

The Final Days: Defending the Homeland

Operation Olympic was the code name for the Allied plan to invade southern Kyushu, scheduled for November 1945. Planners told U.S. President Truman to anticipate anywhere from a quarter of a million to a million casualties for the total invasion, with at least an equal number of Japanese expected to lose their lives. Japan's response to the invasion plans was Ketsugo (Operation Decisive), a plan to meet the invaders with massive ground and air forces, including civilians. All healthy males between ages 15 and 60 and females between 17 and 40 were expected to join in the defense of the homeland.

Preparing for a Fight to the Death

Japanese leaders gave the defense of Kyushu the highest priority, so military units and civilians living near Hitoyoshi Naval Air Base were included in their plans. In February, education at area schools was halted so that students and teachers could join the war effort. On June 1, training at

the base was halted, and the group of trainees was converted into a ground combat unit. Some received training in digging camouflaged foxholes, from which they were to emerge with explosives to engage passing tanks in suicide attacks. Many civilians were trained to fight with sharpened bamboo spears. It would have been impossible to avoid the fighting, as the target area of the invasion front for Operation Olympic was only 20 kilometers south of the base.

The Tragic End

On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on

Hiroshima, causing an estimated 140,000 deaths. Three days later, on

August 9, another atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, resulting in over

70,000 deaths. The war concluded with the Showa emperor's surrender

declaration on August 15.