



Danger's Hour: The Story of the USS Bunker Hill and the Kamikaze Pilot Who Crippled Her

Maxwell Taylor Kennedy

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Band of Brothers meets Masters of the Air in this riveting history of the deadly kamikaze attack on the USS Bunker Hill in the final days of World War II---as told by an author with a unique historical vantage point.

In the closing months of World War II, Americans found themselves facing a new and terrifying weapon: kamikazes – the first men to use airplanes as suicide weapons. By the beginning of 1945, American pilots were shooting down Japanese planes more than ten to one. The Japanese had so few metals left that the military had begun using wooden coins and clay pots for hand grenades. For the first time in 800 years, Japan faced imminent invasion. As Germany faltered, the combined strength of every warring nation gathered at Japan's door. Desperate, Japan turned to its most idealistic young men – the best and brightest college students – and demanded of them the greatest sacrifice.

On the morning of May 11, 1945, days after the Nazi surrender, the USS "Bunker Hill" – a magnificent vessel that held thousands of crewmen and the most sophisticated naval technology available – was holding at the Pacific Theater, 70 miles off the coast of Okinawa.

At precisely 9:58 a.m., Kiyoshi Ogawa radioed in to his base at Kanoya, 350 miles from the Bunker Hill, "I found the enemy vessels." After eighteen months of training, Kiyoshi tucked a comrade's poem into his breast pocket and flew his Zero five hours across the Pacific. Now the young Japanese pilot had located his target and was on the verge of fulfilling his destiny. At 10:02.30 a.m., as he hovered above the "Bunker Hill," hidden in a mass of clouds, Kiyoshi spoke his last words: "Now, I am nose-diving into the ship."

The attack killed 393 Americans and was the worst suicide attack against America until September 11. Juxtaposing Kiyoshi's story with the stories of untold heroism of the men aboard the "Bunker Hill," Maxwell Taylor Kennedy details how American sailors and airmen worked together, risking their own lives to save their fellows and ultimately triumphing in their efforts to save their ship.

Drawing on years of research and firsthand interviews with both American and Japanese survivors, Maxwell Taylor Kennedy draws a gripping portrait of men bravely serving their countries in war and the advent of a terrifying new weapon, suicide bombing, that nearly halted the most powerful nation in the world.

Danger's Hour: The Story of the USS Bunker Hill and the Kamikaze Pilot Who Crippled Her Details

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From Reader Review Danger's Hour: The Story of the USS Bunker Hill and the Kamikaze Pilot Who Crippled Her for online ebook

Tad Deshler says

What an amazing and horrific story. I've always thought aircraft carriers were virtually indestructible, but clearly this vintage had some serious vulnerabilities. My great uncle was on the Bunker Hill during this attack, but sadly he passed away recently and I never heard the story of his experiences on that ship.

William says

Even if the author often slips into moments where he jumps between paragraphs without any transition, the amount of research he put into this work is obvious, and the narrative never seems to lag. Most importantly, the author provides a glimpse into that time that few other historical narratives offer: Kennedy tells us exactly how the combatants from both sides lived and often died. A treasure of interesting detail that still does not hide the bigger story. And give the author much credit for his respectful and careful look into psyche of the suicide bombers (the kamikaze pilots).

Matt says

I enjoyed this read. Author does a solid job setting the period and progress of the war in the Pacific. Nice buildup with the history of the Carriers and what life was like for the men involved. Good idea of the mentality of the Japanese and the mentality behind the Kamikaze pilots.

Very good read overall whether you are a WWII expert or a dabbling novice. good level of detail.

Solid 4 *s

Paul Pessolano says

“Danger’s Hour, The Story of the USS Bunker Hill and the Kamikaze Pilot Who Crippled Her”, by Maxwell Taylor Kennedy, published by Simon & Schuster.

Category – History/World War II Publication Date – November 11, 2008

The Japanese Kamikaze attack on the USS Bunker Hill was the worse suicide attack against America until September 11.

“Danger’s Hour” is really three books in one. The first part of the book gives a general outline of the causes of World War II and the emergence of the Aircraft Carrier and Naval Air Power. The second part of the book gives the reader a look at the lives of both the American and Japanese Aviators. It tries to bring an understanding as to how these young Japanese Kamikaze Pilots (most were between the ages of nineteen and

twenty-five) willingly aimed their planes at American Naval vessels. It might surprise the reader that many of these young men did not agree with this tactic but carried it out due to a profound duty to the Emperor, Country, and Family.

The third part of the book (and most graphic) is the two devastating kamikaze hits on the carrier USS Bunker Hill. The attack killed 393 Naval Personnel and hundreds wounded. Some of these wounded were burned severely and carried the scars throughout their lives. It is a testimony to the caliber of these men who fought raging fires amidst exploding ammunition, and burning fuel that they were able to keep the Bunker Hill afloat.

A fantastic story for those interested in military history, and for those who served and are serving in the armed forces. The beginning of the book may be a rough read for those not interested in military history but the final chapters are full of unbelievable action and courage.

'Aussie Rick' says

This book is an excellent account of the USS Bunker Hill and the Japanese pilot who nearly destroyed her during the final months of the fighting in the Pacific during WW2. The account of the men who sailed and died on the USS Bunker Hill and the story of the brave Kamikaze pilot who dove his plane into the ship flowed effortlessly and it was hard to put the book down. For anyone who would like to learn more about why these men gave their lives during WW2, from both perspectives, this would be a good book to read and understand.

Frances says

Not for the faint of heart. As a burn survivor, the descriptions of the victims, their pain, the lack of knowledge available, before The Vietnam War, of how to deal with burns, resulted in several nights of sleeplessness. I was appalled by the methods used on the young Japanese college students to gradually deprive them "of self" and get them to the position of "He was volunteered for it" (p.184). The loss of Japan's youngest and brightest certainly has given me a new perspective on the current suicide terrorist. How interesting that the Kamikaze are never referred to as terrorist, but the same behavior is now defined as such. I am going to lay off such graphic books until I recover from this one.

Andy says

This book is an extremely readable account of Japan's mounting desperation during the final years of WWII, leading eventually to the formation of the Tokkotai (Kamikaze) units and, on May 11th, 1945, the severe wounding of the U.S. aircraft carrier Bunker Hill by two young Japanese pilots. Kennedy has done a great job of reconstructing the personal experiences of the Japanese pilots and several of the men aboard the Bunker Hill, giving a fairly even-handed account of life on both sides of the conflict.

The author's writing does tend towards hyperbole, particularly when describing acts of bravery and sacrifice (and the volume of footnotes is absolutely obnoxious) but he does a good job of navigating the treacherous

waters of modern WWII analysis; Kennedy honors the bravery of the Japanese pilots while acknowledging the futility of their actions in shaping the final outcome of the war, and he condemns the Japanese commanders who ordered these young men to their deaths. Simultaneously, Kennedy commends the Bunker Hill commander who, after the ship becomes an inferno, orders his men in the boiler and engine rooms to remain at their posts, leading to slow and agonizing deaths. Perhaps more lives were saved than lost by this action, but from the evidence presented, I had to wonder (Carrie Bradshaw moment here), were the Japanese the only side too callous in sacrificing young lives?

Eric_W says

What to make of this book. Not being a professional historian working in this area but with some interest in things nautical, I have no in-depth knowledge of the factual nature of this book. Nevertheless, there were some little things that struck me: the Langley (CV-1) described as having begin its life as a light cruiser (it was a collier - note that a later USS Langley CV-17 was indeed originally ordered as a light cruiser), "heads" being called bathrooms, the "rising sun" insignia described as being on the tail of a plane (all pictures I've seen had the red ball on the fuselage and the wings,) and bombs are not usually attached to the landing gear.

So I poked around in some reviews and leaving aside the inevitable antagonism toward the Kennedys -- why can't we see people as individuals instead of part of the inevitably hated tribe -- there were several naval types who railed at the naval errors which they reported filled the book. (One wag reported that reading the first half of the book was like "walking around with a pebble in your shoe" - what a great line.)

On the other hand, the goal of the author was to celebrate the ordinary seaman and aviator (ironically both Admirals Mitscher and Burke were aboard the *Bunker Hill*); to examine why they performed such heroic actions under impossible conditions; why Japanese often flew their planes willingly into American ships; and to examine whatever cultural differences might exist between the two countries that might explain the differences.

A basic tenet of western culture is that suicide is immoral, yet despite our celebration of the individual as opposed to the Japanese adoration for those who subsume themselves for the group, we, too, honor those who "give their lives for their country." That implies a willful act, one that could be considered suicide and it's certainly done for the "greater good." Charging the machine gun to certain death gets the country's highest honor. If these values were not inculcated into us from birth, I suppose the military could not exist.

The Bunker Hill carried a new kind of bomb. Developed by Dr. Louis Fieser (who later invented antimalarial drugs and proved that cigarettes caused lung cancer,) this cluster bomb contained several pipes each packed with a mixture of sodium and gasoline which formed a kind of jelly that once burning was impossible to extinguish. Called the M-69 it was targeted against people. Since most Japanese *homes* were built of wood, the incendiaries created a firestorm. In a change of tactics, General Curtis LeMay ordered his B-29s to begin nighttime bombing of cities rather than daylight targeted bombing of industrial targets. The first test, a single raid, was horrifically successful destroying 25,000 homes in Tokyo. A larger raid, totally unopposed by Japanese fighters which by March of 1945 had been virtually destroyed, created a firestorm rivaling anything in Europe and killed more than 100,000 and destroyed sixteen square miles. Many died by trying to protect themselves in the city's canals but the water began to boil from the heat and they were boiled alive. More people than died at Hiroshima. Could this devastation provided part of the motivation for the Kamikazes, as a desperate act of revenge or to prevent further strikes?

By 1944, the shortage of experienced pilots and airplanes forced the Japanese military into adopting a last resort tactic as the only way to successfully attack U.S. fast attack carriers which were devastating their navy shore-based aircraft. The only solution left to them -- perhaps the only tactic for any desperate group whose righteous survival is threatened with destruction (Jim Jones, anyone?) was the suicide attack. That lesson seems to have been lost on the U.S. after 9/11: it represented a sign of Al Qaeda's weakness rather than strength.

So the question I continue to ask myself, and sought from this book, is just why we are so willing to give our lives for something as ephemeral and inconsequential as a political entity we call a country and/or a political system which many of us could not define except in mythological terms. My nephew and I once had a most interesting debate over lunch in Wurzburg where he teaches ethics and philosophy about a statement made by a German(!) professor I had in college who said that "no political system was worth one life." If one accepts that one might be, just where does one draw the line: a thousand, ten thousand, a million? So my expectations for the book had less to do with whether the author was a Kennedy or whether the original Langley started as a collier, or where the Japanese planes painted their insignia. It was why people do what they do in times of extreme stress and how we define heroes. I still cannot answer that question to my satisfaction.

The first part of the book is rather disjointed and a disorganized aggregation of facts and background (albeit very interesting) in the development of Japanese adoption of suicide as a tactic. Suicidal behavior has always been a part of combat. Indeed, the attacks by U.S. slow torpedo bombers at Midway were suicidal if you look at the nearly 100% casualty rates and most pilots realized it. On the other hand, despite the realization on the part of the Japanese military of the need for some independent thinking, the general culture of Japan celebrated the community and a slavish devotion to the Emperor and society. (The recent Texas GOP platform has a statement with regard to critical thinking that would have made them fit right in with that kind of cultural mindset.*)

The book has an extraordinary bibliography and Kennedy has clearly done his homework. The rather obvious mistakes I noted above should probably be chalked up to bad editing at Simon & Schuster and not seen as a reflection on the entire book which is extremely interesting.

**From the Texas GOP platform: We oppose the teaching of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (values clarification), critical thinking skills and similar programs that are simply a relabeling of Outcome-Based Education (OBE) (mastery learning) which focus on behavior modification and have the purpose of challenging the student's fixed beliefs and undermining parental authority.*

Matt says

This was a good book. Not great, but it kept my interest. I really enjoyed the background on how the kamikaze program came about and the underpinnings of it the Japanese culture, but the book took too long to get to the event and spent too little time detailing it. There were many parts that felt repetitive.

Wayne Patrick says

A heart wrenching book!

One of the most thorough books in giving 'visualization' to war in the Pacific! A reminder of how war affects both sides of war.

Grant Kisling says

You are either going to enjoy or hate this author's writing style as he can jump topics fairly dramatically between different paragraphs. I found this to be a great way to convey related information in a very engaging manner.

This book is engaging, well researched, and moving.

A great read for history fans.

Shara Clark says

Pretty good book. Very descriptive of the accounts of the personnel involved. At times it was hard to read from a humanitarian point of view. I choose to read this because my grandfather was onboard as a sailor at the time of the kamikaze impacts. I was too young to talk to him about it before he passed, so I felt reading it would somehow "reconnect" me to him.

Jess says

I bought this book because my grandfather served on the USS Bunker Hill. He was a part of and witnessed a great deal of the events described in this book. The writing isn't fantastic but he tells the story and I have a great deal of respect for those in the Armed Forces and anyone willing to tell their story should be commended for their work.

Bruce Fogerty says

The author describes this book as a "micro history" and it is that exactly.

I selected this book on the strength of briefly meeting the author. His interest in history tingled my interest, and here I am.

The narrative traces the personal histories of the crew of the USS Bunker Hill, the Kamikaze pilots, and the ship itself. It also places the events in the context of world history, medical and naval engineering science, and the overall direction of US and Japanese strategy and tactics.

Worth the read if you like WW2 history.

The only mild shortfall of this work is it could have been edited better. I think a few sections were a bit

repetitive. Other than that, no worries.

Janice Russell says

I don't usually read non-fiction about World War II, but this one was of special interest because my father served on the Bunker Hill. His cousin, Bob Stock, was also on the carrier and against all rules, kept a journal. I have a copy and I followed Kennedy's account with what Bob wrote.
