

BYE-BYE, BUSHIDO

BY MAC R. JOHNSON

The Japanese warrior's code, which requires a soldier to be killed or to kill himself rather than surrender, was junked during the last days of the Pacific fighting



Japs surrendering to Marines during the last stages of Okinawa battle

A SEVENTH DIVISION patrol beat its way along the narrow, white coral sand beaches below towering coral limestone cliffs on Okinawa's southeastern coast. It skillfully probed around huge coral boulders which had broken from the mother cliff and crashed down to the sea.

It was June 19th—two days before organized enemy resistance on Okinawa ceased. The heat was suffocating. Sweaty combat greens were plastered to the bodies of these patrolmen from Captain Charles (Dusty) Farnham's G Company, 32d Infantry Regiment.

The patrol pushed forward into the tiny pocket where we had compressed Japanese remnants after eighty days of barbarous bush-and-cave fighting. It was Jap-held territory—"Purple Heart country." But despite the danger, the men of the patrol walked upright, advancing slowly, talking casually and deliberately exposing themselves. They wanted to be seen. Occasionally a Jap would look at them from behind a rock or from a cave entrance and then, flushed from his position and without firing a shot, he would withdraw. It was very strange—and very quiet.

Out in the water two American amphibious tractors kept pace with the patrol, lurching and lunging forward in slow, clanking movements while crewmen kept heavy machine guns aimed protectingly at the beach. Captain Samuel V. Eastman commanded one of the tractors, and Lieutenant Robert W. Strickler the other. Theirs was the responsibility of guarding the patrol's flank and they were alert—and worried.

Each man wondered when the shooting would start. The Japanese were running from

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rock to rock in front of the patrol, but these veteran infantrymen didn't fire. They weren't trigger-happy. They had orders to capture as many Japs as possible.

Captain Farnham called Captain Eastman and told him to go behind the Japs. "Cut them off—with machine-gun fire if necessary," the patrol leader ordered.

Picking up speed, the amphibious tractors moved several hundred yards down the coast. Then Corporal Harvey J. Martin eagerly hollered that he'd seen a party of Nip soldiers in the open.

"I looked over the side," Captain Eastman said, "and saw a large unshaven Nipper walking toward my tractor, with his saber in its scabbard raised over his head. A white towel was attached.

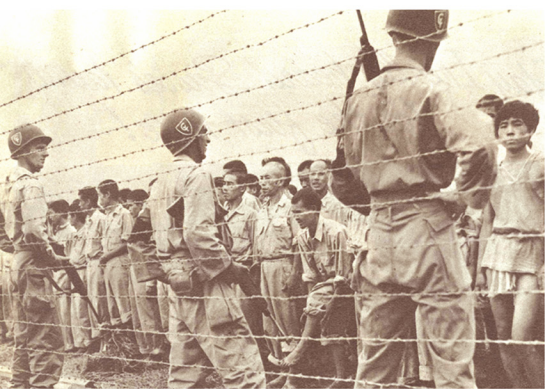
"I was a little afraid and didn't know exactly what to do. But I told my men to keep their guns trained on the Japs and not to fire unless I yelled or was hit. I crawled over the side and advanced toward the Nip, who turned out to be a captain.

"I left my pistol in its holster to show I meant no harm, but I didn't feel very secure. I stopped him when he got within ten feet. Trying to be nonchalant, I offered him a candy bar and some cigarettes. He took a smoke. But when I brought out a box of matches and tried to light it for him my hands were shaking so badly I couldn't hold the match steady. So I handed him the box and he lit it himself.

"I motioned him to surrender his saber. He did. Then I frisked him for other weapons, talking all the time in friendly tones although he never understood a word. I think I kept saying, 'The war's over for you now—we'll treat you okay.' "

Captain Eastman then pantomimed that he wanted all the Japs behind the enemy captain to surrender. The Nip jabbered and motioned and, as American soldiers looked bug-eyed from their amphtracks, Jap soldiers popped from every crevice, fissure and hole in the cliffs. They jumped up from behind rocks and stepped out from the bushes. They outnumbered the Americans 30 to 1, easily. But the Nips weren't hostile. They waved white handkerchiefs, towels and pieces of underwear. They walked toward Captain Eastman, who apprehensively watched this mass of firepower approach. He went through another vigorous pantomime and they threw their weapons down.

Then the march started. Eastman, with his tractor following, led the Nips back toward Farnham's ground patrol. There were 200 Nips in the bunch, including some boys and a dozen women in full Imperial army uniform. As they walked along, other Japs came out of the hills, sheepishly falling in.



With their fanaticism broken, Jap soldiers surrendered in greater numbers on Luzon as well as on Okinawa. This group is part of a bag of over 1,000 made by the 38th "Cyclone" Division and caged in a stockade east of Manila.

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When Eastman contacted Farnham's patrol he turned in 300 prisoners.

The Japanese military maxim that surrender is a Japanese soldier's most disgraceful act had been broken, and the result was of great importance in speeding the end of the Pacific war. The 300 prisoners proved to be only the vanguard of nearly 10,000 who junked the Bushido code on Okinawa and came hands-up into our lines. It was a fantastic total. Amazed American officers jubilantly announced it was the largest number of enemy prisoners ever taken in a two-weeks period in the Pacific war.

And we had won another count. The prisoners had come to disbelieve Japanese lies that prisoners are tortured, mutilated and killed by cruel, sadistic Americans.

Horrors of a War of Nerves

The Japs didn't know how to surrender, but they did. They cracked and broke and exploded mentally during the closing days of the Okinawa campaign. Some came running from their caves laughing and smiling when a short spurt of fire from a flame-throwing tank made up their minds. Others walked for a half mile to within ten feet of our patrols—within ten feet of life as a surviving prisoner of war—but then training and tradition would triumph and they would commit suicide. A few went insane under our ceaseless attacks and had to be carried away bodily.

It was an extraordinary ending for the 82-day, sanguinary battle. Every Japanese of the Okinawa garrison, like his fellow soldier on Leyte, Iwo and Saipan, had orders to "take ten Americans with you when you die." But nearly 10,000 knew this was impossible and preferred to live.

Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Commanding General of the 10th Army, was killed the day before Eastman and Farnham turned in their 300 prisoners, but he had lived to see the trend. A few days later when his successor, Marine Lieutenant General Roy S. Geiger, announced all organized enemy resistance had ceased, Marines and soldiers had taken 3,525 POWs.

Before another 24 hours had passed a record haul of 1,000 Nips boosted the total to 4,500. On this day two Japanese lieutenant generals, Mitsuru Ushijima, Supreme Commander of the Okinawa area, and Isamu Cho, his army Chief of Staff, were beheaded on their own orders. Thus nearly one half of our Japanese prisoners surrendered before their commanding generals died.

Ushijima and Cho made their departure as dramatic as possible under front-line conditions. General Ushijima ordered his cook to prepare the finest meal possible for an "important occasion." That night the staff ate well of rice, canned meats, sweet potatoes, fried fish cakes, salmon, bean soup, fresh cabbage and pineapple. They drank tea and *sake*.

The generals wore polished black cavalry boots to set off their full field uniforms. They pinned on ribbons of victorious campaigns and medals of valor. After eating heavily and talking for several hours over *sake*, in the cave that was their last command post, while maps, code books and military documents were burned, the two generals went outside. A silk patchwork comforter had been spread on a ledge and on this was placed a white sheet symbolic of death.

Weapons for the Death Rite

They kneeled, unbuttoned their blouses and exposed their abdomens. Then Ushijima and

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Cho selected ceremonial hara-kiri knives from Ushijima's aide, who had wrapped half of each gleaming blade in white cloth so his unworthy hands would not touch it.

Then the generals bowed their heads as Ushijima's assistant adjutant, grasping the handle of a saber in both hands, stepped up. It was almost dawn when Ushijima ceremonially scratched his bulging abdomen with the keen blade. But self-disembowelment is painful, and so the adjutant, in full compliance with the hara-kiri ritual, beheaded his commanding officer with a smashing blow. With barely a pause Cho was dispatched in the same way.

The two military leaders had apologized to their emperor for their disgraceful and dishonorable failure to defend Okinawa. They had seen 101,000 of their officers and men killed. In a little more than five days they had seen 4,500 surrender—an unthinkable, unbelievable, totally unmilitary occurrence.

Perhaps the two generals, by following their old, uncivilized Bushido teachings, had hoped to inspire the remnants of their command either to die fighting or take their own lives rather than to become prisoners. But if that was their hope they again failed, for 5,000 more of their command gave up in the next few days.

The mass surrenders were a circus for our troops. It became a race to see which outfit could take the most prisoners. And Major General Lemuel C. Shepard's Sixth Marine Division won the championship with 3,279 prisoners, while Major General Archibald V. Arnold's 7th Army Division was runner-up with 2,627. But the Army division took eighty-three officers, including two majors, while the Marine champions took forty-one officers, two of whom were lieutenant commanders.

The Japs didn't follow any rules in surrendering. Some came in with their arms stiffly parallel, pointing to the sky like a movie safe-cracker being surprised by a cop. Others had their arms extended like a bird in flight. Some voluntarily stripped to a loin-cloth to prove they carried no firearms or explosives. It wasn't even a German-type surrender, with troops neatly stacking rifles at predesignated dumps.

Each day the battleground buzzed with new developments. For days the Japs had been surrendering singly and in groups of three to ten—without their officers. One day two Japanese majors rounded up 83 survivors of their butchered organization and personally led them into our lines. It was unprecedented then, but it soon became commonplace.

Triumph of the Warrior Code

The number of captives would have been higher but sometimes Bushido triumphed. A Japanese captain picked up a light machine gun and murdered twelve of his enlisted men who had left their positions and were moving single file toward American lines with intention of surrendering. Then the enemy captain pressed a grenade to his chest.

The Marines named many of the Jap POWs as they poured into custody. There was "Brooklyn," who asked for American baseball news "because I haven't heard any for four years." There was "Machine-Gun Kelly," who insisted he was an expert machine gunner and as such deserved special favors.

There was "Flat-top," who looked as though he'd been hit on the noggin with a board at the age of one month. There was "The Brow," who had a pitiful, shriveled counte-

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nance—he had been hit in the face by a flame-thrower; and there was the Nip they called “The Word” because he had it. He was a member of the First Battalion, 22d Japanese Army Regiment, which oddly faced the First Battalion, 22d Marine Regiment, in combat those last days. Somebody asked him which was the better and he shrugged his shoulders, saying: “Look who’s winning.”

The main factor in bringing on this deluge of prisoners was the predicament of the Japanese garrison on Okinawa as the campaign closed. Their ranks were decimated and many were wounded. They were suffering from shortages of water, food and ammunition. They were afraid to build a fire to cook rice as smoke drew American gunfire. They had no communications—bursting artillery shells cut every telephone line. They had no transportation left—our guns and planes destroyed every parked or moving truck. Their supporting artillery had been pared to a few pieces. Hour after hour, our unmolested planes soared low over enemy terrain reporting every secret. They lived in fear of our constant, hammering artillery. They dreaded our frying flame throwers. Every position they took up became untenable as the Americans pushed ahead. They lost men and ground every hour.

Psychological warfare had been vigorously and intensively applied since March 25th. We dropped eight million pieces of propaganda behind enemy lines, including twelve editions of a newspaper and 45 types of leaflets. The newspaper informed the enemy of the ignoble death of Mussolini, the capture of Berlin and the end of the European war. Later we told them of the atomic bomb and the entry of Russia into the Pacific war.

We gave them honest, accurate news. Our leaflets impressed the enemy with his continually deteriorating position and assured him of good, humane treatment on surrender. Our surrender leaflet said: “The bearer has ceased resistance. Treat him in accordance with international law. Take him to the nearest commanding officer.” And it promised the prisoner food, clothing, tobacco and medical treatment in conformity with the Geneva Convention.

The Americans mounted loud-speakers on tanks, trucks, planes and gunboats patrolling offshore. Japanese-speaking Americans, including many Nisei, urged the enemy to surrender.

A typical instance was the capture of a dozen Japanese in a cave below Mabuni ridge. A tank mounting a loud-speaker was jockeyed dangerously close to the entrance. A Nisei sergeant picked up the microphone and began to talk over the public-address system. He told the sons of Nippon that the time for surrender had come. He pointed out that continued resistance was futile. He told them they had been abandoned by their fleet and air force.

“The battle has been lost,” he continued. “What will you contribute by dying now?” He asked what Japan would do for leadership and workers in reconstructing the nation after the war if all warriors were killed or committed hara-kiri. The enemy soldiers surrendered. A 10th Army staff officer said the immediate cause in most instances of large-scale surrenders was this type of appeal.

But strong-arm persuasion was also used. Jap-hating, irrepressible Colonel John Merton (Mickey) Finn, much praised fighting commander of the 32d Infantry Regiment, couldn’t stay out of the front lines. Mickey took over a six-man patrol which had been having trouble getting some Nips to surrender. The Japs would watch from caves and

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peer from behind house-sized boulders at the Americans, but they made no effort to surrender or to shoot at our soldiers.

"I had one of my boys put a burst of machine-gun fire up against the side of the cliff," Finn said. "That was the old convincer. Instead of firing back, fifteen Nips suddenly stepped out hands up. . . . Near by there was a cave with plenty of Japs in it. I called in a flame-thrower tank and had a quick squirt of fire placed above the entrance. The Nips inside decided right quick that surrender was better than valor. We even got a Jap nurse out of that one. Altogether fifty Japs came out. They laughed and yelled and fell down on the coral. They beat the ground and hollered with joy. They were screwballs but were very happy to surrender."

Marines Hit the Jackpot

West of where the Army was taking hundreds of prisoners daily, the Marines were performing equal feats. First Lieutenant George Thompson and Pfc. Rufus E. Randall started in pursuit of fifteen fleeing Nips. They chased them down a heavily wooded hillside and broke out into a clearing on the southern tip of Okinawa.

"There were 350 Nips, fully armed, sitting around," Thompson said. "I figured we were just about to make a Navy Department casualty list. I started grinning and waving and bowing, knowing we were dead ducks if I started to shoot. We slung our rifles over our shoulders and I yelled 'Tobacco, tobacco' because that was all that came to my mind.

"The Nips started coming over to me putting out their hands. I had four packs of cigarettes and gave them all away, a few at a time. I had a walkie-talkie radio with me and whenever I could I'd describe part of the scene to my command post—1st Battalion, 20th Marines. I figured they'd send help—and we needed it.

"One Jap officer killed a woman sitting with him. Then he walked up to Randall, saluted and handed him two sabers and a wrist watch. Then the Jap stepped back to a safe range and blew his head off.

"The suicides in the group were running about one a minute and we only got about 200 prisoners by the time a patrol came up."

Occasionally we took a prisoner to whom it made no difference. One shell-shocked Jap sat in the water just off the beach as the tide lapped higher and higher on his body. He stared out to sea as a burning sun seared his skin. He didn't hear our interpreters or his fellow soldiers who tried to talk to him. Finally our troops picked him up and carried him away bodily. He didn't object.

Collier's

September 15, 1945