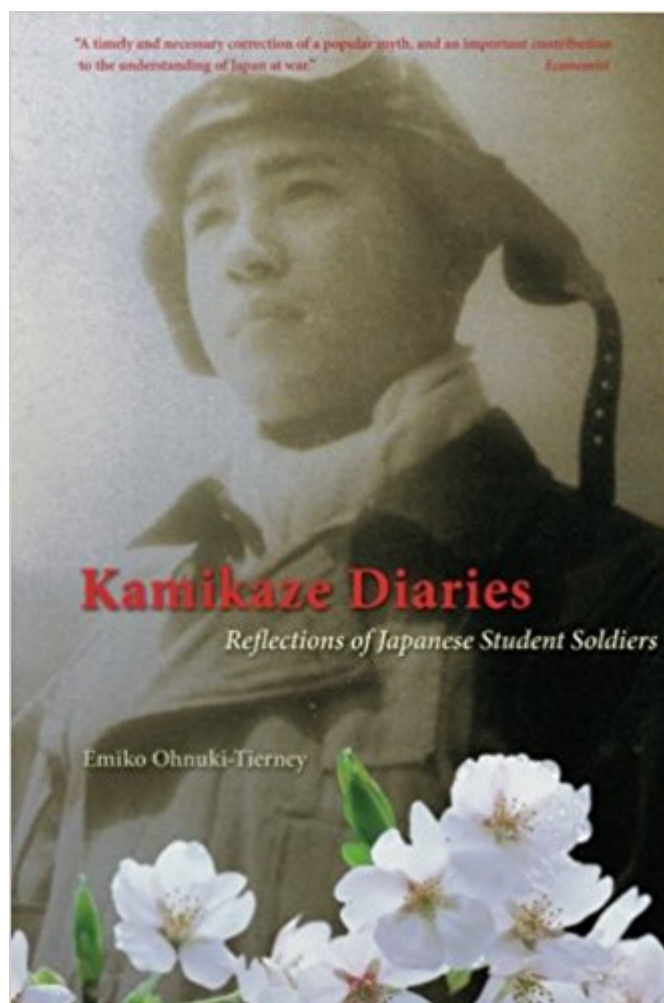


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Kamikaze Diaries: Reflections Of Japanese Student Soldiers



Synopsis

“We tried to live with 120 percent intensity, rather than waiting for death. We read and read, trying to understand why we had to die in our early twenties. We felt the clock ticking away towards our death, every sound of the clock shortening our lives.” So wrote Irokawa Daikichi, one of the many kamikaze pilots, or tokkotai, who faced almost certain death in the futile military operations conducted by Japan at the end of World War II. This moving history presents diaries and correspondence left by members of the tokkotai and other Japanese student soldiers who perished during the war. Outside of Japan, these kamikaze pilots were considered unbridled fanatics and chauvinists who willingly sacrificed their lives for the emperor. But the writings explored here by Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney clearly and eloquently speak otherwise. A significant number of the kamikaze were university students who were drafted and forced to volunteer for this desperate military operation. Such young men were the intellectual elite of modern Japan: steeped in the classics and major works of philosophy, they took Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am” as their motto. And in their diaries and correspondence, as Ohnuki-Tierney shows, these student soldiers wrote long and often heartbreaking soliloquies in which they poured out their anguish and fear, expressed profound ambivalence toward the war, and articulated thoughtful opposition to their nation’s imperialism. A salutary correction to the many caricatures of the kamikaze, this poignant work will be essential to anyone interested in the history of Japan and World War II.

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Customer Reviews

Like Anne Frank’s diary, this collection of kamikaze pilot diaries (translated by anthropologist

Ohnuki-Tierney) uses the eyes of those on the cusp of adulthood to bring to life the unfathomable daily realities of war. Drawing from stores of knowledge that spanned from Western philosophy to contemporary Japanese cultural criticism, the young men who penned these diaries ("the intellectual crÃ©me de la crÃ©me of Japan") sought to use the traditional medium of journal writing to find meaning in the uncertain adulthoods they were on the verge of entering. The range of views encompassed illustrates these young men's varying convictions: the latent patriotism in one young idealist, Sasaki Hachiro ("We cannot succumb to the 'Red Hair and Blue Eyes'"), the influence of Thomas Mann on Hayashi Tadao ("Japan, why don't I love and respect you?"), the sentimentalism of Matasunaga Shigeo ("Those who, even then, love Japan are fortunate. / But, poor souls; it is the happiness of a wild goose. / It is the fake blue bird whose color fades away under light") and the resignation of Hayashi Ichizo ("I will do a splendid job sinking an enemy aircraft carrier. Do brag about me") together eerily illuminate the tragedy of war in a way no textbook could. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney's book is designed to challenge Western perceptions of the kamikaze generation. By assembling brief biographies of some of the young Japanese who perished on suicide missions, and by quoting extensively from their wartime diaries and poetry, she portrays a group of literate, thoughtful people, most of whom hated the war and were reluctant to die." - Sunday Telegraph (UK) "If we wish to understand the phenomenon of terrorism in the modern world... the first and most necessary step is to understand our enemies. We must give respect to our enemies as courageous and capable soldiers enlisted in an evil cause, before we can understand them. Kamikaze Diaries gives us a basis on which to build both respect and understanding." - Freeman J. Dyson, New York Review of Books "The poems, letters, and diaries featured in this book give the lie to the notion that Japan was unified behind the war.... Kamikaze Diaries is a timely and necessary correction of a popular myth, and an important contribution to the understanding of Japan at war." - Economist"

This an eye and mind opening book. However, it is extremely philosophical and requires a sophisticated vocabulary. I was impressed that it presents to "defensive" bias, otherwise known as excuses. The words of the student pilots speak for themselves....and speak a great deal about the need for real intellectual evaluation of any nation's motives and their manipulations of their populations' minds. The content becomes quite sorrowful as the student pilots try to make sense, or

good, of their sure imminent, non-productive deaths. I am gleaning long lists of readings from the students' quotes and reading lists. The students' intellectual abilities are amazing. The editing of the individual diaries was a work of love from their families. The compilation into this book is good enough to keep me reading through difficult ideas.

This is not a historical book that records events as they occurred. Professor Onuki-Tierney uses excerpts from the diaries of six remarkable young men. Though she calls the book "Kamikaze Diaries", several of her subjects were not technically members of Admiral Onishi's Tokkotai (Special Forces, the Kamikaze). They all however, were certain of their impending death in a war that several believed should not have happened. Of the more than four thousand Tokkotai members, three thousand were young boys, the remaining 25 percent were "student pilots" drafted from the universities. These "student pilots" or "student soldiers" were primarily humanities majors (philosophy, music, the arts, and linguistics) as the science and engineering majors were generally exempted. As such, many read heavily, particularly philosophy texts in the native language of the authors (German, French, Dutch, English). Some were Christian and, along with the thousand stitch scarves, they took Bibles and their favorite philosophy texts with them on their last flight. These diary excerpts and the Professor's interpretation of the meaning in their poems and letters give a small insight into these intelligent young men's thinking and the rationalization of their impending death. This is a difficult book to read in many ways. Besides the emotion of seeing the mind and soul of young men about to fly out to try and kill my father by themselves dying and this being a book written by an academic about academics, the book's format adds to the difficulty. Besides a six page preamble, there is a thirty seven page introduction. This is a bit long but necessary to set the stage for non-Japanese. The Professor also uses this to point out the differences between the Kamikaze (who attacked only military targets) and today's suicide bomber, a point which needs to be made. The Professor included a references section but also put references in the text (particularly to her own earlier works) which break up the flow of the reading. She also put in a section of notes instead of using footnotes. While some readers may find this format preferable, I found it cumbersome. Three relatively minor discrepancies appear which again detract from the reading. At one point, the professor makes the claim that some student pilots had read as many as four to five thousand books by the time they died. If they had read a book a day for fourteen years (age 10 to 24), they would have read 5110 books. Considering that they read many philosophical tomes in the author's native language, this looks very unlikely. In an anecdote about how strenuous the discipline was for these student pilots, she recounts one Tokkotai member departing and

returning nine times because he couldn't find any targets. On the ninth return, he was shot by his superior officer. Throughout the text, the Professor mentions that these flights were to be one way, there was no return. They had enough fuel for one trip out. The Tokkotai went out in groups or flights. If this returnee could return nine times, why didn't the rest of his flight? One or maybe two times could be reasonable due to mechanical malfunction but nine times? And while some were trained to land, most weren't - and they were carrying 250 kg bombs. And the third discrepancy occurs when the Professor is discussing the emperor's palace as having been built by "Toyotomi Ieyasu". It was of course Tokugawa Ieyasu. Toyotomi Hideyoshi preceded the Tokugawa as shogun. I was looking for historical impressions of what it was like in Japan during World War II. There is some of that in this text but looking into intelligent minds realizing they are about to die and watching them rationalize this fate is as valuable as any historical documentary. Those interested in philosophy, psychology, and the nature of the Japanese will find this book rewarding.

Gave up half way through. Too much poetry.

I question many of the concepts presented.

This is an amazing book. Nowadays we believe that Japan's society on the eve of WWII was just archaic and devoted to the Emperor. Maybe it was so among the people, but clearly the offsprings of the elite were as educated as in the West. Yet, they were slaughtered for the sake of the nation. Of course, the book, which was edited by the sister of one of the Kamikaze, does not represent a broad social section of the Japanese society. I would recommend the book to anyone that studies history, WWII and political sciences.

I was disappointed as a lot of space in the book is taken up by discussion of Japanese militarism. The reflections of the diaries of the tokko pilots is somewhat shallow. I would have liked to be able to read more of them than just the parts in the book. On the other hand what there is from the tokko pilots is revealing. Leaves you wanting more.

Excellent resource and read

Hard to get stuff

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