

## *How Brave Is the Jap?*



*As a fighter, the Jap's no joke—  
but he's no superman, either.*

*Just a guy who's been taught from  
birth to do or die for his Emperor*

by FREDERIC S. MARQUARDT

**B**EFORE December 7, 1941, the average American regarded the Jap as a comical little fellow who bowed deeply from the waist and said, "So sorry." He was a good gardener, as those who lived in California knew, and had just the proper air to make a fine Fifth Avenue butler.

But as a fighting man, the Jap was obviously a joke. His army hadn't been able to lick poor old broken-down China in four years, and his navy had launched a warship so badly constructed that it turned over when it hit the water.

This picture was destroyed forever, though, by the bombs which fell on Pearl Harbor. Instead of being a light opera character who excelled in flower arrangement and tea ceremony, the Jap suddenly emerged as a terrible fighter who marched all day on a handful of rice and died with a smile on his face. He was so fanatically patriotic that he promptly disemboweled himself if he met the slightest reverse on the field of battle.

The image of the Jap warrior grew to truly terrifying proportions in the Philippine, Malayan and East Indies campaigns. He landed on coral-girt shores and advanced through impenetrable jungles. He used bicycles to rush down the Malay Peninsula, and tanks to smash through Luzon.

## 2 *How Brave?*



Instead of being merely imitative, the Jap blossomed out—in our imaginations at least—as one of the most resourceful, ingenious fighting men of all time. His navy Zero plane could outmaneuver anything we had in the Far East. In the jungles the Jap dressed himself in green, climbed into the trees and did some of the fanciest sniping since Daniel Boone. No military venture was too dangerous, no natural obstacle was too difficult, for this astounding little son of Heaven.



Fortunately, after those first awful months of war, American fighting men began to whittle the Jap down to size in our perspective. Bataan began to destroy the image of the unstoppable Japanese warrior, and the battles of Coral Sea and Midway showed that our side could win victories too. Then the Marines made their spectacular grab for the southeastern Solomons, and commando raids on enemy strongholds in the Pacific showed that the Jap was as susceptible to surprise and force as any other soldier.

There remained, however, the incredible valor of the Jap. He was utterly fearless in battle and died in heroic fashion.

Lieutenant H. L. Merillat, Marine Corps public relations officer who took part in the first Battle of the Solomons, reported that not one of the hundreds



of Japanese on Guadalcanal Island surrendered. They holed up in caves on the cliffs, and the only way to still their fire was to kill them.

On nearby Gavutu Island, the American raiders had to kill every one of 1,200 Japs before resistance ceased. On Tulagi 600 of the enemy were found and 600 were killed.

**THE JAPS** who attempted to retake the Tulagi area, in the second phase of the Battle of the Solomons, were as brave as the original garrisons. A Navy communique, releasing the official story of the fighting, told how 92 Japs tried to land on Tulagi, and how all 92 were killed before the Marines could report that the attack had been repulsed. Across the way, at Guadalcanal, 700 Japs landed, and 670 were killed. The remaining 30 were taken prisoners, and the presumption is that they were wounded.

In a hit and run raid on Makin Island, in which Jimmy Roosevelt was second in command, Carlson's Rangers left two of the 330 men in the Jap garrison alive. This pair hid in the tops of the trees, and the Marines couldn't find them.

All of which adds up to some pretty spectacular mass dying by the Japs.

But what makes the Jap so brave? Briefly, the Japs have two words for it. The first is *Shinto*, and the second, *bushido*.

Let's take *bushido* first. A literal translation of the word is "military-knight-ways," which freely paraphrased means "precepts of knight-

*How Brave?*

hood.” So far so good. But when you try to find out what those precepts are, you are in for trouble. About all you can learn is that they are no more like the knightly precepts of King Arthur than sukiyaki is like a porter-house steak.

Once I got hold of Dr. Inazo Nitobe’s slim volume entitled, *Bushido—the Soul of Japan*. Bushido, he said, consists of a few maxims, handed down from generation to generation. It is a code, most frequently unwritten and unuttered. Exactly what goes into the code, neither Nitobe nor anyone else I have come across has been able to say.

But if we don’t know what bushido is, we do know what it does. It makes the Jap tough. The ancient Samurais taught their children bushido by sending them to public decapitations, then making them visit the charnel house at night and leave a mark on the trunkless head of the person who had been executed.

Japanese babies apparently get bushido along with their mother’s milk. Otherwise, how can you explain the fact that Jap kids never cry in public? If a Japanese child is human enough to cry out when he is hurt, according to Nitobe, his mother rebukes him saying, “What a coward to cry for a trifling pain! What will you do when your arm is cut off in battle? Or when you are called upon to commit hara-kiri?”

Of course, Japanese scholars insist there is more to bushido than a stoical indifference to pain and hunger and discomfort. But undoubtedly that indifference is its greatest contribution to the courage of the Jap.

Shinto is something else. If bushido is the soul of Japan, Shinto is the way of life of the Japanese. It is the basic fact that makes the Jap different from everyone else, for at heart every Jap is a Shintoist and in reality no foreigner can become a Shintoist.

Shinto is not a religion. The Jap-

## How Brave?

Japanese government won't permit it to be called a religion, because that would put it on a par with Christianity and Buddhism in Japan. Shinto teaches of no heaven or hell and makes no distinction between good and evil, except insofar as things are good or bad for the state. The chief of Shinto is the Emperor of Japan, the direct blood representative of the first divine Goddess herself.

Through some obscure processes of Shinto, even the lowliest Japanese subject partakes in the divinity of the Emperor. Every Jap, from cabinet minister down to garbage collector, knows he is of a superior race, chosen to rule the world. This fanatical *knowledge*, something far different from the average American's *belief* that the United States is the best country in the world, is responsible for much of the Jap's determination to prove his superiority.

*"The Japanese have put great store in what they consider to be the white man's flabbiness. They look upon us Americans as constitutional weaklings, demanding our daily comforts and unwilling to make the sacrifices demanded for victory..."*

—JOSEPH C. CREW

Even on the athletic field, the Jap who loses feels he has been remiss in his duty to Shinto. Never have I seen such hangdog looks as those on the faces of Jap athletes forced to stand in the second or third position on the Victory Stand. One Jap Davis Cup player actually jumped off the liner carrying him back from the matches in Paris, because he had been defeated.

Perhaps you have stood, as I have, on Kudan Hill in Tokyo, before the great Shinto shrine erected to honor Nippon's warrior dead. The name of every Jap who has died in battle, from general to private, is supposedly written on the sacred rolls in this temple.

I have watched Japanese widows tell wide-eyed youngsters that their father's spirit lives in the shrine. And I have seen the children nod understandingly as their mothers tell them that they can attain no greater honor than to have their names inscribed there. Small wonder they die so willingly when their Emperor calls.

But in assessing the courage of the Jap, it is well to remember that Americans, without either bushido or

## How Brave?



Shinto to urge them on, are equally willing to die for their country. In the Battle of Midway every one of the 15 planes in Torpedo Squadron 8 was shot down as it drove home an attack on an enemy aircraft carrier, and only Ensign G. H. Gay, Jr., lived to report that a hit had been scored. Major Lofton R. Henderson, of the U. S. Marines, showed that suicide attacks were no exclusive attribute of the Jap, when he crashed his plane onto the deck of a carrier.

The comparative bravery of Japanese and American troops was best assessed on blood-soaked Bataan, where months of daily battle provided ample occasion to prove who was the better man. I have been privileged to read the letters of several American army officers who were on Bataan and who managed to get mail out by plane and submarine before the fall.

“The Jap is stubborn,” wrote one American army officer. “In the three days of mopping up on the Bagac side of the lines, we had to kill over 300 Japs who had seeped through our lines or gotten ashore from boats. We offered them surrender, but they threw grenades and fired while they had ammunition and then resisted with the bayonet.

“We got 20 alive who had been stunned, and they state if they had known we did not castrate our prisoners and otherwise torture them, they would have surrendered. They state that the officers would kill any man who returned—that they themselves would not be able to explain why they had been taken alive—and that they

*How Brave?*

would be shot on sight in order that the officers might maintain the fiction.

“I have not seen them do this, but men who were at Pilar say they saw Jap officers shoot down Jap soldiers who were breaking under our counter-attack, and they insist it was deliberate. Others state they saw Japs, whom they took to be officers, beat and cut down with swords men who were faltering in our machine gun patterns.”

Another letter from Bataan says:

“The Jap is a good fighter, there is no doubt about that, but that he is a man eager to die has been exploded by the number of times we have driven him back in his headlong rushes against our lines. I have seen him step over the carcasses of his dead comrades to come on, but that means nothing as there was nothing else to step on. And I have seen our own Filipino boys drag dead comrades to fill a ditch so that they could get across.”

Schooled in a medieval code of ethics, believing implicitly in the sacredness of his race's mission on earth, the Jap is a formidable foe. But the American is just as willing to die for his home and country as the Jap is for his Emperor and ancestors.

And the American has one great advantage over the Jap. The American is an individualist and has been taught to *think*. The Jap is only a cog in a great machine and has been taught to *obey*. The American will die when he thinks it will do some good. The Jap will die whether it advances his cause or not.

And in the long run, the brave man who uses his head should beat the brave man who can only take orders.

*How Brave?*

*Frederic S. Marquardt* should be an authority on affairs Jap, for he has visited the land of the Honorable Sunrises nine times. Born in Manila, he has spent well over half of his 36 years on the other side of the International Date Line and has had good opportunity to watch the shadow of Japanese aggression spread over the Far East. As associate editor of the *Philippines Free Press*, Marquardt really should be in one of Tojo's prison camps. But a timely vacation in the U. S. saved him for the day when he can return to edit the story of Victory.

—*Suggestions for further reading:*

**OUR ENEMY JAPAN**

by *Wilfrid Fleisher* \$2.00  
*Doubleday Doran & Company, New York*

**BEHIND THE RISING SUN**

by *James R. Young* \$3.00  
*Doubleday Doran & Company, New York*



# Coronet

[OldMagazineArticles.com](http://OldMagazineArticles.com)