

Kamikaze

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The ***Kamikaze*** (神風, literally: "God wind"; common translation: "Divine wind") [kamika[ⓘ]ze] (listen[ⓘ]), official name: ***Tokubetsu Kōgekitai*** (特別攻撃隊), ***Tokkō Tai*** (特攻隊), or ***Tokkō*** (特攻), were suicide attacks by military aviators from the Empire of Japan against Allied naval vessels in the closing stages of the Pacific campaign of World War II, designed to destroy warships more effectively than was possible with conventional attacks. Numbers quoted vary, but at least 47 Allied vessels, from PT boats to escort carriers, were sunk by kamikaze attacks, and about 300 damaged. About 14% of *kamikaze* attacks managed to hit a ship.

Kamikaze aircraft were essentially pilot-guided explosive missiles, purpose-built or converted from conventional aircraft, without the ability to deliver torpedoes or bombs or attack other aircraft, or even to land. Pilots would attempt to crash their aircraft into enemy ships in what was called a "Body Attack" (体当たり; 体当り, *taiatari*) in planes laden with some combination of explosives, bombs, torpedoes and full fuel tanks; accuracy was much better than a conventional attack, and the payload larger. A *kamikaze* could sustain damage which would disable a conventional attacker and still achieve its objective. The goal of crippling or destroying large numbers of Allied ships, particularly aircraft carriers, was considered to justify sacrificing pilots and aircraft.

These attacks, which began in October 1944, followed several critical military defeats for the Japanese. They had long lost aerial dominance due to outdated aircraft and the loss of experienced pilots. On a macroeconomic scale, Japan experienced a decreasing capacity to wage war, and a rapidly declining industrial capacity relative to the United States. The Japanese government expressed its reluctance to surrender. In combination, these factors led to the use of *kamikaze* tactics as Allied forces advanced towards the Japanese home islands.

While the term "kamikaze" usually refers to the aerial strikes, the term has sometimes been applied to various other intentional suicide attacks. The Japanese military also used or made plans for Japanese Special Attack Units, including those involving submarines, human torpedoes, speedboats and divers. Nazi Germany formed its own group of suicide aircraft pilots called the Leonidas Squadron, but the German commanders were more reluctant to use them.

The tradition of death instead of defeat, capture, and perceived shame was deeply entrenched in Japanese military culture. It was one of the primary traditions in the samurai life and the *Bushido* code: loyalty and honour until death.



Ensign Kiyoshi Ogawa, who flew his aircraft into the USS *Bunker Hill* during a *kamikaze* mission on 11 May 1945.



USS *Bunker Hill* was hit by *kamikazes* piloted by Ensign Kiyoshi Ogawa (photo above) and another airman on 11 May 1945. 389 personnel were killed or missing from a crew of 2,600.^[1]

Contents

- 1 Definition and etymology
- 2 History
 - 2.1 Background