,
military intelligence teams had
broken Japan's diplomatic code.
They knew an armada was somewhere
in the Pacific.
But they did not know its destination.
Near diamond Head,
dawn was approaching.
The Japanese mother subs surfaced
to release the midget submarines.
But something went wrong.

At 6:

and a freighter crew
reported a strange sub

approaching Pearl Harbor
The captain of a nearby destroyer,
the U.S.S. Ward,
realized intruders were trying to
penetrate the fleet's defenses.
His gunners opened fire.
The midget sub began sinking
in a thousand feet of water.
Depth charges finished her off.
The Ward reported the sinking twice.
But before notifying Pacific Fleet
commander Husband E. Kimmel,
district headquarters waited
thirty minutes.
The delay was all the attackers needed
News of the sub might have prevented
what happened next.
Well, the message was radioed in
that they fired
on and depth-charged this sub.
It didn't reach Admiral Kimmel.
It wasn't until just a few minutes
before the attack commenced in earnest
with the planes coming in, that the
admiral was finally phoned and told,
look, we got this message in
from the commander
of the Ward saying that
he's fired upon a sub
operating in the defensive zone.
Kimmel says,
Why wasn't I told about this?
He's putting his uniform on,
he's heading out,
and that moment the planes come
screaming in overhead,
the bombs start dropping.
At five minutes to eight, forty
torpedo planes roared over Ford Island
bearing the mark of the Rising Sun.
Accompanying them were
fifty-one dive bombers,
forty-nine high-level bombers,
and forty-three fighters.

American sailors thought they
were seeing a practice drill.
Bombs and bullets found them
eating breakfast, ironing uniforms,
or staring into the fatal sky.
Arizon... Oklahoma... California.
One by one, great ships sank.
The West Virginia alone took
six torpedoes and countless bombs.
Pearl Harbor's air defense
burned on the runways.
Only a handful of pilots managed
to scramble into a sky
thick with enemy planes.
The midget subs' moment had come.
But one had been sunk by the Ward.
A second was depth-charged outside
the harbor.
Of the three that remained,
two posed a threat to Battleship Row.
Between waves of attacking planes,
Sub Three fired a torpedo and missed.
Moments later,
it was rammed and depth-charged
by a destroyer making for the open sea
Sub and crew hit bottom.
Overhead,
the Japanese continued their assault.
But now smoke and anti-aircraft fire
obscured their targets.
The "sleeping giant" had awakened.
an ammunition magazine,
battleship Arizona blazed toward
her doom.
Survivors staggered into waters aflame
with burning oil.
Japan's brilliant, relentless attack
had killed more than 2,400.
Americans and crippled most
of the U.S. battleships in the Pacific
For the midget subs, though,
the battle was not as glorious.
Two still roamed Hawaiian waters.
Number Four, which may have fired

at Battleship Row,
radioed news of Japan's victory to
the fleet that evening.
Then she disappeared,
never to be heard from again.
The subs may not have seen
resounding success...
But Japan needed heroes,
so the propaganda machine
reincarnated their crews
as the nine young gods of Pearl Harbor
This wartime Japanese feature
told their story
with luxurious exaggeration.
In truth, quarters were cramped,
and reeked of battery fumes.
The midget subs helped create
confusion at Pearl Harbor,
but didn't affect the war's outcome.
And what of the last midget sub
at Pearl Harbor?
Commanded by ensign Kazuo Sakamaki,
it suffered a fate worse than sinking.
On December 8,
as President Franklin D. Roosevelt
called for war,
Sakamaki's sub washed up
on the far shore of Oahu,
undone by a faulty gyroscope.
The submarine wouldn't function right.
So he drifted all the way around
the island to the opposite end
and then went ashore on the morning
of December 8 at Bellows,
where he and his crewman assigned to
the sub tried to blow the ship up.
It didn't work.
They jumped into the water.
The crewman then drowned,
but Sakamaki washed ashore
and become the first washed ashore
and became the first prisoner of war
that the U.S. captured

in the Pacific:

Sakamaki spent the war in prison.
His sub toured the U.S.,
helping to sell war bonds
a souvenir of dark days.
At war's end,
after throwing its all at U.S. forces,
Japan let slip a new weapon of terror.
For decades,
the scars left by kamikaze attacks
enforced a silence on both sides.
But the men who fought those battles
will never forget them.
Nineteen forty-four.
Japan, its back to the wall,
makes a final,
fanatic effort to stave off defeat.
In an act incomprehensible to Americans
the empire orders thousands
of men to certain death.
Before an attack,
pilots drink a toast of sake
a warrior's welcome
to the death that awaited.
They were kamikazes named for a typhoon
that saved Japan from Mongol invaders.
Some were veteran pilots,
many were idealistic students eager
to die for their nation's glory.
Kamikazes inflicted awful punishment
on their enemies.
More than three thousand fliers dove
to their deaths.
They sank fifty-seven ships and
damaged more than three hundred others
Their attacks killed at
least three thousand Americans
and wounded more than six thousand.
The kamikazes were the deadliest weapon
ever launched against the U.S. Navy
so frighteningly effective that their
existence was initially kept secret
from the American public.
On April 16th, 1945, kamikazes knocked

the U.S.S. Laffey out of the war.
The Laffey was rebuilt;
she now is a museum ship in Charleston
North Carolina.
Today, she's receiving visitors her
skipper and four crew members
from World War II.
The sight of their ship raises a tide
of memories for these comrades-in-arms
Rear Admiral F. Julian Becton,
who died in 1995,
was 81 when he gave this interview.
He commanded the Laffey during
the invasions of Normandy
and the Philippines.
Steaming toward Okinawa,
he knew what perils lay ahead.
The kamikazes were
the most effective weapon
that the Japanese developed
during the war.
And it was a desperate effort
on their part to do it,
but they were terribly they had a
terrible effect on our ships out there
Ensign James Townley would win
a Silver Star
for his valor aboard the Laffey.
My opinion of the kamikazes were that
they were misguided people.
Then we learned more about them.
We found out that, yes, they were the
"Sons of the Divine wind",
or whatever they chose to call them.
We called them "One-Way Charlies".
And we were really scared
to death of them,
because no matter what you did,
unless you could shoot them out
of the air, they were coming in.
Gunner's Mate Second Class
Lawrence Delewski
would earn a Bronze Star
before his 21st, birthday.

Everybody has their own way of thinking
and their own way of thinking,
and their own ideas.
And their ways didn't suit us.
There was-I certainly didn't feel
as complacent as I feel now,
At that point,
I was ready to kill them all.
In Japan, another group of
old comrades gathers for a reunion.
These men were once the elite of the
Japanese Kamikaze Corps-the Thunder God
They should be long dead,
but they survived some
because they flew fighter cover,
others because seniority
kept them out of combat
to await American's invasion
of the homeland.
Now largely forgotten, they once
made up an awesome attack force.
Their weapon was the okha, which meant
"exploding cherry blossom".
But Americans gave it the code
name baka, meaning "fool".
The weapons were another type
of kamikaze attack,
a baka bomb captured on Okinawa.
It's a two-and-a-half-ton flying bomb,
dropped from a mother plane
and carrying a suicide pilot.
Three rocket propulsion units are
set off on approaching the target,
giving a maximum level speed
of 535 miles per hour.
The baka's punch is an
armor piercing 2,600lb. Warhead.
It's the first
weapon specially designed
for the Kamikaze Flying Corps.
Reserve Lieutenant Hachiro Hosokawa
was a senior member of an okha squadron
There is a Japanese word,
inujini "to die like a dog",

meaning to die in vain.
It is a wasteful death without honor.
When I became a pilot, this situation
was already so bad
that fighting in
an ordinary way was no use.
We were chosen as elite pilots.
Each of us received a headband
and a dagger.
We thought it was a
privilege granted only to the members
of the Human torpedo Unit,
the elite Okha Corps,
and that we would die gloriously.
These were the Thunder Gods.
All had volunteered;
all were ready to die.
Each year, they gather to pray
for their fallen comrades.
Commander Kunihiro Iwaki
was Vice Commander of the Corps.
The war situation was going so badly
for Japan at that time
that we realized that any semblance
of normal military tactics
could not possibly succeed.
And we had to do the unthinkable
or the incomprehensible
in terms of the military acts
in last ditch attempt to primarily get
the American aircraft carriers.
Given that situation,
the men realized they had to become
one with the bomb
in that last, final struggle.
Lieutenant Morimasa Yunokawa commander
on okha squadron.
The thought of my death crossed my mind
only for a fraction of a second.
I was then thinking of only to serve.
No matter how you try to understand
how things were then,
now in this peace time,
I don't think you can.

A kamikaze could send
a ship to its grave
but each flier only had one chance
for success.
Pilots were supposed to aim
for battleships and aircraft carriers,
but destroyers and
their radar gear also were targets.
Aboard the Laffey,
nervous sailors repeated tales
of picket ships breaking in half
and sinking immediately.
The crew would always debate
where is the safest place to be.
That was always the big talk.
Is it safer to be below,
or is it safer to be on deck,
or in the bridge, or wherever.
They all had their own theories
about where was the safest place.
Of course, there was no safe place.
In April 1945,
the noose was tightening on Japan.
As the Battle of Okinawa began,
destroyers patrolled fifty miles
closer to Japan
tempting kamikazes taking off
from the mainland.
Suicide attackers had sunk several
destroyers on this battle station
now it was the Laffey's turn
to stand watch.
On April 16th, the ship began its
third day on the perimeter.
The mood aboard was tense.

At 8:

the Laffey's number came up.
Well, the first ones were just they
sorta circled around out pretty far,
maybe, oh eight, ten thousand yards.
And then all of a sudden,
it's like some sort of a signal,
they started coming in.

And first they just came in one
or two at a time,
and you just couldn't take them
all under fire.
So that's when we started getting hit.
For eighty minutes,
the Laffey's crew fought off
the heaviest kamikaze attack ever
on a single ship.
Our closest call was a plane coming in
on the starboard beam,
and it was, when I first saw it,
was low on the water,
about ten thousand yards out.
I figured it was about
eight seconds away from certain death,
Unless our gunners got it.
And our Mount 52,
which was just forward of the bridge,
was firing at it, and firing fast.
I noticed that the bursts
were just off just missing him.
So I just moved it,
and the next one went right into his
hit him right in the nose,
and just blew him up.
And that one is the one that would
have gotten us all.
And it just literally disintegrated,
and everybody heaved
a big sigh of relief.
And just after that,
then there came one in out of the sky
on the port side,
and one came in low on the water
on the port quarter,
and we were at it all over again.
On the morning of April 16th,
we had a suicide plane hit us
right about here.
It hit with enough impact
so that this gun
was blown up, canted upward at
more than a 45 degree angle.

The motor of that plane skidded along
the inside of this left hand gun
and wound up at the hatchway
in the back of the gun on this side.
And when he hit over there, I was
blown up the deck about fifteen feet.
When I regained consciousness,
that's where I was.
Ripped from stem to stern
by the attacks of Jap suicide pilots
at Okinawa,
the destroyer U.S.S. Laffey comes home
the Laffey was struck by everything
in the Jap book.
In the savage attempt
to finish her off,
Seven bomb-loaded planes crashed
on her decks.
the final score was:
nine enemy planes shot down
by the Laffey,
but 32 of her brave men were dead
or missing, and 60 were wounded.
In the worlds of her skipper,
Commander Becton,
she was truly
"the ship that would not die".
Flying conventional aircraft,
kamikaze pilots caused terrible damage
but the okha Corps never really got
a chance to affect the war's outcome.
The bombers that carried
the okhas were slow,
and American fighter pilots shot down
most of them
before they could release
their deadly cargo.
By war's end, Hosokawa was
his unit's only surviving officer.
He found the transition
to peacetime troubling.
All of a sudden, the war was over,
and I had the feeling of someone
who had been in the eye of a typhoon.

And suddenly the typhoon is gone,
the weather is clear and beautiful.
No one, nothing is left but myself,
and the feeling is, why?
It's a very strange feeling that
I cannot understand
why the typhoon spared me.
They were doing
what they felt was right,
just as we were doing
what we felt was right.
It had to be.
How else could you put your life
on the line for something
you didn't believe in?