

## Japan's Kamikaze Suicide Pilots Exhibit at the USS Missouri in Honolulu: an interview with M.G. Sheftall 戦艦ミズーリ号（ホノルル）で日本の神風特攻隊展□M.G. シェフトル氏に聞く

Arudou Debito, M.G. Sheftall

*M.G. Sheftall, Professor of Modern Japanese History at Shizuoka University and author of [Blossoms in the Wind: Human Legacies of the Kamikaze](#) (Penguin 2005), was in Honolulu, Hawaii, aboard the battleship USS Missouri (site of the Japanese surrender in World War II) speaking at the dedication of a temporary exhibition of the Tokkō Kamikaze suicide pilots on April 10 and 11, 2015.*

*Dr. Sheftall, what's going on?*



**Death awaits: Pictures of kamikaze pilots form part of an exhibition currently being held aboard the USS Missouri in Honolulu. | M.G. SHEFTALL**

You've just witnessed something very historic, because the exhibit that just opened is the first of its kind ever held outside of Japan with

Japanese cooperation. As far as I know, it's also the first exhibit outside Japan about Japanese military activity in the modern era *at all* that has ever been set up with Japanese cooperation. We may be witnessing a sea change toward more openness and frankness in Japanese war memory discourse, and this is the beginning of it.

What makes the USS Missouri an especially relevant venue for this is that it is to my knowledge only one of two still existing ships that were actually hit by Kamikaze during the war. The other one is the USS Intrepid that is in New York Harbor, moored up against Manhattan in the Hudson River. The Missouri was hit on April 12, 1945, so this exhibit and the dedication is happening exactly 70 years after the event.

There's a feel-good aspect to this story - very hard to do when you're talking about Kamikaze attacks. You have the Kamikaze plane that hit the Missouri, but its bomb did not detonate. So what you've got is a wreck of an aluminum plane that collided with a thick steel wall, it caught on the top edge of that. The wreckage spilled out onto the deck and amidst that was the remains of the pilot, which would not have been there if the bomb had gone off. When the crew was putting out the fire that was caused by the fuel of the crash, the initial reaction had been to hose the pilot's remains off the deck. But the Captain of the Missouri, William Callaghan, said, "No, wait a minute. We're going to give this pilot a proper military burial. Now that he's dead, he's not the enemy

anymore. He's just another human being, like you and me, who died for his country. There was a little bit of understandable emotional resistance to this amongst the crew. But the captain got on the PA system and explained to the whole crew that they were going to have a formal burial at sea tomorrow, and everyone had to show up for it. The next day, they all stood on deck, with full gun salute for their former enemy being consigned to the depths that day, and the crew members on the funeral detail actually made a Japanese flag shroud from old unused signal flags in the storage room. So it was really something done with full honors. The chaplain - there was obviously no Buddhist chaplain on board, so they used the next best thing, a Christian chaplain - said a few words for him and then they gave him the formal naval "burial at sea" funeral. I think that's a nice story. If there can be some recognition of shared humanity under circumstances like, I think that shows some hope for human beings in an otherwise insane and irrational situation dominated by hatred and fear.

## **2) How many ships were actually sunk in the Kamikaze campaigns?**

I believe they sank about 40 ships, damaged or sank about 200 ships all together, and killed or wounded about 15,000 Allied servicemen, mostly US Navy sailors. And close to 6000 Kamikaze, mostly aviation pilots, but manned torpedo, manned rocket bomb and special rammer motorboat personnel - about a thousand for the latter - also, died.

## **3) Dispel what you see to be some myths about the Kamikaze.**

First of all, let me talk about the term Kamikaze itself. It's not a historically accurate term because it's not what the Japanese called it during the war. As a historian of Japanese events, I prefer to use the Japanese term, which was the euphemistic phrase "Special Attack Forces" or *Tokubetsu Kōgeki Tai*, shortened to

*Tokkō*. The word "Kamikaze" also comes with a lot of baggage - negative imagery, and obviously, stereotypes, and a lot of tacky usage as a slang term: Kamikaze taxi driver/skateboarder/surfer/cocktail. It's synonymous with irrational insanity. There is an irreverence - a silliness - there which I believe is inappropriate and disrespectful to the dead, on both sides.

Now, the myths: There are a bunch. One is the myth that they were "brainwashed" or doped or something like that. That was not true and not necessary. People might think, looking at it from a Non-Japanese cultural perspective, that the only way people might be able to wrap their head around people doing something like that would be that Kamikaze were put into some kind of religious cult or intensive training to get ready for something like this. That's not true. The world view and the value system and the psychology of any Japanese military man at the time was of such a nature that it wouldn't take much mental or emotional preparation at all to get ready for a Kamikaze mission. In many cases, guys were just told that they were just getting assigned to *Tokkō*, say, from tomorrow. And that would be all the preparation time you were given. There was special technical training, but not much psychological preparation. The *Zeitgeist* of Japanese military culture at the time - and of the Japanese nation *in toto* in the frenzied throes of a losing total war - would have made that redundant.

The way people were chosen was always in large units, which is another myth that has to be dispelled - that they were all volunteers. As per my previous remark about the lack of much need for "brainwashing", etc., I don't even know if the term "volunteer" has any relevance in a 1944-45 Japanese military context. The way that they would gather personnel for these missions was that they would assemble them *en masse*, and then an officer would come out, and say, depending on the knowledge level of the pilots he was addressing, "You know how bad

the war situation is going, now...,” or, if they were kids fresh out of pilot school, who had only heard good things thus far about the war, he’d have to give them a lecture about how things hadn’t been necessarily developing to Japan’s advantage, to paraphrase a certain August 1945 speech. And then they would ask for people to take on these *Tokkō* missions, with everyone in full view of everyone else – their comrades-in-arms and of course the commanding officers. They would be asked to circle chits of paper, or take a step forward – when they’re already standing in tight ranks.

Imagine the peer pressure and face-threat involved in that atmosphere of adolescent testosterone and fatalistic heroism and macho posturing. You’re standing in ranks with guys you’ve bled, sweated, and wept with for the past six months to a year. By now you’ve formed your primary psychological identity as a man in uniform – incredibly difficult to be objective about something like that at that age. I know, because I’ve been there, done that. In the “heat of the moment”, so to speak, eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old, your ego is so wrapped up in and dependent upon your self-perceived role as “heroic soldier” that if you were to give that up by refusing to follow an order to action – or in this case, to “volunteer” – you’d suffer huge psychological injury. Ego collapse. Plus knowing that your family back on the block or back in the village would suffer shame – or worse – when news about you’d done got back to the neighborhood? Forget about it. For a young Japanese man in uniform at the time, such a scenario must have promised a fate worse than death – without the luxury of a worldview accommodating the possibility that refusing orders in such circumstances could be as or more courageous than following them. Only truly extraordinary individuals – and I mean that in the literal sense of extraordinary – had either the force of will, the presence of mind, or the sheer will to survive in that situation to come out and say “Hey, this is insane! Count

me out!” There were, still, some people once in a while who would refuse, and they would be removed from the group very quickly. They weren’t killed or anything, but they were shipped off and isolated so as not to infect others with their bad morale. The Army was apparently especially severe with pilots felt to be insufficiently motivated about the *Tokkō* concept. Basically, they would beat the crap out of them until they folded and changed their minds – did a *Tokkō tenkō*, if you will. Some *Tokkō* pilots in both services survived the war by repeatedly reporting “engine trouble” with their planes, which would give them a pretext to return to their bases in the middle of a mission and live to see another day while their ground crews took the engines apart looking for the phantom mechanical problems.

But the vast majority accepted their *Tokkō* missions and were left to their own devices to rationalize their fate in whatever intellectual or emotional means they could manage. Some wrote those incredibly well-written and erudite farewell letters that are so well known, others just drowned out their fears and doubts basically shouting slogans to the end. You see some farewell letters like that, too. But no one can ever know what was really going through their heads in their final hours... or their final seconds. Some of my *Tokkō* informants even reported feeling insulted about being asked to go through the rigmarole of the volunteer ceremonies. Their thinking was “I’m a pilot in His Majesty’s Army/Navy, how *dare* they consider the possibility that I might *not* want to fly a *Tokkō* mission!” But I wonder if that’s what they were really thinking then. If it was, then that’s rather scary, don’t you think? It shows the power of the military institution and environment – and this is true in any culture, not just Japan’s – to shape young egos and yet-naïve worldviews to its own devices and bidding. But it’s not our place to judge them. Only to try to understand how all of that happened and make sure it never happens again.

Some might nevertheless want to claim that the pilots were brainwashed in some way, but if that is your criteria, then at the time everyone in the country was brainwashed and therefore the *Tokkō* were nothing unusual. There was not much difference in the mindset and the preparedness to sacrifice between someone in uniform and someone not in uniform in Japan at the time. Especially since the end of the Battle of Okinawa, from the standpoint of the government, all military personnel were *Tokkō*. There wasn't even the necessity of keeping up the pretext of having these "volunteer ceremonies" anymore - it was basically announced, "Everyone's *Tokkō* from today." This was actually an official proclamation from Imperial General Headquarters in June 1945: All planes and pilots were slated for *Tokkō* - if you're a trained pilot, be ready for *Tokkō*. That was actually related to the relative lack of air defense efforts over Japanese cities compared to German cities.

When Allied planes started making bombing raids in force and strength over Japan from Fall 1944, the Japanese made spirited attempts to shoot down the B-29s. This is about the time the *Tokkō* started. After those few initial months, though, the Japanese planes that rose up to meet the B-29s fell off quickly, almost to zero once the bombers started having fighter escorts after the fall of Iwo Jima. The reason why they stopped putting up planes was, contrary to popular belief, not because they ran out of planes. Between the Japanese Army and Navy they had something like 6000 planes left at the end of the war. They were holding back those planes to use as *Tokkō*.

So they let the cities burn, basically, because if they put the planes up against the bombers maybe one out of ten will shoot one down. That's what - ten Americans in one B-29? All the rest of the Japanese planes will be lost. The Japanese military looked at it as a waste of pilots and aircraft to put up a spirited defense, so better to save them for *Tokkō* to use when

the Americans invaded Kyushu and Kanto.

Another myth with very long legs is that the Kamikaze pilots only had enough fuel for one-way missions. Two reasons that's wrong. One, especially true for Army pilots insufficiently trained in overwater navigation, was that they were often sent out to find targets - remember, they weren't very good pilots to begin with - and they couldn't find them. If you did that only with enough fuel to reach the target area, you don't incur any damage against the enemy, and the Japanese military loses a pilot and the plane. Just the logic of that alone should be enough to dispel that myth.

But another reason is that the damage these small fighter planes were able to wreak on a target like a warship with their small bombload and light airframe weight was very limited. Half of the damage a Kamikaze plane inflicted on its target, especially on the other human beings riding on that target, was the fuel that it was carrying. It's in effect a 3- or 4-ton Molotov Cocktail. It would hit, the bomb would go off, plus all of the fuel that would have been there for the return trip gets turned into extra explosive charge - napalm, basically. It would spread fires far away from the point of impact, and it would wreak havoc on human flesh, obviously.

I think this myth about the one-way fuel, and this is something you read about in Japanese books, started because of people confusing it with the story of the Battleship Yamato. Its last mission was essentially a surface *Tokkō* mission. It was sent off to Okinawa with a half-load of fuel because it was not intended to return. It was to make its way down to Okinawa, without air cover by the way, and it was going to beach itself and become a shoreline castle shooting its guns against the Americans until it was eventually blown up. When you're talking about the fuel for a vessel that large, thousands and thousands of tons, they had more uses for that fuel other than

something that would just get sunk with the Yamato on its way down to Okinawa anyway. Which is what happened, of course. It was found by American reconnaissance planes and done in by carrier-borne dive bombers and torpedo bombers, in an incredible waste of men and materiel.

**4) You mentioned earlier about other Tokkō missions, including the suicide motorboats. But we hear mostly about the pilots, hardly ever about the other types of Tokkō. Tell us a little more about these other branches, and why you think the pilots have garnered all the attention, especially in popular culture and at Yasukuni Shrine, where they are more famously enshrined as heroes?**



**Kaiten 4 manned torpedo. Yushukan Museum, Yasukuni Shrine**

In addition to the iconic self-immolating bomb-laden fighter plane version of Tokkō almost anyone inside or outside of Japan associates with the term “Kamikaze”, there were three other major Tokkō platforms that we could deem significant in terms of: 1) the expenditure involved in their development and production; 2) the initial expectations the Japanese military had for their success; and 3) the loss in human

lives caused by their deployment. These were the *Kaiten* (“Fortune-reverser”) manned torpedo, the *Shin’yō* (“Ocean-shaker”) rammer-motorboat, and the *Ōka* (“Cherry Blossom”) manned rocket bomb - which was essentially a 1940s cruise missile with a human being in place of a computerized guidance and target acquisition system. Really brutal contraption.

In any case, all three of these platforms were bitter disappointments for the Japanese military. Each of them resulted in over a thousand “friendly” fatalities involved in attempts to deploy them - this is also counting the crew members of the “motherships” ferrying the *Kaiten* and *Ōka* (specially modified fleet submarines for the former, and specially modified twin-engined bombers for the latter) into battle - while only causing a few hundred Allied casualties in total between the three of them, as compared with “conventional” aviation Tokkō, which caused some 15 thousand Allied casualties just in the Battle of Okinawa alone. So, right off the bat I would say that this dismal operational history is certainly a sizable factor behind the rather low profile - and the poor reputation, when known at all - of these specialized Tokkō weapons in the postwar Japanese public imagination.

In other words, there’s not much “story-worthiness” there from the standpoint of either the producers or consumers of entertainment media content - which is of course how and where most postwar Japanese learn about Tokkō to begin with, not to mention most of their 20th century Japanese history. Also - and I hope this doesn’t sound as cynical as I’m afraid it might - these three Tokkō platforms would not have lent themselves to economically viable cinematic depiction in the pre-computer graphics era 1950s, 60s and 70s Japanese film industry - when the postwar Tokkō legacy took the decisive “semi-romanticized” turn in Japanese historical consciousness that has characterized it ever since, and that was itself largely the result of the influence of Tokkō

films of the era, which were financed by sympathetic conservatives in the entertainment industry and “technically advised” by former IJA and IJN figures. A couple of *Kaiten*-themed films were made – one that comes to mind starred a young Ishihara Yūjirō during his breakout period – but the model-making and special effects were extremely challenging and also apparently quite expensive. Much more economical to use model airplanes against a rolling “sky” backdrop with some clouds painted on it, right? Plus the more claustrophobic, horrific, and yes, futile aspects involved with the specialized *Tokkō* platforms could be avoided. Instead, in the stock *Tokkō* story arc of the era, you have these dashing young men sitting around a single barracks room set, delivering soliloquys and speeches about the meaning of it all, then donning white pilot scarves and boarding their planes at the end of the movie to fly off into the clouds – literally disappearing into the heavens -- as the credits roll and the stirring music kicks in. No blood-and-guts horror, no killing, no futility depicted. Fukuma Yoshiaki wrote a great media studies treatment some years back now on the postwar cinematic treatment of *Tokkō*. I would love to translate that someday.

Another factor behind the relative low historical or imaginal profile of these weapons, perhaps, is the fact that, unlike fighter aircraft *Tokkō* – which received spectacular real-time coverage in wartime Japanese news media, both print and broadcast – these other *Tokkō* platforms were top military secrets while the war was on. Their personnel toiled and died in media anonymity under the resulting media blackout. Most Japanese only first found out about the *Kaiten*, *Shin'yō* and *Ōka* in the early postwar, when imagery of these mission-specifically-designed *Tokkō* machines was employed in the extensive media effort undertaken by Occupation authorities to destroy the credibility in the eyes of the postwar Japanese populace of what I call the “Kamikaze ethos”. The *Tokkō* reputation was

one of the very first aspects of wartime Japanese ideology GHQ went after in the first weeks of the Occupation – it was a top priority “re-education” item, and I would say the Occupation authorities got quite a bit of propaganda mileage out of this as part of their larger, more ambitious, and more strategically important (at least in those early postwar pre-Reverse Course days) aim of discrediting the modern Japanese military ethos and ideology *in toto* that had made *Tokkō* possible in the first place. It was a very, very effective media campaign the effects of which continue to be felt in Japan to this day. And this explains why Japanese Establishment conservatives/historical revisionists came out swinging so hard and so soon after the end of the Occupation – that is, after it was safe for them to crawl out of their Occupation Era hiding places – in their attempts to rehabilitate (or at least romanticize) the *Tokkō* reputation. This has been done, again, primarily via entertainment media, but politicians and other Establishment figures have also had a hand in this. For example, readers may recall that the present Prime Minister dedicated several pages of his mid-2000s manifesto *Utsukushii Kuni E* to praising the *Tokkō* personnel and holding up their ethos of self-sacrifice and loyalty as models for today’s (as implied in Abe’s forced comparison, hapless and pathetic) Japanese youth.



**Bronze statue of Tokkō pilot outside Yūshūkan museum**

This tireless and by now multigenerational conservative strategic campaign for the rehabilitation of the *Tokkō* reputation in postwar Japanese hearts and minds is of course also why Yasukuni makes such a big deal out of the *Tokkō*, especially in displays and memorial statuary at the *Yūshūkan* museum on the shrine's precincts. Just as GHQ's media strategists did, postwar Japanese conservatives/historical revisionists very early on realized the key strategic importance, in a political/ideological/historical consciousness sense, of seizing what we might call "editorial control of the approved narrative" of the *Tokkō* legacy in the public imagination. And we must admit that these efforts have been spectacularly successful in rescuing the *Tokkō* legacy from its early postwar nadir. Look at the

box office records smashed by the *Tokkō* feel-good vehicle "The Eternal Zero" last year. Forty, fifty years ago, there would have been riots in the streets against the producers of a movie like that. What has happened? What has changed?

In my opinion, the Japanese Left has really dropped the ball on this. Somewhere around the 1960s, the Left seems to have just given up on the issue and ceded complete control of the *Tokkō* legacy narrative to the Right. Perhaps they were distracted by other issues - Vietnam, the reversion of Okinawa, all of that Red Army stuff going on then - perhaps they mistakenly believed that getting a couple of generations of junior high schoolers to read *Kike Wadatsumi no Koe* was enough to ensure that a warm, fuzzy spot could never be found again for *Tokkō* in the public heart. They were wrong, obviously, completely missing the power of sentimentality/romanticism and of visual imagery and tribal loyalty appeals over written text and preaching in the fight to win over impressionable young minds. Though even in retrospect, and in all fairness, it's difficult to see how the Left could have played that out differently with no movie studios and/or publishing conglomerates in their pockets. People pay money for movie tickets and comic books because they want to be entertained, and as far as entertainment value vis-a-vis the *Tokkō* legacy goes, the nation's moviegoers and manga-readers are going to vote with their feet and their cash, and over the past few decades we've seen that those votes go to feel-good, romanticized *Tokkō* fare, and the entertainment media industry - with Establishment encouragement, especially with nationalists now in control of Nagatacho, I would imagine - will keep churning out what sells.

So, to recap, lack of "story-worthiness" - again, from an entertainment media standpoint - plus wartime media blackout and possibly some lingering Occupation Era shame about these "weird weapons" are probably the main

reasons why we do not see or hear much about them in Japanese public discourse today.

Without the Yamato's crewmen included, the total number of Japanese military deaths in the war as a result of *Tokkō* missions specifically designated as such is just under six thousand, but with the superbattleship's April 1945 casualties included, the total approaches nine thousand.

**5) *Let's change gears. How has your reception in Hawaii been regarding this event?***

Without exception 100% positive. News coverage has included a full front page plus another full page inside April 10's *Honolulu Star-Advertiser*, Oahu's sole remaining daily newspaper. That made the *Los Angeles Times* the following day in its entirety, also in *Stars and Stripes*, the US military newspaper. We had an interview on the Japanese-language radio in Hawaii, and that goes out to all of the main islands. Mayor Shimo-ide of Minami-Kyushu City and the General Manager of the Chiran Peace Museum were asked about what we were doing here, but the DJ didn't dwell too much on the *Tokkō* topics. It was more of a nostalgic travelogue talking about the charms of Kagoshima Prefecture and Chiran in particular. Lots of potatoes there, not too much meat.

**6) *We've recently seen interference from the Japanese Government in how historians have portrayed Japanese history. Also foreign journalists critical of Japan in their coverage are being harassed. Has the Japanese Government been in touch with you over this?***

No. And there's a reason for this. Since the beginning of the project, one of the first things that came to mind for myself and my counterparts at Chiran was the Smithsonian Enola Gay Exhibition controversy in 1994-95. That was a watershed event in US-Japanese

relations - in a bad way - and in the way that war memories are dealt with in American public discourse as a whole. That fiasco set the cause of responsible war memory discourse in America back at least a generation. A squandered opportunity. As you may recall, the original plan was that the Air and Space Museum in Washington DC would feature the Enola Gay airplane, returned to pristine condition after a lengthy and very expensive restoration, and the curator at the time had planned an exhibit about this plane and what it did. He was a civilian liberal-arts academic, not an Air Force type. Early on he contacted the Hiroshima Peace Institute and got them to cooperate on putting an exhibit together. I think even some artifacts from Japan had already arrived - things like the melted children's lunch box, the watch stopped at 8:30AM - very iconic artifacts from the Hiroshima bombing. Powerfully evocative, emotional material. They also had photographs of what happened to human bodies, Japanese photos, and US strategic bombing photos when the US was doing a lot of research down there about how effective the weapons of mass destruction were. It would have been a powerful showcase of American resolve - which now appears to be non-existent in public discourse - about looking unflinchingly at the past, a break from the rah-rah John Wayne narrative of WWII. It would have been a fantastic opportunity for reconciliation and showing American maturity vis-à-vis historical consciousness towards the rest of the world.

But I think where the Smithsonian made their big strategic mistake was in making public these plans I think a full year ahead of time. They wanted to create buzz, but it was a midterm election year, the one that brought the Newt Gingrich tidal wave. And the Republicans in Congress got ahold of this issue and decided to get some political mileage out of it. They got in touch with the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the United States Air Force Association, and other associations and said, "Are you going to let



these pointy-headed liberal intellectuals in Washington DC sully the ‘Greatest Generation’ narrative with these pictures of Japanese children with keloidal scars on their backs and arms?” and melted lunch boxes and all this. They were able to whip up a huge counter-offensive against it that ended basically with a Congressional blackmail: Dump the human-interest stuff or you don’t get a budget from us next term. That was it. That killed it. The curator resigned in shame and I can imagine extreme disappointment, and a great opportunity was blown - and right on the heels of some very promising Japanese gestures at the time toward more openness and frankness about the way, for example the Murayama statement, etc. I still feel sick to my stomach when I remember that episode.

So to go back to what I was saying earlier, when we were first thinking about this, the Enola Gay thing was going through my head, and I first convinced the Chiran people that it would be better if we kept all of this hush-hush until the last moment, without it looking, you know, suspicious. We would give the public and the press two weeks’ notice. We contacted the Missouri people and had them recall the Smithsonian fiasco, and we all agreed that we’d better keep this under wraps until it’s all ready to go, don’t give anyone a chance to mount a counter-offensive. That includes governments on both ends. The announcements came out at the end of March. So, the Japanese Government was caught unawares without time to hold their meetings and decide if and-or how they were going to put Ziegler-style pressure on us, to make us say what they wanted us to say, or make us quit in the first place. The American government didn’t know anything either. Although, you never know, the NSA may have been reading our e-mails going back and forth across the Pacific (laughs). In any case, no government pressures or anything like that brought to bear. Of course, this also gives the authorities an out by being able to say “We didn’t know anything about it.”

I think before anyone knew how positive the American reaction was going to be, all of us involved in the project were pretty fearful. I think if the Japanese Government had known about it, they would have tried to stop it in some way or another. But everyone - me included, and perhaps most of all - was caught by surprise by how positive things have been, how positive the visitors and the news coverage has been. I was expecting more resistance from conservatives on both sides of the Pacific. And I guess the only alternative for the Japanese Government was to come out with smiles on their faces, which is what we got in Honolulu. About two days before we were to depart for Hawaii, the Chiran people contacted me that they had been invited by the Consul General in Honolulu to a formal dinner at the Consulate. So, pack a suit. It happened the first day we arrived, and we were all jet-lagged and no time to sleep or anything more than a shower, and there we were, sitting in the Consul’s mansion having dinner with the Consul and Vice-Consul and his Japanese Self-Defense Forces liaison man, and one of two of the Japanese employees from the Missouri Museum. Plus Mayor Shimoide and representatives of the Chiran Peace Museum, and myself.

More than telling us what to say and put editorial pressure on us, because after all the exhibit at that time was more of a *fait accompli* - they couldn’t really tell us to go back to the Missouri and tell us to change some things: for one thing they didn’t even know what was there - I think probably the only thing for them to do was to check us out, sound us out, and probably an email went out to Tokyo soon after reporting on findings. I don’t think they were too upset by who we are and what we’re trying to do. I didn’t get any sort of negative feeling at all from the Consul. I think the mission was just to check us out and report back to headquarters.

**7) What do you think about the tone of this display? Do you think something like this**

### ***could happen in Japan?***

Oh sure. It does happen. The most challenging thing about the narrative being put across at the Missouri is just that a show like that is being done at that venue at all. That's the only thing that could possibly be controversial about that display. It is very straightforward. It doesn't force a narrative on the visitors, which I like - it's a very different style from Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo, which is also very similar to Japanese war movies, which try to make sure that the Japanese audience absolutely understands the narrative that is trying to be put across by the presenters. Here, you walk in, and the Americans are presented with a human face of Tokkō, which I imagine most have never considered or contemplated before. That alone is a huge step for me. Getting the former enemies to acknowledge each other's humanity - that's a very basic and primal but critically-important first step towards true reconciliation.

In the absence of a forced narrative, visitors get some time to try to piece together on their own what happened and why. They get some idea of background culture that can give rise to something like this. There's a famous quotation from the Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors from I believe the late 1880s, a very important early document in formulating the modern Japanese identity as a nation. It's a strong martial ethos at its core, which says, "Duty is heavier than a mountain, but death is lighter than a feather." That's there on the wall of the exhibit along with a painting showing where the term Kamikaze came from -- the attempted Mongol invasions of Japan in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. And then the exhibit goes into showing some of their uniforms, their artifacts, their personal effects, flying helmets, some insignia from their uniforms. A doll that was made as a gift for an anonymous military man by what appears to be a high school girl, who had been involved in war mobilization at the time - she clearly made the doll as a self-portrait, depicting herself in her *monpe* work uniform.

The symbolism there is that the student intends it to be a doppelganger that will accompany the soldier, sailor, or pilot into battle because she can't be there in person, and she'll at least participate with him in spirit.

And then, the emotional core of the exhibit is a wall of facial photographs of approximately 100 pilots who flew from Chiran, as well as about twelve farewell letters from them, with English translations and biographic information of each pilot. The photograph and the letter section is quite similar to what they have at Chiran, which is only natural because the artifacts came from there. The Chiran people were very sensitive about how that specific material was going to be presented - which is entirely understandable, given their role as custodians of these memories - and the Missouri people were very accommodating about that. But the Chiran people also understood that the material would have to be displayed in this venue with a frankness, completely bereft of sentimentality, which is of course very different from the way material like this tends to be displayed in Japan, where there tends to be more of a forced narrative involved - either something more stridently anti-war or, conversely, something trying to rationalize the Tokkō in some way. As an example of the latter stance, the predominant narrative in a place like Yasukuni, and to a lesser extent at a place like Chiran, is they want to get across to the visitor that the dead did not die in vain. There's nothing like that in the Missouri exhibit, but you're asked to consider the humanity of former enemies, these young men who died, and that's something you almost never see in any war museum anywhere, I'd say, when the subject is a formerly hated enemy. And there are some people in America who will get upset about that, because they confuse showing facts and factual information as somehow being an endorsement of the cause of the people who died. That's just nonsense. There's absolutely nothing nefarious about asking people to consider the truth of this historical situation,

and the Missouri exhibit I think does a good job of asking visitors to do that without being forced to support either the cause for which, or the manner in which, the Tokkō died – and killed other human beings.

Overall, the tone is quite somber, more somber probably than you would see in a Yasukuni situation – or Chiran, until recently. But Chiran is changing, and this exhibit is part of that process. You see those faces of those young men and you think, “What a waste! That those men had to die like that, with the war already lost.” And you read those thoughtful letters from those people, many of whom had superb educations, then you imagine what they might have done for Japan had they lived long lives. They weren’t able to do that, because their potential was taken away from them by these circumstances and bad decision-making by middle- and high-ranking commanding officers and professional military men the vast majority of whom survived the war and lived to comfortable old age in the postwar. So I think that anyone, unless they’re blinded by some kind of political agenda, is going to see that and be affected by it. They will have a very sobering experience there, and the overwhelming message they will take home from that will be the tragic waste of war. Moreover, I would say that any war movie or war exhibit or anything like that where you walk away what you’ve just seen *not* feeling sobered, and saddened, and sickened by it – is disgusting propaganda. War museums should not be places one visits for an uplifting experience. Rather, what you see there should hit you like a punch to the gut.

**8) Last question: What is the takeaway message we should have from the Tokkō phenomenon?**

In terms of “big picture”, and this is something that has universal relevance for anyone living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – and this is also why the Chiran collections are historically invaluable

and must be preserved at all costs – is that this is a record of the last time that two fully-developed economic powers went at each other in a state of total war at that level of ferocity, emotional involvement, and disregard for cost and human destruction. Chiran witnessed the last chapter of the era of industrialized total war. Humanity will never see a war like that again. Or, if we do, there won’t be any time, wherewithal, or resources to build a museum about it because the war will be over in a day, and humanity, if there are any survivors, will take several centuries to recover.

The takeaway message from the Tokkō legacy itself should be one of terror. To realize to what extremes the condition of total war is capable of driving humans psychologically. I want visitors to the exhibit to realize that when you have societies with modern industrial capacity and mass media resources at hand to control information and mobilize their respective populaces to join into a shooting war, this is how it can end up. This is how crazy things can get. And we – all of us, the human race – cannot let that happen again.

As John F. Kennedy once said, “Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind”. The Chiran collection is a historically priceless time capsule from a world which humanity must not and cannot inhabit again -- not if we want our descendants to survive to see the 22nd century. Our species' sick love affair with the phenomenon of total war is over. Period.

To think otherwise -- to plan and prepare for something like that again or to look back on it with pride and fond nostalgia, in an era when our species shares the planet with some 16 thousand nuclear warheads -- is sheer madness.

*The exhibition on the USS Missouri runs through November via the Pacific National Monument at Pearl Harbor in Honolulu. See [here](#).*

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Recommended citation: *Arudou Debito and M.G. Sheftall, "Japan's Kamikaze Suicide Pilots Exhibit at the USS Missouri in Honolulu: an interview with M.G. Sheftall", The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 13, Issue 23, No. 1, June 8, 2015.*

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