

# The Palauan *Kirikomi-tai* Suicide Bombers of World War II and the Siege of Babeldaob: A Reconsideration

Stephen C. Murray

## Abstract

Since World War II, Palauans have shared stories concerning their 80 young men whom the Japanese Army trained in 1944-45 to participate in suicide guerrilla raids against American forces in Palau. During interviews in the 1980s, the Japanese officers involved in this *Kirikomi-tai* program – including the legendary Capt. Morikawa – insisted that the Palauans were wrong to believe they were being prepared for actual military operations. Rather, their training had other purposes, such as reducing civilian unrest. Using fresh interviews with Palauans, research among both Japanese and U.S. sources, and close analysis of the officers' testimonies, this paper disputes the officers' statements. The Japanese Army most definitely trained Palauan youths for hazardous seaborne missions against U.S. forces, missions so dangerous that they were suicidal. The paper also discusses the use of Palauan oral histories, and employs the *Kirikomi-tai* episode to open a wider examination of conditions on Palau's Babeldaob Island during the year it was besieged by the United States. The Japanese Army's policy against surrender led not only to the readiness to sacrifice the Palauan youths, but to mass starvation and levels of violence and death not previously documented. Among the 50,000 civilians and Japanese military personnel trapped on Babeldaob, probably 10,000 died. At least 80% of these deaths were caused by famine and disease.

**Keywords:** Palau, *Kirikomi-tai*, Morikawa, World War II, starvation

## Introduction

World War II swept through the islands of Japanese-held Micronesia with suddenness and ferocity. In just the first nine months of 1944, the United States assaulted the islands of Kwajalein, Majuro, and Enewetak in the Marshall Islands, Saipan, Tinian, and Guam in the Marianas, then ended with Peleliu and Angaur in Palau, and Ulithi near Yap. This island-hopping strategy skipped over 15 other Japanese military bastions in Micronesia. These 15 were not invaded, but for the remainder of the war they were placed under siege, many through regular aerial bombardment. Tactically, the distinguishing characteristic of a siege is the deliberate use of starvation and deprivation as the primary weapons against the foe. In the period between early 1944 and the end of hostilities in August 1945, all these besieged outposts experienced severe malnutrition and rampant disease, which caused many thousands of deaths among military personnel and the large numbers of Asian and Micronesian civilians trapped with them.<sup>1</sup>

The most unusual of the sieges developed in Palau (Fig. 1). The commander of its defensive forces, Lieutenant General Sadae Inoue of the Imperial Japanese Army (IJA), had placed 10,500 troops on Peleliu, where Palau's primary airfield lay, and 1,500 on Angaur. But he was convinced that the United States would invade the largest island in the archipelago, Babeldaob. At 130 sq. miles, it is the second largest island in Micronesia after Guam, and, with its large land mass and control over the nearby Malakal Harbor of Koror Island, it was the most valuable military prize in Palau after Peleliu. To defend Babeldaob, Inoue retained 30,000 soldiers and sailors, three-fourths of his total command. Except for about 150 who remained on Angaur, all other Palauans, including those from Peleliu and Koror, the capital of the Nan'yō colony, had been relocated to Babeldaob in the months following a massive raid by American

aircraft carriers in late March 1944. Along with these estimated 5,500 Palauans were trapped about 150 other Micronesians brought in for labor, and perhaps 14,000 Japanese and other Asian civilians. These latter consisted of Nan'yō immigrants from the 1930s and early 40s, mostly Okinawans and Japanese, who had been unable to flee Palau; and slave laborers, mostly Koreans, brought to Palau against their will by the Army and Navy both before and during the war. Altogether, in September 1944 the island held 50,000 persons.

By June of that year American submarines had effectively severed the shipping lanes between Palau and Japan. Following the loss of the Marianas that summer, Tokyo abandoned its forces in Palau, and made only sporadic, small-scale attempts to supply or reinforce them and evacuate additional civilians (Cook & Cook, 1992, pp. 293-300). When the United States invaded the islands of Peleliu and Angaur in mid-September 1944, the Americans gained control of the sea and air around all Palau. U.S. ships anchored in Palauan waters at Kossol Passage, and cruised outside the barrier reef. U.S. Marine Air Groups flew patrols several times a day from the Peleliu airfield. Bombing and strafing indiscriminately, they treated all Babeldaob as a free-fire zone occupied only by enemies – although throughout the one full year until Japan capitulated, they also dropped leaflets urging the troops to surrender. The Japanese armed forces responded in their own way to the exigencies of the siege. The Army defenders had brought food rations sufficient to feed themselves and the laborers for about a year following their arrival in April 1944. But from the outset the civilian immigrants and Palauans were left to fend for themselves. As the siege lengthened and military food stocks ran low, it appears that first the slave laborers were cut off from rations, then the lower ranking soldiers. Palauans had the advantage of knowing how to farm and fish, although these activities could only be done safely at night. As the situation grew more desperate by the spring of 1945, increasing numbers of soldiers abused Palauans and seized the food they tried to produce for their families. Relations between the natives and the armed marauding soldiers became increasingly strained, for which the Palauans complained bitterly to the Army.<sup>2</sup>

Into this breach stepped a young Japanese Army officer who became a legend throughout Palau. Twenty-four-year-old Capt. Yoshiyasu Morikawa of the IJA received the assignment to increase food production by Palauans, while reducing the dangerous conflicts between them and the starving Japanese soldiers. To accomplish this he formed the *Morikawa Butai*, the Morikawa Corps, which was largely his one-man effort to provide liaison between Palauans and the Army. Tramping the hills of Babeldaob dressed in a spotless Army uniform, Morikawa defied the American planes, treated Palauans with respect and courtesy, encouraged their gardening, and tried to soothe their many complaints against bullying soldiers. Colorful stories about him sprang up among the Palauans, stories that persist to this day: that he was actually a spy for the U.S.; that just before the war ended he prevented the Army from massacring all, or most, Palauans inside a cave; and that he began a program of training and indoctrination of male Palauan youths called *Giyu-Kirikomi-tai*, the Patriotic Shock Corps, whose purpose was to prepare them to join in Japanese guerrilla attacks against American forces in and around Peleliu.



Figure 1. The Palau Islands

Palauans familiar with the *Kirikomi-tai* stories have believed for almost 70 years what the 80 young Palauan men who participated in the program insisted on: that they were forcibly inducted into the *Kirikomi-tai* by the Imperial Army and trained to take part in combat missions against U.S. forces. These missions would have been so dangerous that even six decades later a

Palauan participant described them as “suicide runs.” But sharp disagreement exists between Palauans and some IJA personnel over whether combat operations were the true goal of the Shock Corps. Four decades after the war, key Army officers, including Morikawa, asserted that the program had other, more peaceful, objectives. Did the Palauans misunderstand the purpose of their training? Wakako Higuchi, a researcher who interviewed Palauan participants, Capt. Morikawa, and another Japanese officer involved in the program, concluded the Palauans were mistaken in their belief that the *Kirikomi-tai* youths were to be used in military operations (1991).

It was a service to Palauan history that Higuchi and her colleagues had taken dozens of testimonies from Palauans concerning the war years, and that in Japan, 40 years after the war, she had traced and interviewed Morikawa and the other officer, Second Lt. Ichiro Hachisu (Ballendorf et al., 1986; Higuchi, 1987). Her 1991 paper and Palauan memories are in agreement that 80 Palauan youths were inducted into two drafts of *Kirikomi-tai* training, 40 of them in November 1944 and another 40 in May 1945; that the first program lasted six months (the second was cut short by Japan’s surrender); and that there were two *Kirikomi-tai* training camps, one in eastern Babeldaob and one on the west side. As the only published work on the subject, Higuchi’s paper was accepted by many as authoritative. The history text used in Palau’s schools (Rechebe & McPhetres, 1997, pp. 196-97), Fr. Fran Hezel (1995, pp. 238-39) and Karen Nero (1989, p.120) all state that the suicide commandos never saw action. Karen Walter (1993, p. 168) demurred on the program’s goal, saying it was “reasonable” to assume the trainees were intended for combat. Similarly, the present author’s earlier work sides with Palauan testimonies stating that they were to be used in strikes against the Americans (Murray, 2006, pp. 249-52).

However, Palauan memories uniformly and consistently diverge from Higuchi’s 1991 paper on the central question, the objectives of the program. The causes of this disagreement are several. After collecting testimonies from both the Palauan participants and the IJA officers, Higuchi sides with the versions from the officers but doesn’t explain why. All commentators had assumed that no organized raids were actually launched in Palau, but it turns out that the IJA carried out multiple *Kirikomi-tai* missions in Palau and throughout the Western Pacific. Indeed, one Palauan told Higuchi that he had participated in three such missions. The Palauan youths possessed uniquely valuable skills that the IJA needed for its operations against the Americans, which provides the most plausible alternative to the different reasons the officers gave for the program’s existence. Palauans have maintained and shared their oral histories on these subjects since the end of the war. Publications by outsiders were treated as alternative versions, but in keeping with Palauan oral traditions, were not publicly disputed.

Using recent research and a careful review of the previous evidence, this paper re-examines the issue and reaches the conclusion that the Palauan youths were most definitely trained to take part in guerrilla raids against the American forces in Palau, raids so hazardous as to be suicidal. The two IJA officers, deeply implicated in what would have been war crimes had Palauan forced conscripts died in raids, would have been anxious to deny such intent. They deliberately obscured the program’s true purpose and their roles within it, knowing, when they spoke 40 years after the war, the truth would bring them condemnation.

The *Kirikomi-tai* story itself – dramatic, filled with danger, deeply felt by the Palauans who participated, and by their families – needs to have its contradictory versions resolved. That is the first goal of this paper, to untangle the complex evidence that comes from three different societies with three different perspectives on the Pacific War. The Palauan oral tradition provides the history accepted by almost all Palauans: the youths were trained for suicide missions. The

Japanese version that Higuchi obtained, based on personal testimonies of two officers who were involved in the program, tries to refute the opinions of the Palauans. Other Japanese sources, however, presented in this paper for the first time, support the Palauan view, as does a critical examination of the officers' testimonies. In addition, newly-found American materials match the previously overlooked Japanese evidence: both make clear that multiple *Kirikomi-tai* raids did occur in Palau. These new sources do not shed direct light on the question of how many Palauans actually participated in these raids. One Palauan is on record as saying he went on three of them. This paper will show, however, that events during 1944-45 transpired in such a way that just one attack definitely occurred after Palauans completed their training. This spared the young men from the dangers for which the Japanese command had prepared them.

A second goal of the paper is to examine the *Kirikomi-tai* episode for what it can reveal concerning the transmission of history through different means – particularly oral history (both indigenous and foreign), but also in official written histories, informal accounts, photographs, etc. – and how that transmission may result in contradictory versions of events or the dropping out of vital portions of the story. This can occur because some speakers seek to conceal information, later generations fail to pursue the subject while key participants remain alive, or because historical sources get overlooked or are in languages that few scholars of the subject have mastered. All these apply to the *Kirikomi-tai* episode. It reminds us that the histories indigenous peoples pass down concerning themselves must be treated with understanding on their terms, which includes having an ear for the distinctions the people make among different types of stories. Palauan oral histories treat the tales about possible genocide and Morikawa as a spy differently from the far better-grounded recollections concerning precisely what occurred in the Shock Corps training camps. But most striking is the extent to which the historical records of both the Japanese and the Americans support the Palauan oral accounts concerning the intentions of the *Kirikomi-tai* operation.

The paper's third goal is to use insights and research relevant to the *Kirikomi-tai* story to open up a much broader reconsideration of the terror, suffering, and privation endured by the 50,000 persons trapped on Babeldaob during the siege of 1944-45. Previous historical accounts (note 2) were based on interviews with Palauans, and focused on their personal experiences and knowledge. The accounts described this period as one of persistent but not life-threatening hunger, with isolated cases of abuse against Palauans by Army troops. The first work to raise the subject of possible deaths during the siege and attempt a systematic accounting was Murray (2006, Appendix). The present paper, however, contains new and more complete evidence showing that almost 5,100 military men, possibly 4,750 Japanese and other Asian civilians, and 200 Palauans – over 10,000 persons in total – perished on Babeldaob during this time. (See note 3 for details on how these figures are derived, and for discussion of the scale of similar deaths among the other 14 bypassed outposts.) In the 12 months following the U.S. invasions, no matter how wretched the situation became on the island, General Inoue steadfastly refused to surrender to the Americans any of the 20,000 civilians under his power, or his 30,000 combat personnel. He and his staff officers proved unwilling to equitably distribute the imported stocks of food, and unable to effectively organize the populations under their control to produce adequate food from Babeldaob's farmlands and lagoons. As a result, discipline and order among the soldiers collapsed and mass starvation set in, weakening and then killing both civilians and military alike. Contrary to our previous awareness, then, Babeldaob in 1944-45 would have been a cauldron of suffering, desperate competition for food, and violent deaths – deaths that were not natural, that were caused solely by the state of war that outsiders had brought to Palau.

The relentless American air patrols definitely contributed to the disaster, for their aerial terror threatened the lives of anyone, Palauan or Asian, who dared attempt to gather, farm, or fish during daylight hours. Bombing, strafing, and infrequent naval shelling by the U.S. were directly responsible for nearly one-quarter of the deaths among the Japanese military. The other deaths, however, were caused by famine and disease. The Americans should have reduced their air campaign. The Japanese forces on Babeldaob posed no serious threat to American operations within Palau, and none at all to their operations throughout the Western Pacific. But General Inoue refused to accept the reality of his situation and surrender the helpless 50,000 persons under his authority. His refusal condemned thousands of men, women, and children to untimely and needless deaths, and eventually threatened the survival of the Palauans as a distinct society.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Giyu-Kirikomi-tai: Patriotic Youth Camp or Guerrilla Training Ground?***

In October 1986, Capt. Yoshiyasu Morikawa of the IJA told interviewer Wakako Higuchi that the Japanese military on Babeldaob feared “civilian unrest” and desertions to offshore U.S. ships by Palauans and other Micronesians. To counter these he recommended the idea of the *Kirikomi-tai* to General Inoue’s headquarters as a means of providing “spiritual control of young, male Palauans.” Higuchi reports (1991, pp. 152-54) that a total of 80 Palauan men, between ages 18 and 27, were inducted as conscripts into the Corps in four separate groups, two in November 1944 and two in May 1945. They received six months of “spiritual and technical combat training.” She quotes Lt. Ichiro Hachisu, the organizer of the *Kirikomi-tai* program and one of its instructors (interviewed the same month), as saying that the objective of the program was to teach “rigid discipline, Japanese manner, and genuine courage culled from experience.” He told Higuchi (1987, pp. 163-65) that the Palauans were taught “obedience, morality, pride and other spiritual characteristics important to being human.”<sup>4</sup> The program included the Imperial Instructions for Military Personnel, though he allows that he didn’t demand too much of the Palauan youths since he recognized “that we were living on different levels.”<sup>5</sup> Importantly, both Morikawa and Hachisu contended in their remarks to her, Higuchi writes, that the Japanese command “did not envision Palauans as an actual fighting force.” In her 1991 paper,<sup>6</sup> Higuchi accepts the statements of these officers as truthful. She says that although interviews with “all the surviving Palauan members of the *Kirikomi-tai*” in 1984-85 revealed that they were still certain that their mission was to counterattack U.S. troops, in reality “this was not the case.” That is, she asserts, throughout the entire postwar period Palauan understandings about the Shock Corps have been wrong. Their stories were merely one of their imaginative myths involving the charismatic Capt. Morikawa.

In 1985 there would have been at least 60 to 65 of the Palauan participants still alive, aged 58 to 67. The record of interviews with them (Ballendorf et al., 1986) does not demonstrate that the researchers spoke with all these men. But whatever the number they talked with – it appears to be closer to 12-15 actual participants – Higuchi reports these men uniformly believed their mission was to counterattack U.S. forces on Peleliu. She dismisses the testimonies of these Palauans in favor of the versions offered by the two Japanese officers, but offers no substantive reasons why her readers and history should favor their statements over those of the Islanders. For decades, however, those who inquired of the Palauan survivors or their families have heard consistent descriptions of the training and of its purposes as explained to the Palauans by their Japanese instructors. What the Islanders themselves emphasize are not the program’s spiritual lessons, but its military components. They relate how during six months of boot-camp-like

activity, they were taught to make gasoline bombs or to use other forms of explosives in order to make high-risk, “suicide” assaults against American forces in Palau.<sup>7</sup>

Many interviews from the mid-1980s suggest the trainees were told that Peleliu was their target. However, three Palauans interviewed by the author spoke of other plans as well – for waterborne attacks against U.S. naval ships. Daiziro Nakamura, a three-term Senator for the Republic of Palau who also served as the nation’s ambassador to Japan, described how his father, a Japanese immigrant shipwright to Palau named Zenhitsi Nakamura, made wooden craft called *sabane* for the Army on Babeldaob. They were designed, he says, to carry the *Kirikomi-tai* forces in raids against American vessels. Spesungel Ichiro Dingilius, of Ngesias village on Peleliu Island, was inducted into the second draft of the *Kirikomi-tai* program in Keyukl (western Babeldaob) in what he recalls as April or May 1945. “We were supposed to attack U.S. ships, take explosives to the ships in a canoe,” he told me in the first of three interviews in which we discussed the subject. They called the boat itself *kirikomi-tai* and retained this name after the war. It was bigger than a canoe and had to be paddled. “We didn’t have explosives like a bomb, so we had to use bottles filled with gasoline.”

Like Spesungel Ichiro, Matichau Ilemelong of Ngerkeyukl village, Peleliu, was forced into the second draft, which began in May 1945. He described in two different interviews how there were many Palauans trained on both Despedall (eastern Babeldaob) and Keyukl. He recalls learning to handle explosives for the mission. “We were to bomb ships in Ngerechong channel, inside the lagoon,” he said. Two or three Palauans would man a small canoe carrying a bomb to be attached to a ship with magnets. The bomb was a canister roughly the size of a one-gallon paint can. Matichau continued, “We knew we’d be killed; these were to be suicide runs.” Both men affirm that the war ended before their group graduated, so they never launched an actual attack. (The U.S. used the area that Matichau speaks of, called Shonian (or Schonian) Harbor on Western charts and maps, as an anchorage for smaller-sized craft that sought to prevent infiltration of Japanese troops down from Babeldaob and Koror. On the Fig. 1 map it lies about five miles northeast of the small island north of Peleliu, Ngercheu. The Fig. 2 map shows the Palauan name for the harbor as Sebeseb, although Dan Bailey, reliable on Palauan place names, calls it Oiobetabel Harbor (1991, p. 9). The channel through the reef running just north of Ngerechong Island is Toachel ra Denges, Denges Passage.)

In an interview with Higuchi (Ballendorf et al., 1986, pp. 297-301), Timarong Adelbert of Ngiwal village on Babeldaob describes being trained in the first draft with these same weapons, gasoline bombs and magnet bombs intended for U.S. ships near Peleliu. Timarong also quotes Lt. Hachisu instructing them that if they were injured and unable to move they should commit suicide. He goes on to say that, although originally the *Kirikomi-tai*’s role was to counterattack Peleliu, no date was ever set to do so. In fact, as we shall see, from at least December 1944 the anchored ships in Shonian Harbor were the preferred targets. Another researcher of the war in Palau, Karen Walter, cites testimony from Jonas Olkeriil, who told Higuchi (Ballendorf et al., 1986, pp. 227-31) that the youths’ physical training included swimming while carrying weapons, and that they were “taught suicide attacks – how ‘to kill the enemy using body bombs.” (Walter picks up the misspelling of the man’s name from Ballendorf et al. as “Olkeliil.”) Walter concludes, “Given that Japanese troops *did* land on Peleliu and that there was a continuing infiltration of soldiers into the small islands between Peleliu and Koror, the Palauans’ belief that they were to be used as invasion troops is reasonable” (1993, p. 168).

### ***Kirikomi-tai* Operations in Palau and the Western Pacific**

*Kirikomi-tai* was not an idiosyncratic contrivance created by General Inoue's headquarters staff. By late 1944, suicide assaults against American ships anchored offshore had become a widespread tactic in Japan's plans for defense of the Western Pacific and the homeland. Hayashi and Coox (1959, pp. 116, 118, 121) write that the Japanese Army's tactics included "ramming [suicide ship] attacks against troopships staging offshore [at anchor]". As the invasion of the Philippines neared in the fall of 1944, "Many Naval Raiding Squadrons (assault vessels for ramming)" were attached to armies in the Philippines, Formosa, and Okinawa (brackets and parentheses in the original). Gudmundsson (2001, p. 627) describes one-man suicide motor boats at Okinawa and "entirely muscle-powered human bombs – swimmers trained to attack small craft." Richard Frank describes how, to defend the home islands, the Japanese Navy and Army developed suicide boats armed with explosives, and *kaiten*, torpedoes using human pilots (1999, pp. 159, 179, 182-84, 206; for a detailed discussion of suicide boats see also Warner & Warner, 1982, pp. 161-66, 217ff., and 290).<sup>8</sup>

The testimonies of the two Japanese officers, and Higuchi's discussion of the Shock Corps, make no mention of actual attacks taking place. Statements by Palauans of the second *Kirikomi-tai* draft, whose training began in May 1945 but was cut short by the surrender on 15 August, also leave the impression that no *Kirikomi-tai* assaults actually occurred within Palau. But of the 15 bypassed Japanese outposts in Micronesia, Inoue's was unique in being close enough to U.S. forces to allow guerrilla strikes against them, and in being able to reach the enemy through protected waters navigable by small craft.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 2. Southern Rock Islands (Chelbacheb) showing Ngererechong Island and Denges Passage (bottom), Sebeseb (Shonian Harbor) to west, and Mecherechar Island to north. Courtesy University of Texas Libraries.

Both Japanese and American sources attest that General Inoue managed to launch at least seven *Kirikomi-tai* raids, the majority of them against American ships that were anchored in Shonian Harbor, precisely the waters that Palauan *Kirikomi-tai* participants speak of. Six raids are identified and dated by two Japanese sources. Raids are also documented by four U.S. sources.

The official Japanese government history of the war, known as the *Senshi Sōsho* (“War History Series”), confirms that *Kirikomi-tai* attacks occurred in Palau. Vol. 13 of this history covers the war in Peleliu, Angaur, Babeldaob, and Iwo Jima from the Japanese side (Bōeichō Bōei Kenshūjō Senshishitsu (BBKS). Self-Defense Agency, 1968). It documents that attacks occurred against U.S. ships in Shonian Harbor and against the adjacent island of Ngererechong, where the Americans had built a small airstrip and posted forces (Fig. 2). Forty-five years after its publication, like its 105 companion volumes, this work still awaits translation into English.

Volume 13's Attachment table 2 cites three attacks, each labeled as "Garegong [Ngerechong] Island *Kirikomi*" which occurred on 05 and 24 Dec 1944 and 16 June 1945. The text on pp. 229-231 describes more attacks, for a total of five. It says that on 18 November, 05 and 24 December 1944 the Special Attack Force for Operations at Sea attacked American military forces around "Garegong Island." The next raid came in early March 1945, also in the Ngerechong area, from which the Japanese stated they sank one "submarine chaser" and seriously damaged four others, and left some soldiers wounded. Without providing actual numbers, dates, or details, the book says more attacks occurred after 01 April 1945. During the final listed operation, on 16 June of that year, Japanese raiders say they landed on Ngerechong and destroyed 11 barracks and two artillery pieces, one tractor and two amphibious tanks, leaving 210 Americans killed or wounded. All 11 "sea attackers" and one Army officer returned safely to base. Palauans are not mentioned as members of these expeditions. (Throughout the war, Japan's claims of damage inflicted on the enemy far exceeded the actual results. These raids sound like no exception.)

Numerous examples of exaggerations appear in the diary of Admiral Matome Ugaki, which also describes a sixth dated raid in Palau (1991, p. 503). His entry from 31 October 1944, while his ship was moored in Brunei, notes that the day before "[A]t Peleliu motor launches and small landing craft equipped with torpedoes attacked an enemy convoy in the east at night...and sank three or four of them. Both were sure-to-kill methods, sacrificing their own lives. I'm glad to see that, as the situation becomes critical, this kind of attack method comes to the fore without compulsion, thus displaying our glorious way of warriors." This attack, six weeks after the invasion of Peleliu, sounds as if it was directed at ships in Shonian Harbor, to the island's north and east. If any Palauans accompanied this raid, compulsion certainly was involved. While this raid, early in the siege, employed motorized craft like those described by Hayashi and Coox, later raids in Palau had to rely on craft requiring paddling, like those made by Zenhitsu Nakamura, as losses of equipment mounted.

Prof. Dirk Ballendorf, at the Micronesian Area Research Center, University of Guam until his retirement, had private correspondence dating from 1992 from a U.S. Navy officer, Lt. Ray Gripman of Mercer Island, Washington, that documents three suicide attacks against Navy Landing Craft Infantry (LCI) vessels in the Shonian anchorage, "west and south of Eil Malk island." (Although it shows as Eil Malk on most charts, the island's correct name is Mecherechar. The Fig. 2 map slightly misspells it.) Enemy swimmers attempted to float explosives on rafts during the night and ram them into the sides of the American ships. One party armed with knives succeeded in boarding a ship. Additional documentary evidence appears in the U.S. National Archives, which contain a photo of an LCI damaged by one of these attacks (Fig. 3). The caption refers to a "raiding party" of "swimmers" who exploded their "Rube Goldberg mine" under the vessel's fantail. Gripman's letter says that the ships' shining of bright floodlights at night controlled such attacks. Since he provides no dates for these events, it is not clear whether the three attacks he describes are counted among the documented ones. (See note 17 for Karen Walter's discussion of the third U.S. source, Marine Air Groups of Peleliu reacting to *Kirikomi-tai* raids.)<sup>10</sup>

In the official U.S. Marine Corps account of the battle for Peleliu, F.O.Hough (1950, p. 168 n.83) describes a counter-landing on Peleliu made by the Japanese on 18 January 1945 that put ashore 73 men. This action, counted here as the seventh *Kirikomi-tai* raid, is not listed in the *Senshi Sōsho*, although other U.S. accounts describe it as a suicide mission (Gailey, 1983, pp. 183-84; Hallas, 1994, pp. 278-79; Blair & DeCioccio, 2011, p. 243). The two counter landings

that Inoue sent to Peleliu on 23 and 24 September, 1944, 8-9 days after the U.S. invasion, don't qualify as *Kirikomi-tai* operations since they were large-scale reinforcement efforts that attempted to land an entire battalion; yet they might well have had Palauan guides aboard (Hough, 1950, pp. 104-05).



Figure 3. U.S. Navy LCI Damaged by *Kirikomi-tai* Attack, Shonian Harbor, Palau, 1945  
National Archives photo 127-GW-121721

The surviving Palauan participants from the Shock Corps have been scrupulously honest concerning whether they actually participated in any of the attacks. The Palauans interviewed by the author from the second draft, whose training was cut short by the surrender, insisted none of them took part in raids. Techitong Rebluud, however, told Higuchi that he participated in three assaults against U.S. forces, and that he believed he was the only Palauan to actually go on any raids. He said the efforts were abandoned because the U.S. was able to detect them with bright lights (Ballendorf et al., 1986, pp. 217-222). Although Higuchi does not mention it in her writings, this testimony, bolstered by the observation about the floodlights, is the only recorded statement from anyone besieged on Babeldaob, of any nationality, that *Kirikomi-tai* missions did occur in Palau, and that Palauans took part in them.

The fact that every *Kirikomi-tai* operation had to be waterborne from Babeldaob, whatever the target, provides the likeliest answer to the central question – what was the real purpose of the Shock Corps training? – and to another important one: if General Inoue had many thousands of idle soldiers available for raids, why would the Japanese force Palauan youths into service and teach them military tactics? Both are answered by the Japanese need of unique

knowledge and talents the Palauan men possessed. They were young, athletic males, of prime age and condition for military action (Hachisu refers to them as “gods”). And they had abilities that the Japanese prized. They were knowledgeable guides in Palauan waters, and they were exceptionally skilled boatmen, swimmers, and divers. They would know how to navigate the 30 long and difficult miles south of Babeldaob through the tricky complex of Rock Islands, the small islands lying in the lagoon between Koror and Peleliu. Those men from Angaur, Peleliu, and Koror, who would have frequently traversed and fished the waters south of Koror, would be intimately familiar with the reefs, winds, tides, and currents around Ngerechong Island, Shonian Harbor, and Peleliu itself. (Techitong Rebluud lived in Peleliu, on a parcel of family land named Mengelang, between the villages of Ngesias and Ngerdelolk.) Following the safest and shortest route, and gauging these natural forces correctly, mattered greatly to raiding parties propelled only by human paddlers, who had to make as much of the 60-mile round trip as possible during the moonless hours of the night. Hachisu explained to Higuchi how the Japanese valued Palauans’ eyesight and abilities to function at night. This was a time favored for offensive action by both the Japanese Army and Navy in any event; and in Palau, operations of any type against the Americans had to occur at night since the U.S. had complete mastery of the air and sea during the day. Given their loyalty, the Palauans required only the right training and indoctrination to turn them into combatants of uniquely high value.

### **Problems with the Testimonies of Capt. Morikawa and Lt. Hachisu**

Capt. Morikawa’s and Lt. Hachisu’s assertions about the objectives of the Shock Corps are seriously undermined by their own testimonies, which are filled with inconsistencies, contradictions, inadvertent admissions, and statements that do not withstand scrutiny. The texts of Higuchi’s interviews with them that she has released (1987, pp. 162-176) reveal that in her published description of their remarks from 1991 she excerpted those that supported the assertion that Palauans would not be used for military operations. However, the full text of their statements contains so much information to the contrary that one can only conclude that the officers sought to conceal the true goals of the program when asked about it 40 years later.

In his remarks to Higuchi, Capt. Morikawa offered not one but two different justifications for the *Kirikomi-tai* program. The first was that the Japanese command feared rebellion among the natives, or that they would desert to the many U.S. ships that ringed Babeldaob offshore in the year following the Peleliu invasion of September 1944. The Shock Corps was designed, he says, to counter these possibilities. The second goal he speaks of is very different: to provide the Palauan youths with the military training that would allow them to defend themselves in the event the Americans invaded Babeldaob. In her 1991 paper, Higuchi discusses only the first justification; she does not describe the one that contains clear military content.

Consider first the proposition that insurrection by the Palauans was a serious threat to the Japanese command. Poyer et al. write that in Micronesia near the war’s end “The threat of rebellion by *Islanders and Asian laborers* haunted the Japanese” (2001, p. 231 (italics added)). Apparently, the best solution Morikawa could devise for this danger was to sequester 40 Palauan youths into boot camps for six months, which, according to Hachisu, began in November 1944. Conscripting and propagandizing these men certainly gave the Japanese physical control, and in some cases might have given “spiritual control” – a euphemism for subjugating the vulnerable through forced indoctrination; “brainwashing” in the vernacular. This would, however, leave their 775 Palauan male peers, 4,800 other increasingly frightened Palauans, and 14,000

discontent and sullen Koreans, other Asian slave laborers, and suffering Japanese civilians free for half a year to foment sedition across all of Babeldaob. Another 40 youths would be ordered into the camps the following May. All the worrisome natives, laborers, and other civilians would be ignored, while intensive resources were poured into 80 Palauan youths. And once these young men completed their training, which included nothing about mediation or pacifying restive peoples, what, exactly, was the mechanism by which they would squelch discontent among their unruly countrymen and the Asian strangers with whom they could not communicate? Morikawa and Hachisu do not explain.<sup>11</sup>

In fact, any sort of organized civil disruption by Palauans was highly unlikely. The actual behavior of Palauans and the opinions of well-informed Japanese bear this out. Exhibiting a candid and unrepentant racism undimmed after 40 years, Jiro Nakamura, a *Kempei-tai*, military policeman, on Babeldaob, told Higuchi, “While a few rebellious Korean laborers were captured by the military police, the simple and honest Palauans, who were below the standards set by the general Japanese population, were to be regarded as not dangerous” (1991, p. 155). Another Nan’yō functionary, Seitaro Yasutake, told Higuchi (1987, p. 63), “The Japanese trusted islanders even after the war broke out. The islanders helped the Japanese very much.” Palauan testimonies make it abundantly clear that their disillusionment and alienation from the Japanese arose gradually on Babeldaob, as the military enforced ever harsher demands for food and labor from the suffering Islanders; but none rebelled, and fewer than half a dozen defected to the U.S. ships.

As the policeman recognizes, if any group was a candidate for anti-Japanese activity, it was the five thousand Koreans dragged to Palau against their will as laborers. These formed the bulk of the “Asian laborers” within Palau, the other population that Japanese authorities feared. Koreans had hated the cruelty of Japanese colonialism for 35 years, and they knew that hundreds of their women were in Palau as well, as enslaved prostitutes for the Japanese military (Nahm, 1973, chs. 2, 15, 16; Peattie, 1988a, pp. 266-70; Sawachi, 1990, pp. 37, 71). As the war situation turned against the Japanese in Indonesia, their fear of rebellion by their Korean laborers led them to break the 30-man squads down into groups of three or four (Cook & Cook, 1992, p. 119). In the Ballendorf et al. report (p.99), Higuchi writes that after the surrender Koreans and Taiwanese in Palau did in fact “riot” against the Japanese.<sup>12</sup>

Lt. Hachisu, who was both organizer and instructor of the *Kirikomi-tai*, did say that the Palauans were not to be used as “a direct fighting force,” and were “an indirect war potential” (Higuchi, 1987, pp. 163-64). But he then contradicts himself. The program had two parts, he explains, spiritual training and “education for fighting” – against whom if not the American enemy? When he received his orders to establish the program from Inoue’s Chief of Staff, Col. Tokuchi Tada, this powerful officer, for whom the Americans expressed very high regard as a tactician after the war (Hough, 1950, p. 201 n.4; Gailey, 1983, p. 38), told Hachisu, “I hope the Islanders can be trained to be a part of our armed forces.” Hachisu says he duly made the training plan “according to the Chief of Staff’s order.” Unlike Morikawa, he makes no mention of aiming to quell civilian unrest. Palauans “were trained in stabbing to death [recall Lt. Gripman’s knife-wielding boarders], throwing hand-made spears, how to approach the enemy, night activities, and studies of enemy operations on Peleliu and Angaur.” He describes training the youths in “night-time guerrilla activity,” and admits the Japanese planned to use their “positive cooperation” in night operations, at which they were “skillful.” Hachisu states that the Palauans were not told the aims of their training, yet every surviving Palauan uniformly attests that they were told they would attack U.S. forces. Hachisu also reveals that at the end of the war the list of names of the

Palauan participants was “incinerated” – hardly necessary if the program had the innocent goals of discipline and spiritual training. The revelations within Hachisu’s testimony provide some of the best clues to the actual purpose of the *Kirikomi-tai* effort.

In fact, the *Kirikomi-tai* program was likely to work directly *contrary* to the goal of suppressing resistance among the civilian populations on Babeldaob. A successful program would turn its graduates into a disciplined fighting force, schooled in guerrilla tactics, night actions, the use of weapons, and the manufacture of explosives. Higuchi mentions Japanese fear of betrayal by the *Kirikomi-tai* youths (Ballendorf et al., 1986, p. 98), but if any of them did turn against the Army, they would be far more dangerous after their training than before it. If the young men were not going to raid the Americans, what was the Army going to do with them after graduation? The first 40 were not assigned to assist Morikawa and his *Butai* in his visits to Palauan shelters to improve relations with Islanders – the Japanese effort that had the best chance of reducing unrest among them. The Palauan youths were trained not to resolve conflict, but to engage in it.

Morikawa’s remarks to Higuchi are more guarded than those of Hachisu. He seems to recognize the delicacy of the subject, the risk to his reputation if the truth about the *Kirikomi-tai* were revealed. He says that only “20 some” youths (not the true number, 80) were “called” by the Japanese (that is, forcibly inducted). But he gives us the second objective, one very different from countering native unrest. Morikawa states they were also to be trained for “self-defense,” so that in the event of an assault on Babeldaob they could “protect their families and their race.” He names no weapons to be used for this defense, but the program he describes was clearly intended to provide the Palauans with serious military training (Higuchi, 1987, p. 174). If the U.S. did invade Babeldaob, then the youths’ thorough knowledge of the reefs and terrain of the island, especially around their home villages, would have enabled them to guide Japanese forces on operations large or small. Palauans clearly recalled the military focus of their training. Timarong Adelbert described to Higuchi how, at graduation, his first draft of *Kirikomi-tai* put on a demonstration of their “war skills” for Morikawa. The Captain told them, “We could not win this war if we don’t make up our minds to become ‘ash’ (die).” Techitong Rebluud’s commander told his group, “If you want to be splendid Japanese, shed Palauan blood for Japan, then you will become Japanese.” Rebluud also said that one assumption of their training was that they were “in a shelter surrounded by the enemy” (Ballendorf et al., 1986, pp. 300, 219).

Yet the same objection raised to the explanation of “dampening civilian rebellion” applies to this one of “self-defense”: what exactly is the mechanism by which this goal was to be achieved? The Palauans’ testimonies, and those of their *Kirikomi-tai* officers, show that they were denied training with rifles or any other infantry weapons. How could the 40 Palauan youths possibly defend a surrounded shelter, much less 5,500 of their countrymen scattered across the 130 square miles of Babeldaob, using only the knives, hand-made spears, Molotov cocktails, and magnetic explosives with which they *were* trained? Who would lead them, unless they were integrated with other IJA units, precisely as Col. Tada had directed Lt. Hachisu to accomplish?

### **Questions Raised by the Chronology of Events on Babeldaob**

Review of the actual chronology of events from late 1944 into mid-1945 creates further doubts concerning the honesty of the two officers on the central question of the Palauans and combat. Hachisu is confident in the dates he recalls (unlike Morikawa, who expresses uncertainty over when the *Morikawa Butai* was organized, or how many Palauan shelters,

*hinanba*, existed that he visited regularly). Hachisu remembers that the meeting with Col. Tada to organize the *Kirikomi-tai* occurred in October 1944. In the first three weeks of October, while the battle for Peleliu still raged (organized resistance would continue until 24 November), General Inoue had two overriding responsibilities. First, to prepare to repel the expected American attempt to seize Babeldaob, on which he had retained 30,000 troops as defenders. Second, he felt compelled to find some means of engaging his forces, who lacked warships or planes, against the Americans lodged in and around Peleliu. For both these urgent problems the Palauan *Kirikomi-tai* were part of the proposed solution.

But the U.S. disrupted these expectations with yet another surprise. Morikawa makes an important admission that completely undercuts the excuse of “self-defense” when he remarks that the “anxiety” of the Japanese command about a U.S. landing on Babeldaob was “eliminated” when the U.S. “directed its attack course toward the Philippines” (Higuchi, 1987, p.170). General Douglas MacArthur invaded Leyte Island, in the central Philippines, on 20 October 1944. With this action, the United States had vaulted 700 miles west and north of Palau. It had opened a whole new theater of war in the Western Pacific, and therefore had no need to assault Babeldaob. Inoue’s headquarters realized this immediately. Yet this was one full month before the first draft of Palauans began their *Kirikomi-tai* training. By November, that is, Palauan “self-defense” against an American landing on Babeldaob was no longer an issue. In fact, on 03 November 1944, two weeks after the American invasion of Leyte and three weeks before the loss of Peleliu, Inoue’s command announced a policy of “self-support” on Babeldaob, and assigned all troops and civilians not engaged in combat roles to agricultural groups (Higuchi, 1987, following p.176). This was tacit acknowledgment that the greatest threat now facing the Japanese was not invasion, but starvation, as the garrison faced months or years of isolation. “Self-defense” against the Americans was even more bogus a justification for the second draft of 40 *Kirikomi-tai* youths, which began in May 1945 – when the battle for Okinawa was in its second month.

The chronology is equally unkind to Morikawa’s excuse that the *Morikawa Butai* and *Kirikomi-tai* training were both meant to reduce civilian unrest (Higuchi, 1991, p. 152; 1987, pp. 171-72, 174). The October organizational meeting for the *Kirikomi-tai* occurred two months before there had been any overt acts of Palauan resistance to Japanese authority. For most of that month, however, General Inoue was preoccupied with preparations for what he assumed was the inevitable American attempt to seize Babeldaob. So, contrary to Morikawa’s statements, civilian unrest was a minor worry for Inoue in October. Not until late November 1944 did a few Chamorros, natives from the Mariana Islands brought to Palau by the Japanese for labor, flee to U.S. ships offshore. Some then returned to Babeldaob to urge more Micronesian civilians to escape to the ships. It was mid-December when the Palauan Joseph Tellei made the first escape the Japanese would have learned about. Tellei (also known as Oikawasang) was a kind of native police chief, as such the highest-ranking Palauan after 30 years of the caste-ridden Nan’yō administration. He did indeed rattle the Japanese by deserting to the Americans with his wife and 116 Chamorros (Richard, 1957a, p. 624; Higuchi, 1987, pp. 162-63; Ballendorf et al., 1986, pp. 93, 395). But the chronology of events in late 1944 makes plain that Morikawa’s assertion that the Shock Corps was created *in response to* occurrences of Islander unrest and escapes to the ships cannot be correct. It was formed well before any of these events happened, and undoubtedly was formed for other reasons.

As a final comment regarding chronology, the *Senshi Sōsho*’s table of raids, and the operations cited by Admiral Ugaki for October 1944 and Hough for January 1945, provide the

most plausible explanation for why no Palauans other than Techitong Reblud are known to have accompanied an attack: opportunities were exceedingly scarce. Two or more small-scale missions occurred after 01 April 1945, but we know of only a single recorded *Kirikomi-tai* operation, the one of 16 June 1945, that definitely took place after the first draft of 40 trainees graduated in April 1945. The war ended before the second draft completed their training.

**Conclusion:  
Weighing “Myths,” Using Oral Histories, and  
Confronting the Human Failures in the Siege of Babeldaob**

Wakako Higuchi reports that in her interview with Morikawa he punctured three cherished Palauan myths about him (1991, pp. 153-55). He denied being a spy for the U.S. He denied that the Japanese had planned to massacre Palauans (who assert they were to be herded into a cave in the village of Ngatpang and slaughtered *en masse*). On these two questions one is inclined to agree with him. There is no credible evidence or reasonable argument for why either story would be true. In his discussion with Higuchi on the spying question, Morikawa makes plain that he was not a *nisei* (second-generation Japanese-American) from Hawai'i and did not speak English, contrary to Palauan assertions. The one intriguing bit of evidence Palauans cite – that he was seen flashing light signals to the American ships offshore – he explains as his attempt to test signals the Palauans were said to be flashing, in order to see the U.S. response.<sup>13</sup>

As for plans to murder the Islanders, authors have documented tales throughout much of Micronesia of impending massacres that never occurred (Peattie, 1988b, pp. 347-48, n. 85 and 300-307; Poyer et al., 2001, pp. 233-34; Hezel, 1995, pp. 240-41). The same fears of slaughter existed among Korean slave laborers on Saipan, and among Chamorros on Guam (Glionna, 2011; Camacho, 2011, pp. 53-54). Surely, however, the Palauan farmers and fishermen, the most productive population on Babeldaob, were worth far more to the hungry Japanese alive than dead. Also, by mid-1945 Japanese staff officers knew that the Americans would win the war, and would punish anyone found guilty of war crimes, particularly on such a scale as this. Yet common sense may not have saved the Palauans had circumstances unwound differently. The most chilling testimony Higuchi obtained is a casual remark by Jiro Nakamura, the member of the feared *Kempei-tai*. Since the U.S. didn't invade Babeldaob, said Nakamura, the Japanese “didn't have to adopt a policy of civilian extermination as was carried out on Saipan and Okinawa” (1987, p. 154).<sup>14</sup>

However, concerning the mission of the *Kirikomi-tai*, the weight of new and the analysis of old evidence strongly support the view that the universal Palauan understandings are correct. The Japanese Army did intend to use the Palauans as an active combat force, and for the military activities they have described, nighttime guerrilla raids, including missions as suicide bombers. The program exists within an entirely different order of knowledge and credibility when compared to the unsubstantiated assertions that fueled the stories of spying and genocide. Palauan testimonies about the *Kirikomi-tai* are based on actual events in real places, under conditions when memories are impressed the most deeply. The accounts result from the experiences of 80 adult men who, as Higuchi observes, uniformly and consistently recalled for decades afterward what they were told and taught in the camps.

In the end, the evidence for the accuracy of the Palauan testimonies is overwhelming. Their understanding of the purpose of the *Giyu-Kirikomi-tai* is the one that deserves repeating when the history of the war in Palau is told. The Shock Corps was not a rugged youth camp

designed to instill vaporous ideals from the Empire's dying gasps. Rather, it was a reckless guerrilla scheme, intended to aid operations that had no chance of inflicting serious damage on the enemy or improving the terrible situation on Babeldaob, no matter how many Palauans the Army sacrificed. The Palauans' argument about their true role would appear stronger if more of them had participated in raids. But very few had any chance. The official Japanese history of the Pacific War tells us that, of the seven documented raids, only the last one took place after any Palauans had completed their training. One must keep in mind that the question we are examining is that of the program's *intent*. This is a separate issue from its ultimate execution, from the number of missions that the Army actually managed to launch, and the degree of their success. Higuchi's 1991 paper offers a speculative psychological rationale for Palauan attitudes toward Morikawa, but it fails to address the central questions concerning why interpretations of the Shock Corps and its objectives are so divergent. The officers' explanations are not examined or tested in any way, yet they are preferred, without explanation, to all the contrary and consistent information provided by the Palauan participants. Disagreement between historical accounts, however, is the place to *begin* investigation, not declare it completed.

The two officers who were most deeply implicated in the *Kirikomi-tai* project had, when interviewed in the transformed world of 40 years later, urgent reasons to obscure the goals of the Patriotic Shock Corps. Foremost would be their concern that forcibly inducting 80 civilian youths in order to subject them to suicidal combat would be condemned as brutal, even criminal behavior. Nor would they want readers pondering the thousands of deaths among the populations marooned on Babeldaob, and asking if they could have been prevented. The scale of those deaths has remained concealed from Palauans and historians of the war in Palau for 68 years. So it is not surprising that in 1986 Capt. Morikawa carefully avoided admitting the Army's true objectives for the Shock Corps. Lt. Hachisu comes across as armed with less guile. But he also conceals that raids actually occurred, and he had been worried enough in 1945 about how the Shock Corps and his role in it would be perceived, that once the war was lost he burned the list of participants who had received his lessons in "rigid discipline, Japanese manner, and genuine courage culled from experience." The victorious Americans, intent on uncovering crimes against Allied POWs, missed their chance to flesh out the story of the siege. U.S. forces obtained mortality data from other Micronesian outposts, but they failed to gather any figures from the Japanese command on Babeldaob for deaths among either soldiers or civilians. Nor, in the 15 bypassed islands, did the Americans investigate possible crimes against Micronesians or the unfortunate Asians marooned with the Japanese Army and Navy (Richard, 1957b, pp. 7-18).<sup>15</sup>

We obtain a clearer understanding of the *Kirikomi-tai* question when we examine what the wartime stories mean, and how they are viewed and transmitted, in Palauan terms. In the Palauan sense of history, the stories about spying and genocide, however often they are repeated, are recognized as having uncertain sources, lacking dependable witnesses. They stem from rumors and hearsay. No persons were ever acknowledged as authorities on these subjects. But the *Kirikomi-tai* accounts are very different. These are accepted as valid oral histories, whose validity comes primarily from their having an ownership. They belong ultimately to the participants and their families, because these storytellers actually did live the experiences they describe. They speak with an authority on the topic that nobody else holds, and Palauans accord their versions respect (Murray, 2006, pp. 26-37). Whether the *Kirikomi-tai* men interviewed numbered 15 or 65, their memories and reckonings of this Palauan history cannot be dismissed without careful discussion and sound reasons. Lt. Hachisu himself provides testimony verifying the reliability of Palauan comprehension and memory. If the Palauans could understand *Yamato*

*damashii*, the mélange of Japanese lore turned propaganda that Hachisu force fed them, and then recall it to him in detail four decades later (note 4), they would certainly be able to understand and accurately recall the military instruction and weapons training they received in his *Kirikomi-tai* camps.

Oral histories also occupy a place within wider fields of information. Reliable evidence from Japanese, American, and Palauan sources uniformly confirms the Palauans' versions of events. Multiple Japanese sources inform us that *Kirikomi-tai* attacks actually did occur throughout the Western Pacific and within Palau itself. Inoue's command conceived the program precisely while it was expecting an invasion of Babeldaob and planning counterattacks against U.S. forces – both actions where the Palauans could make uniquely valuable contributions as guerrillas. Hachisu informs us that his orders from Headquarters were to train the youths to become part of the armed services, and he says he followed those orders. One Palauan has provided plausible testimony that he accompanied several Japanese raids against the Americans. And both Japanese and American historical works, diaries, letters, and photographs support Palauan statements about attacks, transport, targets, and weapons. The *Kirikomi-tai* episode provides another sound example of the accuracy of memories passed down as oral traditions, and how they can be verified further by documentary sources from outside the society (Iitaka, 2011).

What finally undermined Japanese rule on Babeldaob was not insurgency by oppressed civilians, but the deadly famine and diseases that ravaged the garrison in 1945, which the Army's leadership had found no effective means to prevent.<sup>16</sup> Morikawa's vaunted efforts to spur food production among Palauan women were actually of little effect, made obvious when compared to the far better organized systems of food production and distribution that were implemented between Japanese forces and the native populations on other bypassed Micronesian islands, especially Kosrae and Jaluij (Poyer et al., 2001, pp. 171-85). The rational use by the IJA of Palauan male youths – some of the most skilled reef fisherman in the world – would have been to organize them in their many hundreds, and equip them with every means possible to enable them to fish and glean on the reefs, in order to provide desperately-needed protein for the thousands of troops and civilians starving on shore. Some Palauans were put into fishing groups called *gyoro-han*, but these were limited efforts and one doesn't hear of anyone receiving significant seafood from them (Ballendorf et al., 1986, pp. 253, 288). This silence suggests that their output was reserved for the officer corps, as was the case elsewhere.

On Kosrae, because of the swollen military population, shortages set in eventually, and the military hierarchy asserted its privileges. Officers received the largest fish and most other protein, while the lower ranks withered into what the Micronesians recall as "stick men" (Poyer et al., 2001, p. 180). In any event, Palauans' ability to fish may have been drastically reduced by Army policy. Paranoia over desertions to the U.S. ships caused Headquarters to order Palauans to destroy their boats and canoes after Joseph Tellei made his escape in December 1944 (Ballendorf et al., 1986, pp. 254, 404). Instead of maximizing production of seafood, the Army opted for guerrilla operations that were mere nuisances to the enemy, but goaded the U.S. to increase its efforts to suppress Japanese resistance, making it all the harder for those on the ground to produce food. That is, the *Kirikomi-tai* raids not only wasted human resources, they were counterproductive. They created only greater misery for the Palauans and for every person trapped on Babeldaob.<sup>17</sup>

The 18 months on Babeldaob, so frightening and haunting in Palauan memory to this day, unfolded in accordance with the whims of those who held the power of life and death over others. Trained for war, caught up in the vast bloodbath that had dragged on for over three years,

both the Japanese and the Americans failed to accurately assess the particularities of the standoff over Babeldaob. Both failed to make the bold decisions that would either mitigate or prevent the human disaster that had gathered in the Palau of 1945. In part because of the *Kirikomi-tai* attacks, the United States maintained aerial operations against Babeldaob far in excess of what was required to secure its position in Palau. Yet despite their military dominance, the Americans could not end the state of war within the archipelago, which would allow them to bring food and medical supplies to the trapped and desperate thousands. Only General Inoue could end the hostilities, but he refused. Like the other 14 bypassed strongholds in Micronesia, Babeldaob was a military dictatorship in miniature. Inoue could have stopped the mayhem in a day simply by laying down his arms as urged by the Americans in the frequently-dropped leaflets. Throughout World War II, however, the Japanese Army actively discouraged its personnel from surrendering, urging suicide instead (Drea, 2009; Straus, 2003). Inoue told the Americans during postwar interrogation, “It was not even considered by me or by local garrison commanders that the garrisons would surrender, no matter how hopeless the situation. All Japanese Army personnel are indoctrinated against surrendering at any time” (Gailey, 1983, p. 49). The consequences of this fanatical policy were calamitous. Japanese commanders, from Tokyo on down the chain of command, refused to reconsider it despite the mass deaths that it would impose on their 370,000 troops stranded throughout the Pacific Islands.

Even less just was the treatment of the innocent civilians besieged with them. Whatever commitment the 30,000 regular troops on Babeldaob had made to accept death rather than be captured, the 20,000 Palauans, Japanese settlers, and enslaved laborers from all over Asia had never made that pledge. As a measure short of total surrender, Inoue could have released them, as well as his sick soldiers, to the Americans. These were matters of human choice, and in 1944-45, Inoue and his staff chose to preside over the needless and excruciating deaths of 10,000 of the persons under their authority, and subject all the rest, military and civilians alike, to ultimate doom, rather than accept that the war in Palau was lost and additional resistance futile. Lt. Hachisu meticulously taught the Palauan youths the Imperial Army’s version of “spiritual characteristics important to being human.” Within that army’s leadership in Palau, these spiritual characteristics most certainly did *not* include compassion, or mercy, or respect for peoples deemed racially inferior, or reverence for human life. An army intoxicated with the notion that meaningless deaths were noble, and callous enough to subject so many persons to such deaths, would have no qualms about sending the 80 Palauans it had forcibly conscripted and intensely indoctrinated on suicidal commando missions. The *Kirikomi-tai* program, exhorting and preparing Palauan youths to expend their lives for no benefit, to inflict pinpricks on Japan’s enemy, flowed directly from the Imperial Army’s unsparing ideology, particularly its doctrine prohibiting surrender.

Cleaning the windowpane that looks out on the landscape of Babeldaob in 1945 reveals another discovery as well. The Palauans’ oral histories are also right about the second Morikawa “myth.” The IJA was indeed willing to destroy Palauans as an organized society. The Islanders have just been mistaken on the means by which the Army would have accomplished that end. It would simply have continued the means it actually did employ in the year up to August 1945. If the war had stretched on to late 1946, as Allied leaders expected, the Palauans would have suffered destruction not by murder in a cave, but by famine, disease, and unending acts of violence from armed Japanese troops maddened with hunger and despair. Fate and luck stepped in to avert the impending deaths of tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians when shortsighted military commanders proved unable to break the deadlock on Babeldaob.<sup>18</sup>

The *Kirikomi-tai* episode, then, fits within and illuminates the larger complex of inflexible military doctrines and stubbornly irrational decisions by the Imperial Army command in Palau that brought pain and death to numbers of people that we can never know with accuracy. Through the Patriotic Shock Corps, the Japanese military was prepared to expend the lives of any number of Palauan young men if circumstances in the archipelago had allowed. Fortunately, they did not. The Americans declined to invade Babeldaob. Their bright floodlights, vigilance, and constant destruction of Inoue's watercraft; hunger, sickness, and exhaustion among the Japanese troops, with attendant collapses in morale and fractures in discipline – all these would combine to hobble the program, so that there were hardly any opportunities for its graduates to engage the enemy. Japan's sudden capitulation finally snuffed out the Patriotic Shock Corps and freed Palauans from subjugation to the Imperial Japanese Army. It was the turn of events, not reasoned conclusions or humane good will from those in command of Babeldaob, that saved not only the lives of many young Palauan suicide bombers, but the existence of the Palauans as a people.

### **Acknowledgments**

I am grateful to the many Palauan colleagues who have shared their personal stories with me, and for the generous help given me for 47 years by my Palauan family, the Nakamuras. My friend and colleague, Prof. Shingo Itaka, shared with me his translations and explanations of the vital information in the *Senshi Sōsho* and Hisae Sawachi's study. Ichiko Kido of Santa Barbara also helped with translations. Prof. Mike Burton of the University of California at Irvine advised on questions of statistics. Meikam Chin Weers and her aunt, Yoppong Chin Smau, both from Peleliu, provided information vital to my interpretation of the *Kirikomi-tai*. As always, my sternest and most incisive critic was my wife, Hirmina Brel Murray, of Melekeok, Palau. Less stern, but also incisive and helpful was my son, Sean H. Murray.

### **References**

- Bailey, D. E. (1991). *World War II wrecks of Palau: the Japanese occupation, operation Desecrate One, operation Snapshot, operation Stalemate II preliminaries*. Redding, CA: North Valley Diver Publications.
- Ballendorf, D. A., Shuster, D. R., & Higuchi, W. (1986). *An oral historiography of the Japanese administration in Palau. Final report submitted to the Japan Foundation International Project Support Program*. Mangilao, Guam: University of Guam, Micronesian Area Research Center.
- Blair, B. C., & DeCioccio, J. P. (2011). *Victory at Peleliu: The 81st infantry division's Pacific campaign*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Bōeichō Bōei Kenshūjō Senshishitsu (BBKS). Self-Defense Agency, S.-D. R. I., War History Office. (1968). *Senshi Sōsho [war history series]. Vol. 13, Chūbu Taiheiyō rikugun sakusen, 2: Periryū, Angaru, Iōtō [Army operations in the Central Pacific, part 2: Peleliu, Angaur, & Iwo Jima]*: Asagumo Shimbun Sha.
- Breen, J. (2008). Yasukuni and the loss of memory. In J. Breen (Ed.), *Yasukuni, the war dead, and the struggle for Japan's past* (pp. 143-162). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Camacho, K. L. (2011). *Cultures of commemoration: The politics of war, memory, and history in the Mariana Islands*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

- CinCPac-CinCPOA. (February 1946). *Report of surrender and occupation of Japan*: Washington, D.C. Chief of Naval Operations. (Commander in Chief Pacific Fleet and Pacific Ocean Areas). Available as download pdf file.
- Collingham, L. (2012). *The taste of war: World War Two and the battle for food*. London: Penguin Books.
- Cook, H. T. (2001). The myth of the Saipan suicides. In R. Cowley (Ed.), *No end save victory: Perspectives on World War II* (pp. 583-597). New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Cook, H. T., & Cook, T. F. (1992). *Japan at war: an oral history*. New York: New Press; distributed by Norton.
- Dower, J. W. (1986). *War without mercy: Race and power in the Pacific War*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Dower, J. W. (2012). Japan's beautiful modern war. In *Ways of forgetting, ways of remembering: Japan in the modern world* (pp. 65-104). New York: The New Press.
- Drea, E. J. (1998). *In the service of the emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Drea, E. J. (2009). *Japan's imperial army: Its rise and fall, 1853-1945*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Falgout, S., Poyer, L., & Carucci, L. M. (2008). *Memories of war: Micronesians in the Pacific War*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Frank, R. B. (1999). *Downfall: The end of the imperial Japanese empire*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Gailey, H. A. (1983). *Peleliu, 1944*. Annapolis, Md.: Nautical & Aviation Pub. Co. of America.
- Glionna, J. M. (2011). Trying to erase a war legacy. *Los Angeles Times*, 15 August 2011, p.A1.
- Gorenflo, L. J. (1996). Demographic change in the Republic of Palau. *Pacific Studies*, 19(3), 37-106.
- Gudmundsson, B. I. (2001). Okinawa. In R. Cowley (Ed.), *No end save victory: Perspectives on World War II* (pp. 625-638). New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Hallas, J. H. (1994). *The devil's anvil: The assault on Peleliu*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Hayashi, S., & Coox, A. D. (1959). *Kōgun: The Japanese army in the Pacific War*. Quantico, VA: The Marine Corps Association.
- Hezel, F. X., S.J. (1995). *Strangers in their own land: A century of colonial rule in the Caroline and Marshall Islands*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Higuchi, W. (1986). Micronesians and the Pacific War: the Palauans. An oral historiography of the Japanese administration. University of Guam, Micronesian Area Research Center.
- Higuchi, W. (1987). *Micronesia under Japanese administration: Interviews with former South Sea Bureau and military officials*. Mangilao, Guam: University of Guam, Micronesian Area Research Center. Sponsor: L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation.
- Higuchi, W. (1991). War in Palau: Morikawa and the Palauans. In G. M. White (Ed.), *Remembering the Pacific War* (pp. 145-156). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i, Center for Pacific Islands Studies, occasional paper 36. [http://www.hawaii.edu/cpis/publications\\_6.html](http://www.hawaii.edu/cpis/publications_6.html).
- Hough, F. O. (1950). *The assault on Peleliu*. Nashville, TN: The Battery Press, Inc. 1990
- Ienaga, S. (1978). *The Pacific War: World War II and the Japanese, 1931-1945*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Iitaka, S. (2011). Conflicting discourses on colonial assimilation: A Palauan cultural tour in Japan, 1915. *Pacific Asia Inquiry*, 2(1), 85-102.

- Ishihara, M. (2001). Memories of war and Okinawa. In T. Fujitani, G. M. White & L. Yoneyama (Eds.), *Perilous memories: The Asia-Pacific war(s)* (pp. 87-106). Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Kemp, P. (2001). Decima mas. In R. Cowley (Ed.), *No end save victory: Perspectives on World War II* (pp. 348-361). New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.
- Murray, S. C. (2006). *War and remembrance on Peleliu: Islander, Japanese, and American memories of a battle in the Pacific War*. Unpublished PhD dissertation for the Department of Anthropology, University of California at Santa Barbara. ProQuest catalog #3245927.
- Nahm, A. (Ed.). (1973). *Korea under Japanese colonial rule: Studies of the policy and techniques of Japanese colonialism*. Kalamazoo, Mich.: Center for Korean Studies, Institute of International and Area Studies, Western Michigan University.
- Nero, K. L. (1989). Time of famine, time of transformation: Hell in the Pacific, Palau. In G. M. White & L. Lindstrom (Eds.), *The Pacific theater: Island representations of World War II* (pp. 117-148). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- O'Donnell, P. K. (2002). *Into the rising sun*. New York: The Free Press.
- Peattie, M. R. (1984). The Nan'yō: Japan in the South Pacific, 1885-1945. In R. H. Myers & M. R. Peattie (Eds.), *The Japanese colonial empire, 1895-1945* (pp. 172-210). Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Peattie, M. R. (1988a). The Japanese colonial empire, 1895-1945. In P. Duus (Ed.), *The Cambridge history of Japan, vol. 6: The twentieth century* (pp. 217-270). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Peattie, M. R. (1988b). *Nan'yō: The rise and fall of the Japanese in Micronesia, 1885-1945*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Poyer, L. (1995). Yapese experiences of the Pacific War. *Isla: A Journal of Micronesian Studies*, 3(2), 223-256 <http://www.uog.edu/dynamicdata/CLASSIslaJournalMicroStudies.aspx>.
- Poyer, L., Falgout, S., & Carucci, L. M. (2001). *The typhoon of war: Micronesian experiences of the Pacific War*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Rechebei, E. D., & McPhetres, S. F. (1997). *History of Palau: heritage of an emerging nation*. Koror, Palau: Ministry of Education.
- Republic of Palau. (2001). *Republic of Palau 2000 statistical yearbook*. Koror, Palau: Division of Planning and Statistics.
- Richard, D. E. (1957a). *United States naval administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. volume 1: The wartime military government period 1942-1945*. Washington D.C.: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.
- Richard, D. E. (1957b). *United States naval administration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. volume 2: The postwar military government era 1945-1947*. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.
- Sawachi, H. (1990). *Berau no sei to shi (Life and death in Palau)*. Tokyo: Kodansha.
- Senshi Sōsho [Japanese government war history series]. See *Bōeichō Bōei Kenshūjō Senshishitsu (BBKS), Vol. 13, 1968*.
- Spector, R. H. (1985). *Eagle against the sun: The American war with Japan*. New York: Free Press.
- Straus, U. (2003). *The anguish of surrender: Japanese POWs in World War II*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

- Taaffe, S. R. (1998). *MacArthur's jungle war: The 1944 New Guinea campaign*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Tanaka, Y. (1996). *Hidden horrors: Japanese war crimes in World War II*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.
- Ugaki, M. (1991). *Fading victory: The diary of Admiral Matome Ugaki, 1941-1945* (M. Chihaya, Trans.). Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, English edition; Japanese edition 1953.
- United States Army. (1956). *Military geology of Palau Islands, Caroline Islands*. Washington D.C. Copy in Micro-Pacific Collection, oversize cart, Palau Community College Library.
- United States Strategic Bombing Survey. (1947). *The American campaign against Wotje, Maloelap, Mille, and Jaluit* (vol. 76). Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office. Available on CD-ROM from MilSpecManuals.com.
- Walter, K. R. (1993). *Through the looking glass: Palauan experiences of war and reconstruction, 1944-1951*. Unpublished PhD dissertation for Department of History, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia.
- Warner, D., & Warner, P. (1982). *The sacred warriors: Japan's suicide legions*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., Inc.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Besides Babeldaob, the Japanese bases bypassed within the Japanese Mandate of Micronesia, what Japan called the Nan'yō (South Seas), included Maloelap, Wotje, Jaluit, and Mili in the Marshall Islands; Pohnpei and Kosrae in the eastern Caroline Islands; the Chuuk lagoon and three other sites in the Chuuk region within the central Carolines; Woleai and Yap in the western Carolines; and Rota and Pagan in the Mariana Islands. Alternate American wartime names and spellings included Babelthuap, Jaluit, Mille, Ponape, Kusaie, and Truk for today's Chuuk.

<sup>2</sup>The basic history of the Japanese colonial era in Micronesia (1914-45), the impacts of the war years on Micronesians and Japanese, and their experiences on cut-off islands are covered in four widely available studies (Peattie, 1988b; Hezel, 1995; Poyer et al., 2001; Falgout et al., 2008). Detailed accounts of Palauan experiences during the war appear in two PhD dissertations, that by Karen Walter (1993) and my own (2006), in Nero (1989), and in Ballendorf et al., (1986). Japan's policy was to supply its troops with minimal food, requiring them to obtain food for themselves – “self-sufficiency” – in the field; see Collingham (2012, chs. 3,11,13, and 17). The one-year stocks of food provided for the Army troops sent to defend Micronesia was unusual, presumably in recognition of the restricted capacity of the small islands to feed an influx of soldiers.

<sup>3</sup> The official Japanese government history of the war, the *Senshi Sōsho* (“War History Series”), vol. 13 (1968) states on p. 235 that the combined Imperial Army and Navy deaths on Babeldaob totaled 4,838 men – 2,956 Army, 1,882 Navy. (These figures have never appeared in an English language history of the war in Palau or Micronesia.) However, Map 6 of this same volume says that the number 4,838 was valid as of 31 July 1945. I estimate deaths would have grown by 250 before the final repatriations from Palau in February 1946. (The malnourished and sick continued dying long after the guns went silent on 15 August 1945. According to Walter (1993, pp. 197-207) seven more weeks passed before the Americans began supplying Babeldaob with food, in early October, and they didn't occupy and patrol the big island until late December. The death rate after July is calculated from the Sawachi data for the 59<sup>th</sup> regiment's regular troops described below, which run to February.) After a small correction, the total military deaths would equal 5,060, which would leave 24,650 military survivors. In June 1944 they had started as 29,700 men (21,400 Army and 8,300 Navy) who experienced a mortality rate of 17.0%. Page 235 also reveals that 22% of Army deaths were caused by combat (the U.S. bombing, strafing, and naval shelling; Babeldaob was never invaded). The remaining 78% resulted from starvation and the illnesses associated with malnutrition.

On Babeldaob, as Mark Peattie writes in his indispensable study of the Nan'yō period, only the armed forces could have provided orderly administration, but they had “little time, resources, or inclination to look after the welfare of civilians, [whether] Japanese or Micronesian” (1988b, p. 299). The military made no attempt to systematically record deaths among civilians on Babeldaob, neither Japanese, other Asian, or Micronesian.

## *The Palauan Kirikomi-tai Suicide Bombers of World War II and the Siege of Babeldaob*

However, the *Senshi Sōsho* pp. 234-36, and two English-language sources, Karen Walter (1993, p. 195) and Dorothy Richard (1957b, p. 18) all give the figure of 9,750 Japanese and other Asian civilian survivors at war's end (Richard adds 123 Chinese she believes had been excluded from the count). Besides these, 5,350 "Islanders" (almost all of these Palauans) also survived. But Sawachi provides rare data which, with slight corrections, suggest that the regular troops of one of the IJA regiments on Babeldaob, the 59<sup>th</sup>, died at an 18% rate (423 men of 2,369). At the same time, the civilians this regiment drafted after arriving in Palau, who were Okinawans and other Japanese nationals who had immigrated to the Nan'yō colony before the war, died at a 33.2% rate (257 of 775). This was nearly double the 17% rate for all military on Babeldaob. The high rate for the draftees most likely resulted from their rations being reduced and then cut off earlier than for the regular troops in the regiment. These are the only data we have for mortality rates among any of the civilian populations on Babeldaob.

If the 9,750 Japanese and Asian civilians alive on 31 July 1945 suffered another 205 deaths by February 1946 (at the rate derived from Sawachi's figures for the 59<sup>th</sup> regiment's draftees during this period) then 9,545 survived their ordeal. The larger speculation, grim and troubling, is this: if these 775 civilian draftees of the 59<sup>th</sup> are used as a statistical sample for all the Asian (non-Islander) civilians, and their mortality rate of 33.2% is applied to the 9,545 survivors, then these had begun as 14,300 persons, of whom 4,750 died. If so, altogether 9,800 military and Asian civilians would have perished on Babeldaob, the vast majority from famine and disease. Including Palauan and other Islander deaths would take this number to 10,000. (By comparison, according to the *Senshi Sōsho*, 10,200 Japanese died defending Peleliu in one of the longest and hardest-fought battles of the war; the Americans suffered 1,600 deaths in seizing Peleliu.)

The problems in using the 59<sup>th</sup> regiment's draftees as a valid statistical sample for all Asian civilians are obvious. However, Prof. Mike Burton cites an important principle advising us to use potentially useful information when that is all we have. I have found only two comparable figures for deaths among foreign civilian populations on the other 14 bypassed islands. They too are sobering in their magnitude. After the island of Mili surrendered, the Americans found that of an original 1,250 "construction troops", 615 survived; therefore 635, or 51%, had died. ("Construction troops" or "labor troops" is the inaccurate term many U.S. accounts use for what were actually Asian civilians forced into labor by the Japanese military; "slave laborers" is a fair term for them. The *Senshi Sōsho* refers to them as *gunpu*.) A second example comes from Chuuk (Truk), where the Americans found that in mid-1943 the Japanese had forcibly removed 1,202 natives from Nauru and brought them to Chuuk to work seven days a week on construction and gardening. At war's end only 761 of these were still alive; 441, or 36.7%, had perished, all by starvation (CinCPac-CinCPOA, February 1946, pp. 172, 181, 183). The Nauruans' sad tale echoes the situation of Korean laborers brought to Palau at the same time. Both the *Senshi Sōsho* vol. 13 (pp. 45- 46) and the postwar U.S. survey of Palau's military geology cite 2,500 Koreans as being in Palau by June 1943 (United States Army, 1956, p. 14). These laborers, abducted from their home villages and towns (Glionna, 2011), would see many more of their countrymen brought to Palau by early 1944 to work for the Japanese military. Their treatment, and their fates, would have matched closely those of the unfortunate Nauruans in Chuuk.

Regarding the civilian death rate on Babeldaob, even if the better documented death rate of 17.0% for the combined Army and Navy personnel on the island is the one applied to the Asian civilians, these would have started as 11,500 persons, of whom 1,955 perished. Using the *Senshi Sōsho*'s death rate on Babeldaob for troops of the Imperial Navy, 22.7%, the civilians would start as 12,350, of whom 2,800 died. Further, one can plausibly argue that the 59<sup>th</sup> draftees were able-bodied healthy males, the strongest category of civilians, which is why they were drafted in the first place. As ranked soldiers, they also would have received better medical care, and more food for a longer period of time, than did the other two categories of Asian civilians – the stranded and shunned undrafted immigrants (women, children, and the elderly) and the military's slave laborers, who were not ranked members of the armed forces. The draftees' 33% death rate, that is, was very likely *lower* than the rate for the other Asian civilians. My Palauan colleagues volunteered their opinions that the most miserable and disadvantaged of all those on Babeldaob were the Japanese immigrants, who lacked stores of food, knowledge of how to grow food crops, other social support, and, of course, weapons and the temperament to coerce food from Palauan farmers. Many in fact sought and received aid from Palauans. It is likely that a lower percentage of civilians died by the combat of strafing and bombing than did military personnel since civilians were able to hide and avoid military targets like camps, depots, anti-aircraft guns, and the watercraft sought by Marine air patrols. With civilian deaths on Babeldaob equal to those of the military, and civilians less likely to die from combat, starvation and disease would be the cause of over 80% of all the deaths on the island.

Given the available data, my working estimate for the rate of Asian civilian deaths on Babeldaob is the 33.2% of the 59<sup>th</sup> regiment's local draftees. This produces the presumed starting total of 14,300 Asian civilians. It is possible to make an informed estimate of how many of these were in each of the three civilian categories. Higuchi reports (1987, pp. 64-65) that 3,500 immigrant men, aged 10 to 45, were drafted in Palau when the Army arrived in April 1944. Among these were the 775 drafted by the 59<sup>th</sup> regiment. The *Senshi Sōsho*, in its Fig. 6 map of Babeldaob deployments, says of the second category, slave laborers (*gunpu*), that 3,179 survived to 31 July 1945. This would mean that these men, mostly Koreans, ended as 3,112, and so began as 4,660. Therefore, the remaining un-drafted immigrants would have numbered 6,140 when Babeldaob was cut off. Among this last category were all males over age 45; these, according to Higuchi (*ibid.*), were used as porters for the armed services.

As the civilian deaths on Mili and Chuuk imply, the horrendous loss of life on Babeldaob was by no means unique among isolated Japanese garrisons. Vol. 13 of the *Senshi Sōsho* also shows in its Attachment Table 1 that the 15 leapfrogged Japanese contingents in Micronesia (including Babeldaob's) contained 120,400 men considered to be military at the time they were cut off. Of these, 24,600 died before war's end, a rate of 20.4%. Starvation or disease accounted for 77% of these deaths. Rates of death varied from 75% on Woleai (4,976 out of 6,625) and 62% on Maloelap (2,050 out of 3,329), to 6% on both Pohnpei and Yap. As far as I can determine, these figures have not previously been collected and published in English. The *Senshi Sōsho* does not include estimates for deaths among civilians, either Asian or Micronesian, on these 15 bases. Altogether, adding the 240,000 Japanese troops the Americans bypassed in New Guinea, the Bismarcks, and the Solomons of the Southwest Pacific (Taaffe, 1998, pp. 52-53), Imperial Headquarters in Tokyo abandoned to their fate at least 370,000 men in the Pacific Islands. How many died in the Southwest Pacific will become clearer when the relevant volumes of the *Senshi Sōsho* are translated and fully analyzed. But Edward Drea (1998), in his essay on general Hatazo Adachi, says Japan sent a force of 140,000 men to eastern New Guinea. After being leapfrogged by the U.S., Adachi put 60,000 men on one-third rations, marched them through 300 miles of swamps and jungle along New Guinea's north coast, lost 10,000 in the defeat that awaited him when he caught up with the enemy at Aitape, and eventually surrendered a scant 10,000 survivors at war's end.

I estimate that between 150 and 225 Palauans died within the archipelago during the period of hostilities, from March 1944 to August 1945, while approximately 20-25 others died abroad while serving the military of Japan. The natural mortality rate would have produced about 65 deaths in this period.

Mark Peattie (1988b, p. 305) names the most common diseases as amoebic dysentery, paratyphoid and dengue fevers, and beriberi. This last is a debilitating disease caused by a deficiency of vitamin B, which resulted from heavy reliance on polished white rice.

<sup>4</sup> Describing the program as consisting of "spiritual and technical combat training" can leave the impression it was a sort of boys' camp where the Palauans memorized rules of clean living, practiced target shooting, and relaxed with recreational canoeing. The reality was very different. The guerrilla and weapons training and their goals I describe further on. The Palauans' "spiritual training" was actually constant indoctrination. Higuchi writes that it consisted of "rules, moral building, and pride building measures. These were emphasized to and propagated among the Palauans for 24 hours a day" (Ballendorf et al., 1986, pp. 97-98). To understand how the Imperial Army used the term "spiritual" requires familiarity with the idiom of the IJA in the 1930s and 40s. Rather than standing as polar opposites to things "worldly" or "military," as a Western reader might presume, intangibles like spirit were deeply embedded within IJA doctrine and training. *Seishin*, for example, means "fighting spirit." This was a pillar of IJA doctrine, extolled as the means by which the courageous and resolute Japanese soldier would overcome the huge material advantages of his American foe. Lt. Hachisu proudly recalls to Higuchi that when he visited former *Kirikomi-tai* conscripts 40 years later in Palau, they could still remember the precepts of *Yamato damashii*, the spirit of ancient Japan, because of his "severe training."

As Edward J. Drea demonstrates in his study of the IJA, following the defeat of Russia in 1905, an unsavory stew of ideological concepts began simmering in Japan, with the mythological *Yamato damashii* and a corrupted form of the feudal warrior code, *bushidō*, as key ingredients: ideas of racial superiority, Japanese exceptionalism under a 2,600-year-old imperial dynasty descended from Heaven, *seishin*, and the feudal notion of death before dishonor, which came to mean refusing surrender under any circumstances. By the time Japan went to war in China and the Pacific, these concepts had hardened into orthodoxy within what had become a thoroughly militarized imperial state. They were nowhere more deeply rooted than within the Imperial Army. They contributed directly to the extraordinary brutality with which this army treated those it conquered or captured, and to the imperative of death rather than surrender being forced even upon Japan's *civilian* population as the failed war

reached closer to the homeland. Death became the ultimate expression of loyalty to these ideals and to the deified emperor (see Drea, 2009, pp. 119-20, 132-35, 212-13, 246-48, 257-80; Ienaga, 1978, pp. 27-28, 48-50; Tanaka, 1996, pp. 206-11; Dower, 2012, pp. 74-82; 1986, chs. 8 & 10). All these concepts will bear grim consequences for the 50,000 persons trapped on Babeldaob under the fist of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division, particularly the rejection of surrender, which spurned a year's worth of chances to save many thousands of lives.

<sup>5</sup> If Hachisu said he taught the *Gunjin Chokuron*, the Imperial Code of Military Conduct, this directive “demanded absolute loyalty to the emperor” (Tanaka, 1996, p. 206). His racist remark is typical of Japanese attitudes toward Micronesians in the Nan'yō era. Japanese racism was most visible in the formal three-tier racial hierarchy imposed in the Nan'yō colony and maintained by the military during the war. Home-island Japanese occupied the top tier, Okinawans and Koreans made up the second class, while the Palauans and other Micronesians were *santō kokumin*, third-class peoples, the bottom tier in their own homelands (Murray, 2006, p. 80; Peattie, 1988b, pp. 111-112).

<sup>6</sup> This paper was first delivered at a conference in Honolulu in 1988, then collected for printing in 1991.

<sup>7</sup> Testimonies concerning the *Kirikomi-tai* are scattered throughout the interviews with Palauans in Ballendorf et al., (1986); see especially Higuchi's discussion on pp. 93-103. This document is difficult to navigate since it lacks an index or a table of contents for the 300 pages of oral interviews, the same interview may be printed more than once, and multiple interviews with the same person are not gathered together. Higuchi wrote an essay based on her interviews with Palauans, (1986), which is incorporated, with some revision, into the larger Ballendorf et al., 1986 report, on pp. 65-119. I cite its pagination within this report. Transcripts of her interviews with Capt. Morikawa and Second Lt. Hachisu appear in Higuchi 1987, pp. 162-176. But her 1991 paper contains quotes of the officers that do not appear in the 1987 document, so the latter may not be a complete text of the interviews. The estimate of 65 Palauan participants alive in 1985 is conservative, based on the UK National Survey of Health and Development, in which 13% of its lifelong participants had died by age 65 (<http://www.nshd.mrc.ac.uk/>).

Under the Fourth Geneva convention, civilians cannot be forced into military service. This convention came into force after WW II, but, like their counterparts at Nuremberg and Tokyo, American officials in Micronesia after the surrenders in September 1945 exercised great latitude in defining and prosecuting war crimes. They proved far more interested in punishing crimes against Allied prisoners of war than in investigating and punishing crimes the Japanese forces committed against their own people, other Asians, or Micronesians. See note 18 below for prosecutions related to Palau, and [www.crimesofwar.org](http://www.crimesofwar.org), “compelling military service.”

<sup>8</sup> To attack Allied ships in Mediterranean harbors, the Italians developed motorboats loaded with explosives for ramming, and torpedoes guided by frogmen. The frogmen would ride the torpedoes, detach their warheads, then secure them to ships' hulls with magnetic clamps. In contrast to the meager results realized everywhere by the Japanese, the Italians inflicted serious damage to British capital ships and sank several merchant vessels between 1941 and 1943. Nor were the Italian operations suicidal: accompanying vessels picked up the frogmen after they attached their mines or dismounted from their torpedoes or ramming craft. See Kemp (2001).

<sup>9</sup> Had the regular American air patrols left them with any seaworthy vessels, Japanese forces on the other 14 leapfrogged strongpoints would have to cross scores or hundreds of miles of open sea to attack U.S. bases on Kwajalein, Majuro, or Enewetak in the Marshalls, Ulithi in the western Carolines, or Saipan, Tinian, and Guam in the Marianas.

<sup>10</sup> The cartoonist Rube Goldberg drew elaborately inefficient mechanisms meant to accomplish simple tasks. The photo caption is saying that the Japanese explosive devices were crudely home-made – i.e., exactly as Palauans described their weapons. The caption refers to “attacks” in the plural, saying they “are generally timed with a moonless night and a heavy rain squall. Detection of the swimmers is almost impossible despite alert watches.” It also says the swimmers “wrap their midriffs with bandages to protect themselves from the concussion.” Warner & Warner (1982, p. 163), write that suicide boat trainees in the Philippines at graduation received, among other items, “an eight-inch-wide band to be wrapped around the body as protection against underwater explosions.” Comparing the dates of attacks with lunar phases shows that indeed they occurred on nights when the moon set early or rose very late. The notable exception was the operation of 24 December 1944, when, hoping to catch the Americans off guard on Christmas Eve, the raiders risked being silhouetted in the evening by a moon two days past first quarter and two-thirds illuminated.

Ngerechong Island and the ships anchored in Shonian Harbor would be attractive targets for several reasons. From Babeldaob they were closer and more vulnerable than heavily-defended Peleliu. They also could be reached by raiding parties coming south on two different routes, depending on the seasonal winds: either through the

central lagoon and Rock Islands (offering protection from fall and winter's northeast trade winds, what Palauans call *ongos*), or along the east side of the islands and through the patch reefs using Denges Passage at Ngerechong (during the southwesterlies, *ngebard*, of spring and summer). This latter route is the one the village boat of Peleliu follows today in its trips to and from Koror.

<sup>11</sup> Males aged 15-29 constituted between 15% and 16% of the total population. If there were 5,500 Palauans on Babeldaob, as I estimate, then among them were 825 to 900 such youthful males. See Gorenflo (1996) for demographic pyramids from 1925 (before Palau was disrupted by massive immigration) and 1958 (before large numbers of Palauans began emigrating for school and work). In 1980 males in these age brackets were 15.7% of the total population (Republic of Palau, 2001, p. 9).

<sup>12</sup> Poyer et al. (2001, pp. 226-28) describe what they call "the only organized rebellion to Japanese military rule in Micronesia" on Mili Atoll in the Marshall Islands, after the island had been cut off by the Americans in early 1944. A Marshallese man told them that following the execution of some Koreans for stealing, about 60 Marshallese, together with 400 Koreans, killed many Japanese in a surprise night attack. The Japanese retaliated by killing 97 Marshallese men, women, and children, and perhaps hundreds of Koreans, although the authors offer no estimate for the latter. I have found no documented verification of this event. The figure of up to 6,000 Koreans in Palau comes from the inscription on the Korean monument placed near the Palauan capitol in Melekeok; it is consistent with Japanese census data and data on surviving forced laborers and local draftees from the *Senshi Sōsho*.

<sup>13</sup> The people of the Yap islands, 275 miles northeast of Palau, have maintained stories about an IJA officer presumed to be the island commander, named Ito, that are remarkably similar to stories Palauans hold about Morikawa: Ito was a spy or an American agent, and a protector of the Yapese (Poyer, 1995, p. 228).

<sup>14</sup> For descriptions of the Japanese Army's ruthless treatment of the native Chamorros and the marooned Japanese civilians when the U.S. invaded Saipan in June 1944, and of the native Okinawans, who were Japanese nationals, when their homeland was assaulted in April 1945, see Spector (1985, pp. 317-18), Dower (1986, pp. 45, 298, 327 n.34), Cook (2001), Cook & Cook (1992, pp. 354-372), Ishihara (2001), and Breen (2008). Up to 150,000 Okinawans died in the fighting or were forced into suicide by the IJA.

<sup>15</sup> Although Palauans were used as porters by the IJA and were usually able to move about Babeldaob freely (both done at night), they mostly lived in shelters, *hinanba*, at their home villages – where Morikawa visited them on his rounds. Separated from concentrations of troops and Asian civilians, Palauans became aware of deaths by starvation among the foreigners, but they could not have known of the full scale among the military and civilians, all across the island. It also appears that Japanese recognition of Palauans' productivity in farming and fishing offered them protection, at least into mid-1945. As I explain, their continued safety was by no means assured had the war extended into 1946.

<sup>16</sup> While no IJA officer admitted it in postwar interrogations or interviews, it is plain that the greatest threat to Japanese control of Babeldaob arose from the breakdown of order and discipline among Inoue's own troops after their stocks of food were consumed and starvation began killing 5,000 of them, one out of every six. Every Palauan has stories about the *tōbōsha*, fugitives or deserters from the IJA, and the frequent chaos they caused as they roamed the island, stealing crops or fish catches, and abusing and terrorizing Palauans. See interviews in Murray (2006), Ballendorf et al., (1986) and Walter (1993), and the descriptions in Nero (1989) and Peattie (1988b). The military policeman Jiro Nakamura described his primary duty as preventing Japanese soldiers from escaping from their units (Higuchi, 1987, p. 154). They were deserting in order to find food. No major army in WW II had a deeper history of insubordination and factionalism, of conspiracy and coups, than the IJA (Drea, 2009; Ienaga, 1978). The threat these combat troops posed to Headquarters' control and privileges, had they become armed mutineers, vastly outweighed the very real danger from 5,000 discontent, starving, but unarmed slave laborers; and underlines how the supposed fears of revolt from helpless and cooperative Palauans were a smokescreen to hide the real purpose of the *Kirikomi-tai* camps.

Although he downplays the issue, Morikawa admits that Palauans "were afraid of the military," that "competition for food" caused trouble between them and Japanese soldiers, and that Palauans complained about the stealing of their coconuts and "potatoes" [*chemutii*, sweet potatoes]. As I have explained, the efforts of the *Morikawa Butai* were aimed at soothing the bitterness of Palauans toward these marauders, while the *Kirikomi-tai* had entirely different goals. Skilled as they were in gardening, the Palauans became as hungry as the Japanese soldiers, and had to resort to various wild "famine foods." Daytime gardening was too dangerous, the cycle of crops too long, the demand from 50,000 starving people too great, to allow the Palauan gardens alone to satisfy the pressing need for food. The most productive plots on the island were the *mesei*, the Palauans' wetland taro patches

built before the evacuations to Babeldaob. These required heavy labor to construct, careful water management, and regular mulching and weeding. The large, nutritious taro crops they produced (*Colocasia esculenta*) would be a prime target for all the hungry populations at first, but replanted taro required a year to mature. The dryland gardens started by the soldiers would not have produced comparable amounts of food, and of course, none at all until 3-6 months after planting in late 1944. Both Palauan and foreign gardeners grew sweet potatoes, *chemutii*, since these were both nutritious and matured in a relatively short four months.

<sup>17</sup> Karen Walter found that records of the U.S. Marine Air Groups operating from Peleliu show that beginning in January 1945 their air patrols aggressively sought to locate and destroy Japanese boats and barges hidden beneath trees in Babeldaob; they increased their patrolling further during March and April (1993, pp. 122-24). These actions were certainly responses to the *Kirikomi-tai* raids mounted on 18 November and 05 and 24 December 1944, 18 January 1945, and early March, specific attacks that Walter was unaware of. (She writes instead of general “infiltrations” down from Babeldaob.) She also describes additional air action against the Rock Islands north of Peleliu after Japanese “infiltration” into them in June 1945. The large *Kirikomi-tai* raid against Ngerechong Island, described above, took place on 16 June. Walter offers no bouquets to the American commanders of the air campaign for their ignorance and indifference toward the Palauans trapped with the enemy. She found no records that the U.S. fliers had orders to avoid Palauans, even after escaped Japanese and Koreans gave the U.S. intelligence about their predicament. The U.S. was more interested in destroying the many Japanese installations on Babeldaob (pp. 134-138).

<sup>18</sup> The Allies had scheduled the invasion of Kyūshū for November 1945, and the Kantō Plain (Tokyo) for March 1946. Recall that except for the 150 in American hands on Angaur, the entire population of Palauans was stranded on Babeldaob, and so would share the fate dictated by General Inoue for all those on the island. No Japanese commander of the 15 bypassed Micronesian outposts released any civilians or military men under his control until the final surrenders at war’s end, in September 1945.

Shohei Ooka’s novel, *Fires on the Plain* (1957) and the masterful film made of it by Kon Ichikawa (1959), dramatize the collapse of humanity among Japanese soldiers scattered and starving in the Philippines after the U.S. assaults demolished their units. One of their most revealing insights is that men undergoing such slow dying gradually lose their sanity; many resort to murder and cannibalism. For other examples of madness, murder, and cannibalism among Japanese troops in the Southwest Pacific, see the accounts by Masatsugu Ogawa in Cook & Cook (1992, pp. 268-74), Tanaka (1996, ch.4), and O’Donnell (2002, pp. 127-129). The only examples of cannibalism documented from Micronesia thus far occurred in the bypassed Marshall Islands. Guards had to be posted at graveyards to prevent grave robbing by famished soldiers (United States Strategic Bombing Survey, 1947, p. 49).

The reader should note that the despairing Japanese soldiers in all these theaters, like their comrades on Babeldaob who deserted their units in search of food, were struggling to live, to survive the war and return to their families. Once their battles were lost, they did not seek the empty deaths urged on them by their government and military superiors. The Army command on Babeldaob conspicuously failed to set a heroic standard for its men in this regard. General Inoue and his chief of staff, Col. Tada, both surrendered themselves and all their forces to the Americans on 02 September 1945. The U.S. arrested Inoue and tried him for the execution in Palau of one American and nine European civilians by his subordinates, and tried him and Col. Tada for the execution of three U.S. Navy frogmen captured while reconnoitering Yap on 13 August 1944. Inoue was imprisoned until 1953, and died in Japan in 1961. Col. Tada argued at his trial that he had opposed killing the three frogmen, and he was released. Capt. Morikawa and Lt. Hachisu also surrendered to the Americans. The U.S. Navy treated Morikawa’s dysentery and repatriated both men. Forty years later Higuchi found them living in a peaceful and prosperous Japan. Despite Inoue’s bluster to his American captors, there is no known example of any officer of the 14<sup>th</sup> Division committing suicide when Japan capitulated. See Higuchi, 1987, pp. 153-61; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadae\\_Inoue](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadae_Inoue); <http://www.missingaircrew.com/yap2.asp>.