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General Tadamichi Kuribayashi, Imperial Japanese Army Portrait

General Kuribayashi, who was very close to his wife and children, wrote many letters to his family. He was hopeful they would never be published, as quoted by Richard F. Newcomb and Harry Schmidt in *Iwo Jima*, page 57):

... 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 with the children.

... Take care of your health and live as long as possible so that you can care for the children. (Kuribayashi Letter, dated 21 January 1945.)

Hoping for a miracle, Yoshie thought perhaps her husband could be transferred. He did not want her to engage in wishful thinking:

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 ever see me again ...

Death for him, the general told his wife, was a certainty:

Lt. Gen. Baba was recently appointed as an Army commander of the Southern Area and he will share the same fate, as will Lt. Gen. Sato, Watanabe, and Kitamura. That date - death - will be unavoidable. (Letter dated 28 January 1945, quoted by Richard F. Newcomb and Harry Schmidt, *Iwo Jima*, page 57.)

Fully expecting the Allies would bomb Tokyo with incendiary bombs, once Iwo Jima fell, Kuribayashi urged his wife to leave the city:

Are you still in Tokyo? Believe me, the bombings will get steadily worse [the link depicts Iwo Jima's airfield a few months after its capture] so I wish that you'd go to a safe place. You probably won't be killed directly by a bomb, but you could easily be burned or hit by a bomb fragment. (Quoted in *Iwo Jima*, page 57.)

On Iwo Jima, Japanese soldiers were told they would die defending the island. Did these young men welcome death or did they, like their counterparts, wish to return to families they loved? Letters, later found on Iwo, reveal a desire to live.

Kuribayashi, the fifty-three-year-old general who had opposed going to war against America in the first place, was also sorry to leave his family:

I am sorry to end my life here, fighting the United States of America. But I want to defend this island as long as I can. (Rhodes, page 594)

On the 23rd of March, 1945, Kuribayashi said good-bye to the troops who remained with him:

We have done our duty and I bid you farewell. Behave yourselves in a manly way.

It is said that Tadamichi Kuribayashi, samurai descendant, committed suicide in the samurai manner on Iwo Jima. (His son, Taro, disputed that because of information he received from Sgt. Oyama who was with the general when he died.)

His grave has never been found.

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Media Stream



Iwo Jima's Airfield a Few Months After Its Capture

Image online, courtesy the military.com website.

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