



Kamikaze Diaries: Reflections of Japanese Student Soldiers

Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney

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“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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