

1. How do the opening shots of the battlefield in the modern era set the tone for the film?
2. In what ways are the strict sense of Japanese military discipline exhibited?
3. How might General Kuribayashi be considered different from other Japanese leaders?
4. What is the strategic importance of Iwo Jima? Why do the Japanese fight so fiercely?
5. Saigo is a fictional character. What is his purpose as a cinematic and historical device?
6. How is the hardship and senseless of the war best exhibited in this film?
7. How does American director Clint Eastwood try to show the humanity of Japanese troops?
8. Analyze the scene in which Kuribayashi hears the radio broadcast from home.
9. How are Americans depicted in the film?
10. What are the merits in gaining international perspective while watching WWII movies?


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Accompanying primary source:

***Excerpt from So Sad to Fall in Battle***

Lieutenant general Tadamichi Kuribayashi, commander of the Japanese garrison on Iwo Jima, wrote the following on June 25, 1944, to his nine-year-old daughter Takako:

My dear Tako-chan,

How are you, Tako-chan? In my mind’s eye, I can still see you and Mother standing by the gate to see me off on the day I left. Since then, I’ve dreamed several times of going back home and taking a walk around the neighborhood with you and Mother. Sadly, though, it’s something I can’t really do. You know, Tako-chan, Daddy just can’t wait for you to grow up to be a support to your mother.

Build up your strength, study hard, and do exactly what your mother tells you to do. That will really put my mind at ease. Now I must say “Good-bye.”

*Takako had been born when Kuribayashi was over forty years old. He doted on her, addressing her with the pet name of “Tako-chan,” and generally made a fuss over her. She appeared frequently in her father’s dreams while he was at the front. On November 17, 1944, he wrote to her:*

Tako-chan! How are you? I’m fine! Last night we had two air raids: one just after I’d got to sleep and another just as it was getting light. But I still managed to have a funny dream.

In my dream, you, Tako-chan, had just got out of the bath and were sniveling and whimpering. “Why are you crying?” I asked you. “Was the bathwater too hot?” Then Mother appeared. She laughed and said, “I bet it’s because you want something nice and sweet.” Then she brought out her breast and put it in your mouth. The two of you lay down, and your cheeks, Tako-chan, were all puffed out as you sucked away greedily on the breast. You just looked so very happy.

Just then out came your big sister. “I’m shocked!” she said. “I’m shocked! Honestly, Tako-chan, still suckling at your age!” Then she started poking your cheeks.

That was about all that happened, but Daddy saw all your faces so clearly that it was just like being there with you. What do you think? A pretty funny dream, wasn’t it?

*Then, on December 23, 1944, he wrote:*

Tako-chan, a little while ago Daddy had another dream with you in it. In my dream, you were very tall—about as tall as me, in fact. You also had on Daddy’s pants, but your hair was in a bob.

I was marveling at how very tall you were, when, lo and behold, who should turn up but your mother! With her there, I thought it would be nice if the two of us swung you between us the way we always did, but you were so very heavy we just couldn’t do it!

*As American forces approached Iwo Jima, commander Kuribayashi composed six, "Courageous Battle Vows," which were widely reproduced and distributed among his men. They read:*

1. We shall defend this island with all our strength to the end.

2. We shall fling ourselves against the enemy tanks clutching explosives to destroy them.

3. We shall slaughter the enemy, dashing in among them to kill them.

4. Every one of our shots shall be on target and kill the enemy.

5. We shall not die until we have killed ten of the enemy.

6. We shall continue to harass the enemy with guerrilla tactics even if only one of us remains alive.

*Additionally, Kuribayashi composed a set of instructions to the soldiers of the “Courage Division.” They read as follows:*

*Preparations for battle.*

1. Use every moment you have, whether during air raids or during battle, to build strong positions that enable you to smash the enemy at a ratio of ten to one.

2. Build fortifications that enable you to shoot and attack in any direction without pausing even if your comrades should fall.

3. Be resolute and make rapid preparations to store food and water in your position so that your supplies will last even through intense barrages.

*Fighting defensively.*

1. Destroy the American devils with heavy fire. Improve your aim and try to hit your target the first time.

2. As we practiced, refrain from reckless charges, but take advantage of the moment when you've smashed the enemy. Watch out for bullets from others of the enemy.

3. When one man dies a hole opens up in your defense. Exploit man-made structures and natural features for your own protection. Take care with camouflage and cover.

4. Destroy enemy tanks with explosives, and several enemy soldiers along with the tank. This is your best chance for meritorious deeds.

5. Do not be alarmed should tanks come toward you with a thunderous rumble. Shoot at them with anti-tank fire and use tanks.

6. Do not be afraid if the enemy penetrates inside your position. Resist stubbornly and shoot them dead.

7. Control is difficult to exercise if you are sparsely dispersed over a wide area. Always tell the officers in charge when you move forward.

8. Even if your commanding officer falls, continue defending your position, by yourself if necessary. Your most important duty is to perform brave deeds.

9. Do not think about eating and drinking, but focus on exterminating the enemy. Be brave, O warriors, even if rest and sleep are impossible.

10. The strength of each of you is the cause of our victory. Soldiers of the Courage Division, do not crack at the harshness of the battle and try to hasten your death.

11. We will finally prevail if you make the effort to kill just one man more. Die after killing ten men and yours is a glorious death on the battlefield.

12. Keep on fighting even if you are wounded in the battle. Do not get taken prisoner. At the end, stab the enemy as he stabs you.