

# YOU'LL PROBABLY BE KILLED

The greatest military invasion in the history of war, fortunately, never happened. The ill-fated participants would have been in the millions, as would have been their casualties. Forecasted deaths included soldiers, airmen, sailors, civilians; **even young children armed with spears or sharpened bamboo javelins**. It was destined to be the goriest combat the civilized world had ever witnessed.



Operation Downfall was the proposed Allied blueprint for the invasion of the Japanese homeland nearing the end of WWII in the Pacific. Japan stood alone, stubbornly refusing to throw in the towel even after enormous destruction by Allied bombing. The Allied armada gathering for the storm included the United

States, England, the British Commonwealth, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and France. Unknown to the Allies, the Soviet Union (Russia) also had a plan to invade the major Japanese island of Hokkaido before the end of August, 1945. In reality, Soviet forces invaded the Kuril Islands on August 18, three days after Japan's unconditional surrender on August 15. However, the Japanese forces resisted the Soviet invasion fiercely and inflicted heavier losses on Soviets forces than they suffered themselves.

The D-Day Invasion of Normandy on June 6, 1944 was pale in comparison to the projected invasion of Japan. The invasion consisted of two major parts: Operation Olympic, the invasion of the major island of Kyushu on November 1, 1945, followed by Operation Coronet, the invasion of Honshu at the Kanto Plain south of Tokyo on March 1, 1946. Allied forces falling upon Tokyo would have been even larger than the Operation Olympic, with up to 40 divisions converging on the Japanese capital. (The Allied invasion of Europe at Normandy deployed only 12 divisions in the initial landings).

Even so, the opening landings at Kyushu would have been the largest naval armada ever assembled. It included 42 aircraft carriers, 24 battleships, and over 400 destroyers and destroyer escorts. The Japanese, however, battered and war weary, were nowhere near as weak as Allied estimates.

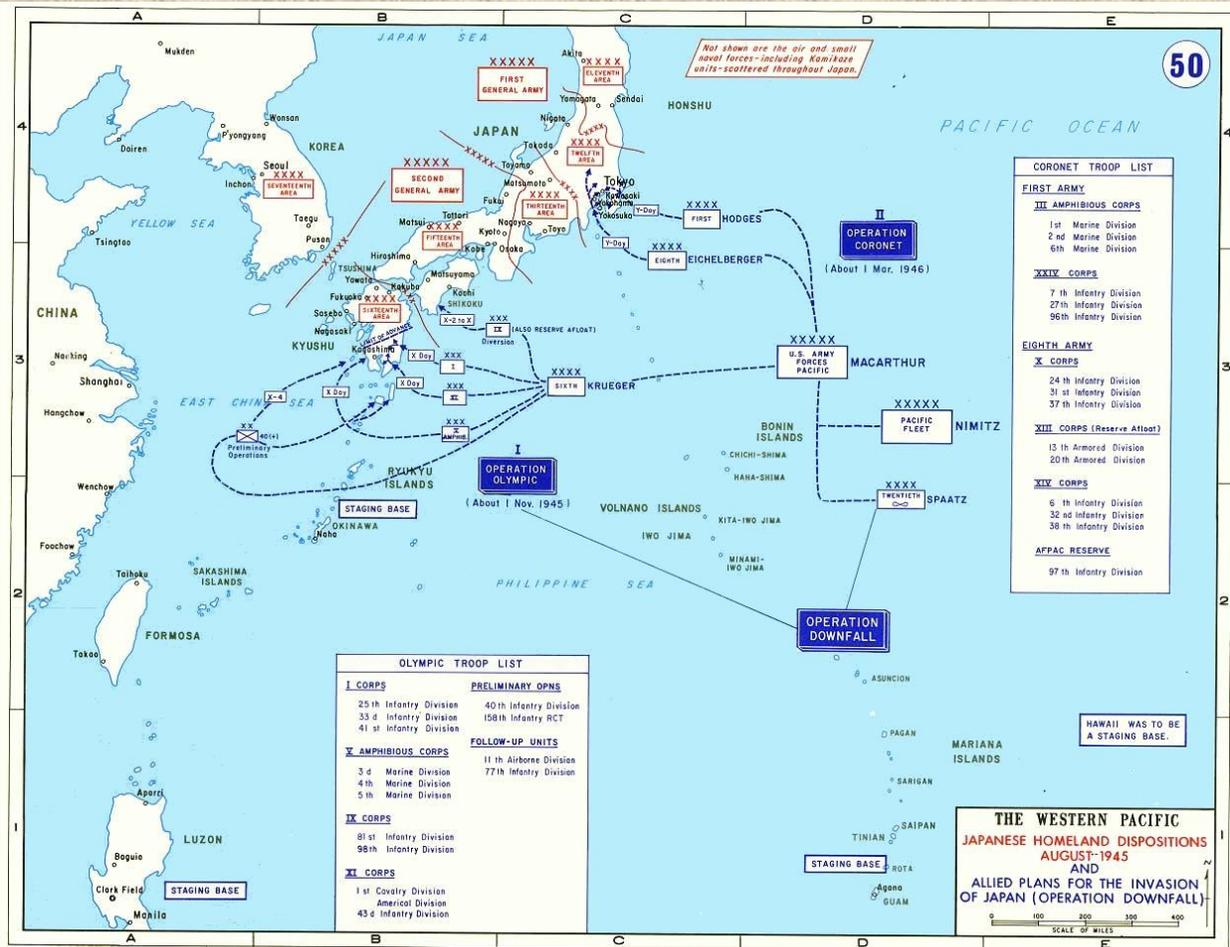
Japanese intelligence accurately predicted where the invasions would take place. Japanese intelligence also predicted the only

way to force an 'armistice' instead of 'unconditional surrender' was too make American and Allied casualties too high for the enemy to accept. The Japanese devised Operation Ketsugo, which committed the entire population to resist the invasion. Starting in June of 1945, Japanese propaganda called for "The Glorious Death of One Hundred Million." Japan's "Volunteer Fighting Corps" included all able-bodied men aged 15 to 60 and healthy women aged 17 to 40 (28 million souls) for support and later combat missions. The "Volunteer Fighting Corps" were to be armed with obsolete rifles and pistols, longbows, Molotov cocktails, knives, swords, wooden or bamboo spears, clubs and truncheons.

Allied intelligence initially estimated the Japanese could deploy about 3,000 aircraft to the final defense of their homeland. By the time the war ended, Japan had over 12,700 aircraft, more than half of them Kamikaze suicide planes.

Ground forces defending Kyushu numbered 350,000 according to Allied intelligence. By August of 1945, almost a half million Japanese ground forces were on hand to face the invasion. By the time the Japanese surrendered on August 15, over 735,000 Japanese soldiers were stationed in defensive positions on or in the vicinity of Kyushu. The vast majority of Japanese warships had been virtually destroyed during the war, yet they still had plans to deploy five aircraft carriers and four battleships (all damaged), plus 46 submarines, 23 destroyers, and two large cruisers. In addition, Japan had manufactured over 400 midget

submarines, 120 manned (suicide) torpedoes and over 2,400 suicide boats. A Fukuryu unit was developed; navy frogmen used as suicide bombers armed with contact-fuzed mines.



Chemical weapons had been used by the Japanese earlier in the war against the Chinese. By 1945 their ability to manufacture such weapons was severely hampered. America and her allies, however, were not hampered. Stockpiles of chemical weapons were stockpiled in the Marianas Island to be used against Japan and its population. When the plan was proposed to President Truman, he vetoed the utilization of chemical weapons against the Japanese people, but authorized, as a last resort, the use of

the weapons against crop production. A compound known as LN-8 was the herbicide chosen for possible eradication of crop production. The phenoxyacetic acids in LN-8 and another acid compound would later be used to create the noiseless killer in Vietnam called Agent Orange.

**The Bomb.** Atomic bombs were also considered for use against defending forces. At least seven were available for the invasion of Kyushu. American forces were advised not to enter an area destroyed by an atomic bomb for at least 48 hours. With little understood about nuclear fallout, the faulty advice would have caused radiation sickness and eventual death for thousands of Allied troops.

While this massive plan for death and destruction was in the planning stages, American and Allied inter-service squabbling became a problem due to pride and egos. The Navy wanted Admiral Chester Nimitz as the C-in-C (Commander in Chief for the overall invasion of Japan), the US Army wanted none other than General Douglas MacArthur as the C-in-C, while the Brits suggested Admiral Louis Mountbatten. The bickering became so serious that it threatened to wreck the planning. Dugout Doug, as MacArthur was known to the troops on Bataan and Corregidor at the start of the war, was finally chosen as C-in-C of all forces should the invasion embark.

To understand the depth of projected casualties, roughly a half million Purple Hearts (awarded to American soldiers wounded in combat) were ordered into production. Never used during WWII

due to cancellation of Operation Downfall, the massive production of Purple Hearts found utilization during the Korean War and the Vietnam War, yet by the turn of the century over 120,000 of the medals were still in stock. Combat troops in Afghanistan and Iraq have Purple Hearts left over from the pre-invasion of Japan for immediate use in the field.



Debate still rages over the use of the two atomic bombs used to end the war with Japan. It's a mute debate. In 1945, millions of American boys had set sail across the vastness of the Pacific en route for the Invasion of Japan. One of those young soldiers was Robert Ford, Jr., and this is his story.

**“Where were you born and raised, sir?”**

“I was born in Batesville, Arkansas on September 3, 1926.”

**“So you lived through the Great Depression?”**

“Yep, sure did.”

**“Were your folks farmers?”**

“No, my dad was a Chevrolet dealer. They divorced when I was seven or eight years old. My mother married again and he was a farmer.”

**“Did you live with your mother?”**

“Yes.”

**“Tell me a little bit about the Great Depression. How tough was it?”**

“Well, with my dad having a Chevrolet dealership we still had a good income coming in, we didn’t suffer like some people did. It was the general population that really suffered, it was hard to find work. Times were hard, but we made it through okay.”

**“Tell us about the day Pearl Harbor was bombed.”**

“I was still in high school. I didn’t graduate until 1944.”

**“But you remember Pearl Harbor?”**

“Oh, yes. The biggest part of it was believing something like this could happen. I mean, things like that didn’t come to a small town like Batesville, Arkansas.”

**“Did you know where Pearl Harbor was?”**

“Yes. And we soon came to the conclusion we were at war. I knew I’d be going to war, but I didn’t graduate until 1944.”

**“Were you drafted?”**

“Well, when a boy turned 18 he had to register for the draft. Within a few weeks, you were gone.”

**“You went into the Army, is that correct?”**

“Yes.”

**“Where did you go for basic training?”**

“Camp Wolters, Texas, for 17 weeks of infantry training.”

**NOTE: Camp Wolters was the largest infantry replacement training center in the United States during WWII. It also served as a German POW camp. Two of the war’s most well-known enlisted men underwent training at Camp Wolters - Audie Murphy and Eddie Slovak. Audie Murphy became one of the most decorated soldiers in WWII. He received every military combat award for his service, including French and Belgian awards for heroism. Murphy single-handedly held off an entire company of German soldiers for an hour at the Colmar Pocket in France, then led a brilliant counterattack while out of ammunition and suffering from a wound. He received the Medal of Honor, at 19 years of age. Eddie Slovik, however, went to France as a replacement and was convicted of desertion in November of 1944. On January 31, 1945, he became the first U.S. soldier since the American Civil War to be executed for desertion.**

Mr. Ford continued: “I was a young boy full of piss and vinegar and use to running in the hills of Arkansas to hunt and fish, so the Army wasn’t that tough on me. I made it alright, but some

of the boys couldn't take it at first. They had to learn to adjust to Army life."

**"Where did you go after basis training?"**

"After 17 weeks of basic training, the Army decided we needed six more weeks of advance training. So we were sent to Fort Meade, Maryland."

**"What type of advanced training?"**

"More techniques in jungle warfare, that's what we specialized in. Then, ironically, the Army sent us to Seattle, Washington to prepare to push the Japanese out of the Aleutian Islands. We were issued winter clothing then set sail for the Aleutians. A couple of days out to sea, they told us to toss our winter gear overboard...the Japanese had slipped out during the night and nobody knew it. Then they issued us tropical clothing and gear and we headed for the Marianas in the South Pacific."

**"What was your unit?"**

"We were all infantry replacements. My MOS was 745, I was a rifleman. The entire ship was infantry replacements. We were told this was going to be the bloodiest campaign of the war and we would most likely hit Kyushu, the southern-most island of Japan. They also told us to be prepared to kill kids because they would come at us with sharpened sticks and there would be a lot of casualties. We would probably be killed. That's where we were headed. Then they dropped those two atomic bombs and

they stopped us right there. I'll tell you, we were a happy bunch of boys."

**"How long were you on the ship?"**

"Twenty two days, zig-zagging across the Pacific. We stopped at Tinian then went to Guam. When we pulled into the harbor at Guam I saw the oddest thing I'd ever seen; a cargo ship with a torpedo hole in one side at the water line and another hole on the other side. The torpedo had gone through the entire ship without exploding."



**"So, exactly where were you when the bombs were dropped and the invasion was canceled?"**

"On Tinian. We stayed there for a short time then sailed to Saipan until we had enough points to come home. We were there several months. Ninety days after the war ended, 45

diehard Japanese soldiers and two officers came out of the jungle and surrendered to us. We'd watch movies and the Japanese still in the jungle would come up close to watch the movie. They didn't understand English but would laugh at the cartoons, then we could chase them down."

**"Briefly, what did you do after the war?"**

"I went to school on the G.I. Bill and learned to be a mechanic. Then I worked for a car agency for about ten years before going



into the auto repair business for myself. I ran a successful auto repair business for 35 years. I also ran a cattle farm. I started with 11 cows and one bull. In the following years, my herd was up to over 300 heads of cattle, including 13 sets of twin calves."

**"So, at 93 years of age, how's life treating you?"**

"Pretty good. I feel pretty good."

**"Robert, let me take a quick picture of you."**

"Do you want me to look intelligent or normal?"

**"Either one will be difficult, right?"**

“Absolutely. Oh, I forgot this part of my story. When we sailed into Guam, the USS Indianapolis was departing Guam at about the same time, so both ships must have crossed paths. I have always wondered, ‘what if’, what if that Japanese submarine had shadowed our troop ship instead of the Indianapolis. Had it done so, I wouldn’t be here to tell my story.”

**NOTE: The USS Indianapolis sailed to Guam after delivering the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima. While en route to Leyte Gulf to join the USS Idaho for the Invasion of Japan, she was torpedoed by Japanese submarine I-58. She sank in 12 minutes. Of the crew of 1,195, about 300 sailors went down with the ship while 890 men went into the water. Finally rescued four days later, exposure, dehydration, and sharks had cut the survivor count down to 316. The sinking of the USS Indianapolis is the highest loss of life, of a single ship, in the history of the U.S. Navy.**

