

Witness to Valor
Charles (Chuck) Tatum

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General Tadamichi Kuribayashi was the Japanese Commanding officer of the Japanese Garrison on Iwo Jima.

The following are letters from the Japanese Commanding General of Iwo Jima during the invasion by U.S. Forces.

These letters are a continuation of the article started in the 13 September issue of the Suribachi Sentinel.

Letter to wife: 19 November 1944.

I'm still feeling fine so don't worry about me. Even on Iwo Jima it has cooled off but the flies still bother us. It must be cold in Tokyo so be careful not to catch cold.

I know from listening to the radio that you have been hearing the air raid sirens. It won't be long before you will be experiencing the real thing. Be prepared for them.

I wrote detailed instructions to you in another letter and as an officer is flying to Tokyo, I will have him take this letter.

I am sending one package of cake with him.

Very Truly Yours,

Tadamichi

27 November 1944 (To Taro)

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My dear Taro:

According to your mother's letters you have been studying and working at the supply depot very hard. I was glad to hear that.

I, your father, stand on Iwo Jima, the island which will soon be attacked by the American forces. In other words this island is the gateway to Japan. My heart is as strong as that of General M. Kusunoke who gave his life for Japan 650 years ago at the Minato River. As he could not, neither can I expect to return to Japan alive, but I am proud and feel honored to fight until death comes.

Today is your birthday and you are now 20. Until now we have had the pleasure and trouble in rearing you but the trouble has largely been your mother's as I was abroad so much. I was in United States for 3 years, 3 years in Canada, 1 in Manchuria, and in China for 2 years. How you will be called on to make many decisions on your own and to arrive at the best solution; you will have to do much self-examination.

That is the first step to become a man of culture. Strong will is essential for a man – a weak-willed man can accomplish nothing. Many murderers are weak willed as are many who commit other serious crimes. The weak-willed man makes mistakes; he cannot execute the plan he believes good, and he cannot improve on the plan he believes poor. Will power is the essence of manhood – his success is determined by the strength of his will. You have not yet developed your will and in your present state, you cannot head my household successfully. I am praying to God on this, your birthday, that you will train your will and that you will develop into a trustworthy man for Japan. Particularly, you must become the foundation of our home after my death.

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Take it easy, Taro

Very Truly Yours

Your Father

28 November 1944: (To Wife)

I received your letter of 21 October and 20 November yesterday. According to your letter, you had visited Mr. Yoshida. You had better not go visiting anymore as you might get caught in an air raid.

I was glad to hear that you had moved Taro to the 6 mat room for his studying as that small room is better for concentrating and it can be kept warmer.

Did you get the floor of the kitchen chinked? If you haven't, have it done as those drafts may give you colds. Have Taro do it. If he can't cover it with matting or roofing paper. There should be some roofing paper left over from the air raid shelter. But the roofing paper will not wear well.

I think that Yoko will find a better job at the Army supply depot. You can ask Major Senoda or Mr. Iwabushi of the Tokyo Division to help place her. I hope that she can attend college later, but until the war ends she may pay taxes and do her bit by working in a defense plant.

I wrote your to ask Miss Toyoko to be your housemaid but apparently she prefers defense plant work.

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You write that it is difficult to make paper bags at home because you have so many visitors. Perhaps you should stop visiting yourself.

I don't write to Takako's teacher so will you write? It was nice of you to send him that necktie, but he is probably wearing that "national uniform" exclusively and will not be able to wear the tie. Another gift might have been better.

I wrote this letter because there is a plane flying from here today.

There are still many ants, flies, and bugs troubling us and the ants crawl over us in swarms.

Very Truly Yours,

Tadamichi

11 December 1944 (To Wife)

I was sorry to hear that winter has come to Japan and that the cold water is chapping your hands. You have my sympathy. Dry your hands well and rub them vigorously whenever you wet them. I was also sorry to hear that you were so short of fuel that you could heat water for only one bath every 10 days. I understand how the lack of a regular bath bothers you as we are unable to bathe over here.

I arise at 5:30 a.m. but many of the troops arise at 5:00 a.m. or work all night and sleep during the day. I wash, exercise with my wooden sword, eat breakfast at 6:00 a.m., and

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start inspection of the front lines at 7:00 a.m. I return about 11:00 a.m. check the staff work, eat lunch and watch the troop maneuvers from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., eat supper at 5:00 p.m., sing songs or recite poetry and go to bed at 6:00 p.m. to drop immediately into a deep and fatigued sleep. My schedule is often upset by the enemy air raids and it seems that we sleep much more than 10 hours. As we have to seek shelter many times during the day we must make every free moment count.

My meals consist of one bowl of 70% rice and 30% barley and one cup of soup made from dried vegetables such as rape and squash. Occasionally I get some private vegetables in from Chichi Jima or Tokyo and my orderlies have planted a small garden. It will have some squash and sweet potatoes soon unless it gets bombed.

As our water comes only from rainfall the shortage is serious. We have been praying for rain lately, but it has not rained.

I have changed from short shirt and pants into long clothes as the weather has been cool. I always wear my bulletproof belt and good luck charm. At night I remove only my hat and shoes and sleep under one comforter.

My health is exceptional. My brother officers say that I am getting fat-they may be right. May have an unknown fever. My Chief of Staff and many other officers and men were or are in bed some as long as 40 or 50 days, but the ailment has never attacked me.

Mr. Maoka who was my orderly with the Tokyo Division, has been hospitalized at Chichi Jima and has decided to go back to Tokyo. He says that he will call, so feed and entertain him within your meager means.

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I occasionally get letters from Takako and I often dream about her. Use your waist belt and chemise to keep warm and wear my camel hair shirt instead of your cotton one. Because you cannot get fuel be sure to wear enough clothes to keep you warm.

Very Truly Yours

Tadamichi

13 December 1944 (To Wife)

I have learned that the enemy has started their bombing offensive against the Japanese homeland. It seems that their targets now are military facilities and industries, but no one can foretell where or where they'll bomb. I am sorry the widows and children who will be frightened terribly by the bombings. We were attacked continuously throughout 8 December, both with naval gunfire and airplanes. They kept it up all night as well and since have hit us seven or eight times every night. The casualties from bombing have not yet been great but we have been unable to get any rest nor can we get much work done as we must run to the shelters so often

You will soon be bombed day and night there in Tokyo. Sleep in your clothes; keep extra clothes handy as well as food and tea. Keep blankets and quilts in the shelter so that you can be warm. Have Taro build a thick, heavy door for the shelter. Have him throw dirt from in front of the 4 ½ mat room onto the sides of the shelter to make heavier walls. I

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suggested earlier that you wear string-tied sandals, but perhaps my short boots would be better. To remove the incendiary bombs get heavy gloves, keep them wet and get some long poles, a ladder and some sand to move the bombs and put out fire. I read Yoko's letter and was disappointed at her penmanship and grammar.

Very Truly Yours,

Tadamichi

22 December 1944 (To Wife)

I surely sympathize with you now that Tokyo is being bombed around the clock. It won't be long before they start bombing the fortified and residence areas as well and I am afraid that they will use incendiaries and that shell splinters from our anti-aircraft guns will drop on our house. I think that the shelter is strong enough to withstand the bomb blast, but not for shell splinters. Have Taro and Yoko pile up more dirt to give added protection. Lay mats in your shelter and take in many clothes. Take a hot water bottle, and keep your waist and stomach warm. Eat earlier than usual because it is bad to be raided during a meal. Go to bed early and get as much sleep as possible.

On Iwo Jima we dare not show a light at night so we go to bed in the shelters at nightfall thus getting some sleep.

Save your canned foods for use during the air raids.

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I have heard that the Tokyo city management has volunteered to secure civilian valuables. I believe that it would be a good plan to turn our stocks and bonds and other valuables over to them. Make a list of them and give each of the children a copy.

Consider your footwear carefully. Bear in mind that our home may be destroyed and that you may have to walk eight or ten miles to find shelter. I believe that my short boots will be best for you, that sport shoes will be best for Taro and Toko. The Army shoes might fit Taro. They are in the wooden box in the upstairs reception room.

You wrote that you wanted to send some cigarettes to Mr. Haoka, but I think that because he could not join me here, that such a gift would make him feel worse. It is this war which makes such problems of small mater.

Very Truly Yours

Tadamachi

16 January 1945 (To Taro and Yoko)

My dear Taro and Yoko,

The other day I sent one of your letters back to you with your errors noted. Later I found that I had made two errors in those corrections. Check your dictionary and correct the letters. Yoko, you make errors in spelling and grammar and you do not write legibly. You should improve your penmanship and write without errors. In Japan, others will not respect you if you make errors in letters.

I wish I knew how long the war will last. They can completely destroy Tokyo with their bombers. They have already ruined much of London and Berlin. No one can foretell the future of Japan, but we must have courage and do our best for our country.

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If your mother moves to the country, you should stay in Tokyo and continue your studies. I know that it will be hard for you to be separated from your mother and your sister, but you must train your will. If you can become a two-year student at Waseda University, you will probably have to work at an army depot.

At the depot will be an enemy bombing target, be careful not to get hurt.

Very Truly Yours

Your Father

21 January 1945 (To Wife)

I am mailing this to you at Hiaku presuming that you have already moved. You have probably had some trouble getting food and fuel there. Had you moved to Negano or to Matsushiro you might not have had as much trouble. You have no relatives in Hiaku either, so your problems are worse.

Did you leave Taro in Tokyo? Don't you think you should have Takako join you even though your room is small? I know it will upset her schooling, but I believe that she'd be happier with you and Taro.

If Divisional Tokyo Headquarters moves to Iwabushi ask Colonel Itazu to help you with your problems. The war will not end soon and the enemy gets stronger all the time. At Saipan alone some 150 B-29's are based; by April they will have 230 and by the end of the year, 500. So you can see, the bombing of Japan will get steadily worse.

And when Iwo Jima falls, many bombers will be released for bombing Japan. The Americans will probably invade Japan at Chiba and Managawa prefectures, and then advance toward Tokyo. (Note: Kanagawa is the prefecture bordering Tokyo on the south and Chiba is the prefecture to the east, across Tokyo Bay. The American plans for the invasion of Japan were (1) "Operation Olympic" which was the first phase and provided for landing on the southern coast of Kyushu, Southernmost Island of Japan, in Nov 1945. (2) "Operation Coronet" the second phase called for a landing on Honshu, the main island, in February 1946).

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Listen to the radio and read the newspapers so that you will be able to judge the situation and plan accordingly.

The war in the Philippines is going against us and I am sure that the enemy can invade Iwo Jima at any time.

No one here expects to return alive but we are determined to do our best. Do not plan for my return. Do not be surprised when you hear that I have died. Do not let others, particularly reporters, read my letters, as they would publish the information.

I hope that you can buy a plot for my burial in Tokyo, but if not there, any plot is all right. I am sure that my ashes will not be sent home, but my soul will remain with you and the children.

Take care of your health and live as long as possible so that you can care for the children.

Very Truly Yours

Tadamichi

28 January 1945 (To Wife)

I received the letter in which you had included Takako's and a letter from a child at Hiaku. I also received two letters from Mr. Kiyono's children. I wonder why so many children wrote at the same time? So you have not moved to Hiaku yet.

According to their letters, the aunt in Kaiku says that Buddha will protect her and that she is not afraid of the enemy's bombs. That is ridiculous. The enemy cares not for Buddha and they drop their bombs and incendiaries at any place they desire. Her faith will help her, but she should protect herself too. Here, the men who did not seek shelter quickly are dead.

I think that you are stubborn not to have moved to Hiaku. I warned you repeatedly that the war would last a long time and that the danger in Tokyo would steadily increase. Forget your desire to live in Tokyo and move. Wherever you go will become your

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permanent residence. I feel that you should move to Nagano or Matsushiro as they are near our home towns and our relatives. However, because Takako is in school at Hiaku, it might be well for you to go there and to Nagano and Matsushiro, later.

You wrote that you were sending the valuables to the country but that you will stay in Tokyo. I wish that you would move.

Now only 70 or 80 B-29's are bombing Tokyo, but soon there will be 400 or 500 taking part in the daily raids. It is dangerous for you to remain in Tokyo.

Therefore I wish you would move to Hiaku.

It is odd that you dreamed about my transfer. It cannot happen. We will be invaded at any time and no one can then get off of the island. A commander-in-chief is never transferred before a battle. Please stop hoping that I can return alive, that you will even see me again. All men and officers overseas except those in China and Manchukuo will be killed too.

Lt. General Baba was recently appointed as an Army Commander of the Southern Area and he will share the same fate, as will Lt. General Sato, Watanabe and Kitamura. That fate—death—will be unavoidable.

Mr. Maoka wrote and said that he'd be glad to help you pack. He is very kind.

Take it easy and live strongly
Very Truly Yours

Tadamichi

3 February 1945 (To Wife)

Have you caught a cold? I have not heard from you for 23 days. Are you still in Tokyo? Believe me, the bombs will get steadily worse so I wish you'd go to a safe place. You

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probably wouldn't be killed directly by a bomb, but you could be easily be burned or be hit by a bomb fragment. The enemy uses incendiaries here, which cause fires even though there is nothing to burn. They also drop drums of jellied gasoline, which explode and make seas of fire.

In spite of the heavy air raids, I am, fortunately, healthy. We are getting a few vegetables from our small gardens and while taking an unexpected bath the other day; I found that I was getting fat.

Most of the command has been sick, but I've been fortunate.

Major Omoto, First Adjutant General, is leaving for the Imperial Headquarters today. He will take this letter to you. Don't ask him to send me anything. Take care of yourself and get a massage occasionally to help you overcome your fatigue.

Tell Taro to behave himself
Very Truly Yours

Tadamichi

In Tokyo, Mrs. Kuribayashi went about her daily tasks. Every day she and her eldest daughter went to the shrine close to their home to pray for her husband's safety. Taro was studying at Waseda University and working part time at an Army Supply Depot. Takako the youngest daughter was at school in Hiaku.

At 9 a.m. on 19 February 1945, 60,000 United States Marines stormed the black volcanic ash beaches of Iwo Jima in what was to be the most fiercely fought battle of the Pacific.

Day after day, battle reports were announced to Tokyo and there were many visitors to the Kuribayashi home. The newspapers were filled with stories about Mrs. Kuribayashi

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and her husband and people from their hometown in Nagano Prefecture, together with school children all over Japan, wrote letters to her.

On the 17th of March, General Kuribayashi, together with Admiral Ichimaru, Col. Takaishi, Chief of Staff, Lt. Col. Nakane, Operations Officer and about 200 Japanese soldiers and sailors moved from the Divisional Headquarters cave, 160 yards northwest to another underground location. About 50 or 60 wounded were left behind, each with one hand grenade with which to commit suicide.

During this movement General Kuribayashi was wounded in the right thigh by a shell splinter. At their new cave location they were joined by the survivors of the 145th Infantry Regiment totaling about 450 men of which about 150 were wounded.

U.S. Marines besieged the cave and the survivors continued fighting. There was so food, water, or medical supplies; and the groaning and moaning of the wounded created a constant dirge and many of the wounded committed suicide.

At 3:00 a.m. on the morning of 23 March, General Kuribayashi addressed the surviving officers and men. "We have done our duty and I bid you farewell. Behave yourselves in a manly way."

He limped out of the cave and under the cover of darkness proceeded towards a U. S. Marine sentry post followed by Lt. Col. Nakane and three soldiers. At that sentry post were several Marines and a Nisei interpreter who, through a loud speaker calling upon the defending survivors to surrender. No one fired upon the General or his party and after arriving at the sentry post location he talked to one of the Marines (in English), for about 10 minutes. Probably this conversation concerned the surrender of the survivors but this has not been proven. It is a good assumption that the Marines did not know who he was.

General Kuribayashi and his party returned to their cave entrance where he talked briefly with Lt. Col. Nakane. When they concluded, their soldier's escorts were directed to go

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into the cave. General Kuribayashi faced towards Tokyo, kneeled, and bowed three times, meanwhile speaking softly and solemnly. Undressing himself and exposing the abdomen in the tradition of the Samurai, performed an act of Harakiri. Lt. Col. Nakane assisted in the death act by decapitation the general with his sword. (This assistance was the custom of the military of old Japan). Lt. Col. Nakane buried the General's body and returned to the cave where he talked with Admiral Ichimaru and Col. Takaishi. He bade them farewell, walked out into the darkness and shot himself at the spot where General Kuribayashi had died.

About 20 minutes later Admiral Ichimaru and one Sergeant from the 109th Signal Corps left the cave, each armed with a number of hand grenades. In an unconcerned manner they walked towards the U.S. Marine positions and were well inside before being noticed. Both were able to inflict minor damage to a few American vehicles before Admiral Ichimaru was killed and the Sergeant wounded. It was late afternoon of the 23rd of March when the Sergeant regained his consciousness and found himself in a Marine aid station receiving medical treatment. He recovered from his wounds and at the end of the war returned to Japan where he lives today.

Col. Takaishi continued to communicate the latest battle reports to Chichi Jima but made no mention of Gen. Kuribayashi. On the afternoon of 23 March he sent the following message, "To all my friends in Chichi Jima, Goodbye."

After instruction the wireless operator to destroy the instrument he shot himself in the head. On 26 March the survivors of General Kuribayashi 109th Division attempted their last futile counter-attack. The battle of Iwo Jima was over.

In April 1945, Mrs. Kuribayashi, Tao, and Yoko moved to Kofu City, 70 miles northwest of Tokyo after their Tokyo home was destroyed during an air raid. In July 1945, the Japanese government awarded the Silver Star First Class and a pension to Mrs. Kuribayashi. In early August bombing destroyed her home at Kofu City and she and the children (Yoko and Taro) moved into a nearby temple. Here Yoko contracted typhoid fever and died just before the end of World War II.

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The War Department, Japanese Imperial Forces promoted Lt. General Kuribayashi to General on 21 March 1945 as of 17 March that year. Gen. of the Army Sugiyama, War Minister, delivered the writ of promotion, signed by Emperor Hirohito, to Mrs. Kuribayashi. An effort was made by Mayor Horie on Chichi Jima to communicate that news to Gen. Kuribayashi on both 22 and 23 March was unsuccessful.

After the end of the war, Mrs. Kuribayashi, Taro, and Takako returned to Tokyo. Taro continued his studies at Waseda University, graduated with a degree in architecture in 1950 and is presently employed as a draftsman at Feamcom Air Base, Tachikawa, Japan.

Takao Kuribayashi, using the stage name of Takako Hayama is a rising young starlet with Daiei Movie Studios, Tokyo and is studying French literature at Waseda University. Once or twice each week she visits my wife and me for assistance in learning conversation English. Both Taro and Takako reside with their mother in Tokyo.

“Somewhere on Iwo Jima General Tadamichi Kuribayashi Sleeps.”

The End

A picture of General Kuribayashi appears on page 200 of Mr. Tatum's book

RED BLOOD BLACK SAND

PACIFIC APOCALYPSE

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