

explosive-laden aircraft aimed at the Allied ships, which were coming dangerously close to Japan. The first recorded instance of what was thought to be a suicide attack, or *kamikaze*, occurred as early as 7 December 1941, during the Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor when a Japanese Val bomber was hit by gunners aboard the USS *Curtiss* (AV-4). The pilot of the damaged aircraft swung down to hit the seaplane tender's starboard crane in an obvious suicide dive. As the war progressed, other such attacks were noted, yet nothing on a massive organized scale until the Allies breached the last defensive ring around Japan.

When the landings took place in Leyte Gulf in the Philippines in October 1944, the *kamikaze* became a very real and determined method of combating the Allied ships. There is some argument over which ship was first hit by a *kamikaze* raid, however, the *Kamikaze* Special Attack Force was actually inaugurated on 25 October 1944, when five Zero or Zeke fighters attacked the USS *St Lo* (CVE-63). Only one Zero hit the jeep carrier, but its bomb and residual fuel was sufficient to cause explosions that sank the small carrier. Pumped up by this success, over 55 *kamikazes* in various raids took place as part of the Special Attack Force over the next two days. The targets were again the smaller American carriers, and at least 40 other ships. The resultant success of sinking five ships and severely damaging over 30 ships, gave hope to the Japanese military hierarchy and especially the propaganda architects that the suicide weapon could effectively stop the Allies from coming closer to the home islands. In fact, those that gave their lives for the Emperor would drive the enemy back across the Pacific allowing the Japanese Armed Forces to gain the upper hand.



The *Grasp* has the *Des Moines* under tow and is bringing her through the channels near Philadelphia and on out to sea.

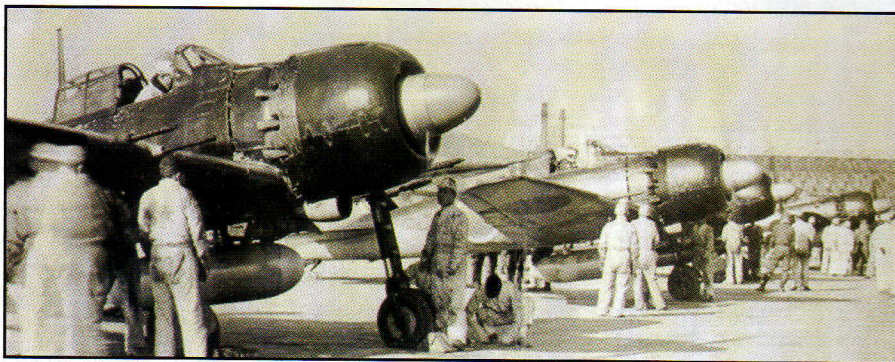
Young men from all over Japan were pressed into becoming one-way pilots through peer pressure, family honor and devotion to the Emperor. Unfortunately, much of the lore surrounding the *kamikaze* concept was falsely presented to the pilots who were 17-20 years of age. The next task for the expanded Special Attack Forces or Corps was to seek out and destroy bigger targets such as the fleet carriers, battleships and troop and cargo transports. Later, as the Allied forces assaulted Okinawa, the *kamikaze* attacks were literally carried out around the clock and in multiple raids of over 50 aircraft per day. In fact, there were over 10,000 aircraft/suicide boats/Baka bombs being readied for use to drive off the invaders, even if the pilots had little or no experience and the aircraft were in poor condition. A few of the aircraft were the Ki-115 Tsurugi type which was simplistic wood frame flyable craft that used leftover crated engines from any aircraft. The landing gear was detachable and fell off when the aircraft left the ground. The gear could then be re-used on another Tsurugi. They were only slated for a one-way journey.

In the battle between the Allied Navies and the Japanese airmen, it was a contest between men who

sought to die versus those who wanted to live. The *kamikaze* soon became the greatest challenge to the Allied invasion force. Fortunately, the combination of large scale combat air patrols, organized anti-aircraft fire and well-placed defenses (destroyer picket lines) away from the main body of the fleet blunted what could have been a huge setback to Allied victory. These tactical methods plus the B-29 Stratofortress raids on Japan coupled with the two atomic bomb attacks put an end to the war before the *kamikaze* could do its greatest damage. Even so, the 3912 combined Army and Navy planes sunk 34 Allied ships and damaged 368 other craft. Nearly 5000 men were killed, and 4800 were wounded.

In terms of the success rate, 547 *kamikazes* fought their way through Allied defenses to hit their targets, and 8.5-percent of the ships that were hit did not survive. These figures were significant to anyone who had appreciation of Naval combat. A new weapon had emerged — a guided missile. Almost immediately, the Navy began to study ways and means of defeating enemy missiles that would be electronically flown as opposed to suicide pilot.

The value of this type of weapon was not lost on America's potential enemies, and methods to shoot down incoming missiles at medium or distant ranges was given a high priority by the US Navy. One of the first items to be considered was the rapid-fire gun such as the 6-in/47-cal automatic weapons on the USS *Worcester* (CLAA-144) and USS *Roanoke* (CLAA-145), and the 8-in/55-cal guns on the USS *Des Moines* class of heavy cruiser. Of greater importance was an electronic system for detecting and tracking attacking



*Kamikaze* aircraft are being warmed up for a raid on Allied ships operating off the coast.