

Wings of Defeat

PRODUCER/WRITER, LINDA HOAGLUND
PRODUCER/DIRECTOR, RISA MORIMOTO
DISTRIBUTED BY EDGEWOOD PICTURES
DVD, 90 MINUTES COLOR/B/W, 2007
ENGLISH/JAPANESE W/ENGLISH SUBTITLES

Reviewed by Alejandro Echevarria

W*ings of Defeat* is a documentary that contains rare interviews with surviving kamikaze pilots, also known as the *tokko* or *Tokkotai* (Special Attack Forces). However, the film deals with much more than the kamikaze. Risa Morimoto, the director of the film, had an uncle in Japan who was a surviving tokko. Although she found this out after his death, she had many questions about his life. For many Americans, the kamikaze may be considered fanatical suicide bombers who did not value human life. Yet, for Morimoto, this did not describe her uncle. The film explores the human side of the kamikaze through interviews, newsreels, photos, an animated sequence, documents, and voice-overs by Morimoto, as well as Japanese and American veterans.

This film belongs in the secondary and post-secondary classroom and is especially suited for World History and American History courses. Educators in early secondary education should decide if the film is appropriate due to the subject matter and the graphic images of

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Kamikaze pilot. ©2007 Edgewood pictures.



Kamikaze pilots. ©2007 Edgewood pictures.

war. One of the difficulties a teacher will have with the film is deciding whether to allot ninety minutes to the subject of the kamikaze, in addition to discussion time. In the past, I found that I could cover the subject of the kamikaze with fifteen minutes of newsreels and discussion. However, this is not the type of film where one can show a fifteen-minute segment. The entire film needs to be seen from beginning to end, and I believe it is indeed worth spending that amount of time. As a high school history teacher, I was quite taken with this film, and I believe it belongs in the classroom.

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FILM REVIEW ESSAYS



Survivor of the USS Drexler, a destroyer sunk by kamikaze pilots. ©2007 Edgewood pictures.



Photo still from the documentary Web site at <http://www.edgewoodpictures.com/wings-of-defeat/>. ©2007 Edgewood pictures.



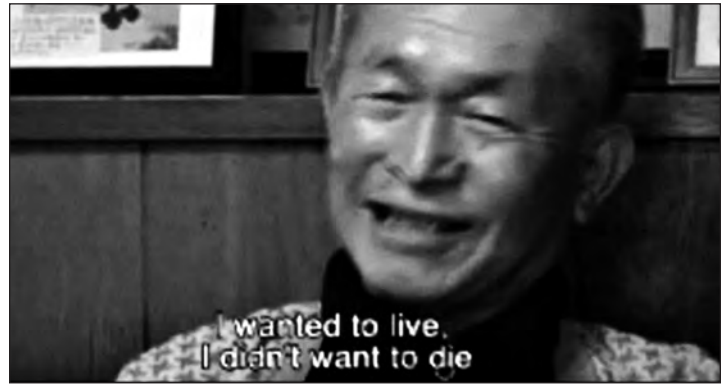
Japanese civilian shares her memory of war. ©2007 Edgewood pictures.

Wings of Defeat does not dwell solely on the kamikaze. The film gives a synopsis of the Pacific War, but focuses mainly on its final eight months. The lives of the pilots do not dominate the film, but instead become a story within a story.

Perspectives of Japanese civilians during the war play a pivotal role in the film. This perspective, difficult to find in other films, takes the students to a necessary place for them to understand the complexities of war. The film moves between the pilots' historical memory, the perspective of the civilian population, and the official policy of the Japanese government in such a complete way that the viewer understands why Japan continued to fight a war that devastated the nation.

American military survivors of the USS Drexler, a destroyer sunk by kamikaze pilots, give their account of fighting against suicide pilots


This film is about how ideology and belief guided the Japanese to use the Tokkotai as a last resort.



A former kamikaze pilot tells his story. ©2007 Edgewood pictures.

in a forty-minute follow-up film to *Wings of Defeat*. The film, entitled *Another Journey*, documents the American veterans' journey to Japan to meet and reconcile with the former kamikaze pilots featured in the film.

Many of the tokko pilots were teenagers, the same age as my students. Of the four thousand pilots, around three thousand were "boy pilots" with little understanding of the war, let alone knowledge of how


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... *Wings of Defeat is an ideal film
for concluding a unit on the Pacific War* ...

to successfully pilot a plane. Due to a labor shortage, high school girls in Japan were pulled out of the classroom to manufacture planes for these pilots. This alone makes the film engaging for students.

Interesting details in *Wings of Defeat* show the humanity of tokko pilots. When the director visits a small Tokkotai museum and opens a journal kept by one of the pilots, she shows intriguing drawings and entries that look very similar to what my students would journal. Many of the pilots adopted families around the training centers to help them ease the constant thoughts they had of their own deaths. Members of these families made dolls that represented themselves for the pilots to carry in their planes so that they would not be alone when they died. In a picture kept by one of the pilots, he points out the doll attached to his waist.

Wings of Defeat will help students think more deeply about the nature of warfare. This film is about how ideology and belief guided the Japanese to use the Tokkotai as a last resort. In an interview with one of the director's elderly family members, she said she had believed Japan would win the war once the government began to use the kamikaze. She believed the pilots were "deities" (*kami-sama*), and that now the gods were on the side of Japan. Even in the spring of 1945, when the war was at its worst for Japan, the kamikaze became a tool of propaganda. The population was urged to die for their nation, and the film shows a propaganda poster with the caption "Every citizen is now kamikaze."

This film has relevance today, as students are confronted almost daily with news about terrorists, fanatics, and suicide bombers. Perhaps this film will give them an anchor to ask the questions that should be asked. This is why Edgewood Pictures markets *Wings of Defeat* not just for History classes, but also for courses in Peace and Justice, Human Rights, Political Science, International Relations, and Media and Culture.

Teachers who purchase the film also receive a teacher's guide created by SPICE with "Letters to Educators" from Professor John Dower, Professor Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, Linda Hoaglund, and Risa Morimoto.

After viewing this film, I know I will devote more than fifteen minutes to the kamikaze. *Wings of Defeat* is an ideal film for concluding a unit on the Pacific War, and it will generate a classroom discussion questioning the nature of war. ■

ALEJANDRO ECHEVARRIA is a history teacher in the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program at Rampart High School in Colorado Springs. He was the 2007 US-Japan Foundation Elgin Heinz teaching award winner in the Humanities category.

Journeys in Japan the Japanland

DIRECTOR, KARIN MULLER

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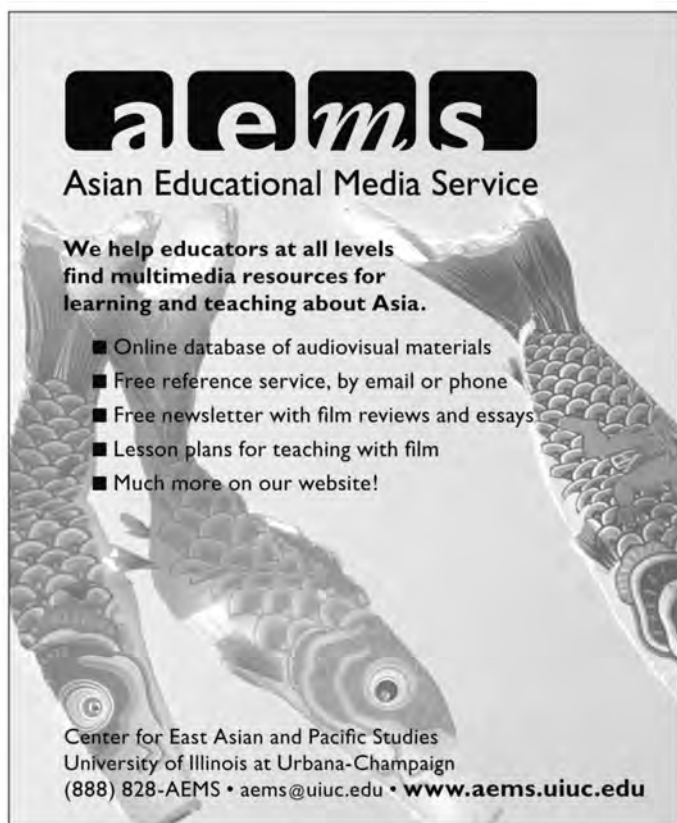
225 MINUTES, COLOR, TWO DVD SET, ALSO AVAILABLE IN VHS

Reviewed by Guven Witteveen

Karin Muller's *Japanland* book was published in 2005, and the double DVD set was released in 2006. Classroom supplements went online at japanlandstudyguide.com at the end of 2007. This review focuses on the four hours of short video segments that can be viewed as stand-alone pieces or played as a linear story that follows Muller's year of observing and participating in mainstream Japanese life, as well as pursuing far less common experiences across the islands.

The story opens with Karin introducing herself and the judo training that brought her to Tokyo. She then ventures out to some places within easy reach of the capital. From her interest in the similarities to and difference with her life in the US, she sets off for several months across the islands to learn about ongoing traditions and everyday life among the Japanese people.

What Karin does not say is that she has made travels before and presented them through film. Her other work, along with still images, some commentary (www.japanlandjourney.com), and ordering information for the *Japanland* set are online at www.japanlandonline.com. The quality of the audio and video is high. The pacing of edits and the length of each segment are also well done. Her storytelling and production skills are clear. No prior knowledge about Japan is presumed. The opening menu on each DVD allows easy navigation to individual episodes, which run between two and eight minutes. The story flows in chronological



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