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The Twilight Warriors

Robert Gandt

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The Twilight Warriors, winner of the 2011 Samuel Eliot Morison Award for Naval Literature, is the engrossing, page-turning saga of a tightly knit band of naval aviators who are thrust into the final—and most brutal—battle of the Pacific war: Okinawa.

April 1945. The end of World War II finally appears to be nearing. The Third Reich is collapsing in Europe, and the Americans are overpowering the once-mighty Japanese Empire in the Pacific. For a group of young pilots trained in the twilight of the war, the greatest worry is that it will end before they have a chance to face the enemy. They call themselves Tail End Charlies. They fly at the tail end of formations, stand at the tail end of chow lines, and now they are catching the tail end of the war. What they don't know is that they will be key players in the bloodiest and most difficult of naval battles—not only of World War II but in all of American history.

The Twilight Warriors relives the drama of the world's last great naval campaign. From the cockpit of a Corsair fighter we gaze down at the Japanese task force racing to destroy the American amphibious force at Okinawa. Through the eyes of the men on the destroyers assigned to picket ship duty, we experience the terror as wave after wave of kamikazes crash into their ships. Standing on the deck of the legendary superbattleship *Yamato*, we watch Japan's last hope for victory die in a tableau of gunfire and explosions.

Among the Tail End Charlies are men such as a twenty-two-year-old former art student who grows to manhood on the day of his first mission over Japan and his best friend, a ladies' man and intrepid fighter pilot whose life abruptly changes when his Corsair goes down off the enemy shore. Another is a young Texan lieutenant who volunteers for the most dangerous flying job in the fleet—intercepting kamikazes at night over the blackened Pacific. Their leader is a charismatic officer who rises to greatness in the crucible of Okinawa. Directing the vast armada of sea, air, and land forces is a cast of brilliant and flawed commanders—from the imperturbable admiral and master of carrier warfare to the controversial soldier assigned to command the land forces.

The fate of the Americans at Okinawa is intertwined with the lives of the "young gods"— the honor-bound Japanese airmen who swarm like killer bees toward the U.S. ships. The kamikazes are dispatched on their deadly one-way missions by a classic samurai warrior who vows that he will follow them to a warrior's grave.

The ferocity of the Okinawa fighting stuns the world. Before it ends, the long battle will cost more American lives, ships, and aircraft than any naval engagement in U.S. history. More than simply the account of a historic battle, *The Twilight Warriors* brings to life the human side of an epic conflict. It is the story of young Americans at war in the air and on the sea—and of their enigmatic, fanatically courageous enemy.

From the Hardcover edition.

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