

The Kamikaze of God

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In June 1941, the United States was attacked at Pearl Harbor, an event that stunned America. The event has been referred to often since the September 11 suicide attacks, which also left America shocked and grieving. So it may be time to retell a remarkable story that arose from that horrific attack in 1941. It is a story of the kamikaze of God.

Prisoner of Japan

Jake DeShazer was on KP duty at an Army air base in Oregon when news of the Japanese attack blared over a loudspeaker. He threw a potato against the wall and shouted, "Those Japs are going to have to pay for this." His deep hatred for the Japanese, born that day, grew into an obsession for revenge.

A few weeks later, their officer asked how many of the men would volunteer for an extremely dangerous secret mission. It sounded like an adventure, so DeShazer immediately volunteered. After training as a bombardier, he became a crew member of the Doolittle Raiders. After bombing Tokyo and other cities, they ran out of fuel, abandoned their planes, and parachuted down. While most of them made it to friendly Chinese locations, three crews including DeShazer were captured. So began 40 months of imprisonment, 34 of them in solitary confinement, with tortures and interrogation. Bugs, lice, and rats bit them until their faces swelled with infections. In October 1942, three of the men were executed, but Emperor Hirohito commuted the sentences of five, including DeShazer, to life imprisonment.

For years, they begged for books. Finally, in 1944, their captors relented. Among other books, they brought a copy of the Bible. Each man eagerly read it for his allotted three weeks. The light in DeShazer's cell was dim, but he read the entire Bible several times. He memorized many passages. The Bible's message made its way into his heart. On June 8, 1944, DeShazer prayed for forgiveness, trusted Christ, and experienced the joy of salvation.

Obedience became DeShazer's key word. "Love your enemies" included even the cruel guards he hated so bitterly—especially the one who had pushed him into the cell, closed the door on his foot, and then kept kicking DeShazer's bare foot with hobnailed boots. DeShazer began speaking respectfully and kindly to his guards. It took time, but eventually they responded in kind. DeShazer experienced deep moments of prayer when his cell seemed filled with God's light. When he learned that the war was over, to his amazement he felt God telling him to return to Japan to share the love of Christ.

He trained, and with his bride sailed for Japan as Free Methodist missionaries. When they arrived in December 1948, they were surprised that a large crowd greeted them at the docks. The Japanese had come to see what they had been reading in the papers: a tortured, hate-filled Doolittle bombardier was now returning to serve his former persecutors with love.

Meanwhile, Gen. Douglas MacArthur asked the Bible Meditation League to print something that might help heal the wounds between Japan and the United States. The league printed 1 million pamphlets of DeShazer's testimony, *I Was A Prisoner of Japan*. One of those tracts wafted down into a most unlikely hand.

Overcome by Forgiveness

Commander Mitsuo Fuchida was the lead pilot of the 360 planes that attacked Pearl Harbor. He gave the order to attack, and then shouted the famous attack signal, Tora! Tora! Tora! (Tiger! Tiger! Tiger!) Fuchida had been carefully chosen for this task. He was a fearless and expert flier, who at age 39 had racked up more flying hours than any other Japanese pilot.

Fuchida also felt that an intuition guided and protected him. Upon returning from Pearl Harbor, he inspected his plane and found it barely held together. Although he was not in any sense "religious," this was the first of a series of near-death incidents that made him believe something was watching over him. The successful attack against the United States made Fuchida a national hero, earning him an audience with Emperor Hirohito himself. This, mixed with typical Japanese military patriotism, added to his sense of destiny. Other incidents contributed to this feeling. He narrowly survived the battle of Midway in June 1942. He was summoned to Tokyo from Hiroshima the day before the atomic attack. He survived the radiation.

Shortly after the war, Fuchida spoke to a friend who had been imprisoned in the United States. He was curious to hear how Japanese prisoners were treated. One 18-year-old prison volunteer was Peggy Covell, whose parents, missionary teachers in Japan at the beginning of the war, had been judged to be

spies and beheaded. Peggy was initially filled with hate, but she concluded that her parents must have forgiven their killers. Now God asked her to forgive—and show it.

This story astounded Fuchida. He had long been pondering a phrase from the Emperor's surrender broadcast—"To pave the way for a grand peace for all generations to come"—and now he began to think that such peace could come only from a supernatural source.

One day in October 1948, at a rail station in Tokyo, Fuchida was handed DeShazer's leaflet, *I Was a Prisoner of Japan*. He was ready to throw it away, but he noticed that it was written by a courageous Doolittle flier, so he read it. He immediately bought a Bible, though he didn't read it for months. He found it's message gripped him, and Christ's prayer from the cross captured him: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:24). He wept as he realized Jesus had prayed and died for him. In September 1949, he accepted Christ as his Savior, and he was baptized on Easter Sunday in 1951.

Over the next years, Fuchida and De-Shazer spoke to large crowds, both together and individually, and their ministries brought thousands more to Christ.

When Fuchida died in 1976 at age 74, De-Shazer and his wife still lived near Salem, Oregon, but he has recently passed away.

While God may not be the author of every situation, he is certainly master of them all. Through his inspired Word, two enemies, who through war and the subsequent peace had good reason not to trust Christ or one another, did both.

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