This account of the kamikaze campaign is an excerpt from one of the war’s most remarkable documents, a diary kept against regulations by a sailor named James J. Fahey, of Waltham, Massachusetts. Day after day he described life aboard the cruiser Montpelier, providing a rare and vivid account of the war in the Pacific as seen from the fighting man’s point of view.

. . . It is absolutely out of the question for you to return alive. Your mission involves certain death. Your bodies will be dead, but not your spirits. The death of a single one of you will be the birth of a million others. Neglect nothing that may affect your training or your health. You must not leave behind any cause for regret, which would follow you into eternity. And, lastly: do not be in too much of a hurry to die. If you cannot find your target, turn back; next time you may find a more favorable opportunity. Choose a death which brings about a maximum result.

From the First Order of the Kamikazes

Contrary to my usual habit, I woke early, at five o’clock. I did my exercises stripped to the waist. I felt extremely well.

Now one has only to place a sheet of paper into the little box which usually contains the ashes of the dead. I wonder if that is true? I wanted to send you parings of my nails and a few locks of my hair, but I had my hair cut short yesterday and my nails are already too short. I am sorry, but unfortunately it is too late. Neither my nails nor my hair will grow again in one night.

I do not want a grave. I would feel oppressed if they were to put me into a narrow vault. A vagabond, such as I, has no need of it. Will you tell my parents that?

Do not weep because I am about to die. If I were to live and one my dear ones to die, I would do all in my power to cheer those who remain behind. I would try to be brave.

11:30 AM – the last morning. I shall now have breakfast and then go to the aerodrome. I am busy with my final briefing and have no time to write any more. So I bid you farewell.

Excuse this illegible letter and the jerky sentences.
Keep in good health.
I believe in the victory of Greater Asia.
I pray for the happiness of you all, and I beg your forgiveness for my lack of piety.

I leave for the attack with a smile on my face. The moon will be full to-night. AS I fly over the open sea off Okinawa I will choose the enemy ship that is to be my target.
I will show you that I know how to die bravely.
With all my respectful affection,
-Akio Otsuka,
A Kamikaze Pilot

There was one maintenance man who made a point of meticulously securing and polishing the cockpit of each kamikaze plane he tended. It was his theory that the cockpit
was the pilot’s coffin and as such it should be spotless. One recipient of this service was so pleasantly surprised that he summoned and thanked his benefactor, saying that the neatness of the plane meant a great deal to him. The maintenance man’s eyes dimmed with tears, and, unable to speak, he ran along with one hand on the wing tip of the plane as it taxied for its final take-off.

- Commander Tadashi Nakajima

Jap planes and bombs were hitting all around us. Some of our ships were being hit by suicide planes, bombs and machine gun fire. It was a fight to the finish. While all this was taking place our ship had its hands full with Jap planes. We knocked our share of planes down but we also got hit by 3 suicide planes, but lucky for us they dropped their bombs before they crashed into us. In the meantime exploding planes overhead were showering us with their parts. It looked like it was raining plane parts. They were falling all over the ship. Quite a few of the men were hit by big pieces of Jap planes. We were supposed to have air coverage but all we had was 4 P-38 fighters, and when we opened up on the Jap planes they got out of the range of our exploding shells. They must have had a ring side seat of the show. The men on my mount were also showered with parts of Jap planes. One suicide dive bomber was heading right for us while we were firing at other attacking planes and if the 40 mm. mount behind us on the port side did not blow the Jap wing off it would have killed all of us. When the wing was blown off it, the plane turned some and bounced off into the water and the bombs blew part of the plane onto our ship. Another suicide plane crashed into one of the 5 inch mounts, pushing the side of the mount in and injuring some of the men inside. A lot of 5 inch shells were damaged. It was a miracle they did not explode. If that happened the powder and shells would have blown up the ship. Our 40 mm. mount is not too far away. The men threw the 5 inch shells over the side. They expected them to go off at any time. A Jap dive bomber crashed into one of the 40 mm. mounts but lucky for them it dropped its bombs on another ship before crashing. Parts of the plane flew everywhere when it crashed into the mount. Part of the motor hit Tomlinson, he had chunks of it all over him, his stomach, back, legs etc. The rest of the crew were wounded, most of them were sprayed with gasoline from the plane. Tomlinson was thrown a great distance and at first they thought he was knocked over the side. They finally found him in a corner in bad shape. One of the mt. Captains had the wires cut on his phones and kept talking into the phone, because he did not know they were cut by shrapnel until one of the fellows told him. The explosions were terrific as the suicide planes exploded in the water not too far away from the ship. The water was covered with black smoke that rose high in the air. The water looked like it was on fire. It would have been curtains for us if they had crashed into us.

Another suicide plane just overshot us. It grazed the six inch turret. . . . There was a terrific explosion as the bombs exploded, about 20 ft. away. If we were going a little faster we would have been hit. The Jap planes that were not destroyed with our shells crashed into the water close by or hit our ships. It is a tough job to hold back this tidal wave of suicide planes. The come at you from all directions and also straight down at us at a very fast pace but some of the men have time for a few fast jokes, “This is mass suicide at its best.” Another suicide plane came down at us in a very steep dive. It was a near miss, it just missed the 5 inch mount. The starboard side of the ship was showered with water and fragments. How long will our luck hold out? The
Good Lord is really watching over us. This was very close to my 40 mm mount and we were showered with debris. If the suicide plane exploded on the 5 inch mount, the ammunition would have gone up . . .

. . . During a little lull in the action the men would look around for Jap souvenirs and what souvenirs they were. I got part of the plane. The deck near my mount was covered with blood, guts, brains, tongues, scalps, hearts, arms etc. from the Jap pilots. One of the Marines cut the ring off the finger of one of the dead pilots. They had to put the hose on to wash the blood off the deck. The deck ran red with blood. The Japs were spattered all over the place . . . I cannot think of everything that happened because too many things were happening at the same time.

These suicide or kamikaze pilots wanted to destroy us, our ships and themselves. This gives you an idea what kind of an enemy we are fighting . . . You do not discourage the Japs, they never give up, you have to kill them. It is an honor to die for the Emperor . . . - James J. Fahey

Among those of us who were there, in the Philippines and at Okinawa, I doubt if there is anyone who can depict with complete clarity our mixed emotions as we watched a man about to die – a man determined to die in order that he might destroy us in the process. There was a hypnotic fascination to a sight so alien to our Western philosophy. We watched each plunging kamikaze with the detached horror of one witnessing a terrible spectacle rather than as the intended victim. We forgot self for the moment as we groped hopelessly for the thoughts of that other man up there . . .
- Vice-Admiral C.R. Brown