



The Ultimate Battle: Okinawa 1945--The Last Epic Struggle of World War II

Bill Sloan

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The Ultimate Battle is the full story of the last great clash of World War II as it has never before been told. With the same "grunt's-eye-view" narrative style that distinguished his *Brotherhood of Heroes* (on the Battle of Peleliu), Bill Sloan presents a gripping and uniquely personal saga of heroism and sacrifice in which at least 115,000 soldiers, sailors, and airmen from both sides were killed, as were nearly 150,000 civilians caught in the crossfire or encouraged to commit suicide by Japanese troops.

It is a story set against a panorama of more than 1,500 American ships, nearly two thousand Japanese kamikazes sworn to sink those ships, and two huge armies locked in a no-quarter struggle to the death -- the 541,000 GIs and Marines of the U.S. Tenth Army, and Japan's 110,000-man 32nd Army. Woven into the broader narrative, in *Band of Brothers* style, are the personal stories of men who endured this epic battle and were interviewed by the author. In many cases, their experiences are told here in print for the first time.

A few days after Japanese defenders surprised American assault troops by allowing them to land virtually unopposed on April 1, 1945, scouts of the 96th Division stumbled onto the outerworks of formidable Japanese defenses near Kakazu Ridge, where fierce fighting erupted. It would continue without respite for nearly three months as American forces used every weapon and strategy at their disposal to break through three cunningly designed Japanese lines of defense, each anchored by commanding high ground, intricate underground installations, and massed artillery. When one line was about to be breached, the Japanese would slip away to the next one, forcing the Americans to repeat the same exhausting and deadly "corkscrew and blowtorch" assaults all over again.

Much of the action in *The Ultimate Battle* unfolds among men pinned down under relentless fire on disputed hillsides, in the ruins of shell-blasted villages, and inside stricken tanks and armored cars. Sloan also takes readers aboard flaming ships and into the cockpits of night-fighter aircraft to capture the horror and heroism of men and vessels besieged by kamikazes.

When the battle was over, most of the GIs, Marines, and sailors who survived it were too worn out to celebrate. More than 49,000 of their comrades had been killed or wounded, and they knew that the even more brutal invasion of Japan's home islands loomed just ahead. But as Sloan makes clear, the slaughter at Okinawa helped to convince President Truman to use the atomic bomb against Japanese cities in the hope of shortening the war and averting a far more horrific loss of life.

The Ultimate Battle is a searing and unforgettable recreation of the Okinawa campaign as it was experienced by men who were there. It is filled with fresh insights that only those men can provide.

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