CHAPTER 4

THE US INVASION: ‘ATTACK THE AMERICANS AND DIE!’¹
(21 JULY – 6 AUGUST 1944)

According to the Japanese official history of the war, we were said to have struck the colours by fire on 21 July 1944 when the Americans invaded Guam.² In reality, we did so about a week before that. On that day, our company commander Tsuchiya summoned us to report on the company commanders’ meeting with the regiment commander:

The Regiment Commander Colonel Jōtarō Suenaga said that since we stood no chance of winning this battle, the colonel wanted to strike the colours by our own hands before the enemy invasion. We thus struck the colours, which had been handed down to us from our forefathers in the Sino-Japanese War and the Russo-Japanese War. The colonel said adieu to all of us. Under the circumstances, I want all of you to fight bravely to the last soldier in order to maintain our honour.

‘No one shall remain alive to incur the shame of becoming a prisoner of war.’ Code 2, Article 8 of the Codes of Conduct in Battle had been so powerfully impressed upon us all.³

The intensification of the American bombardment suggested that their invasion was imminent. Even the stabbing pain of my stomach and bodily exhaustion no longer bothered me. I do not
know how to explain this. But I was beginning to be settled into some sort of determination. Not only myself but also all of us shared the same frame of mind. We quietly hid ourselves in a shelter and calmly waited for the invasion.

On the morning of 21 July 1944, at around 04.30 hours, the weather was disgracefully fine and clear. When we came out of the shelter, we saw an increased number of US warships and transport ships drawn up in line of battle. They then launched an intensive naval bombardment along the coastline again. At the same time, about 1,000 US aircraft bombed the coast. While hiding ourselves in the shelter, we had an occasional glance at the sea. Around 07.00 hours, dozens of landing craft came forward one after another. ‘They have come!’ While we were shouting to each other, our mountain cannons and rapid-firing-guns, which had been hidden in caves beside the shore, opened fire for the first time. However, this turned out to be a trick by the Americans. As soon as we opened fire, their landing craft quickly turned back. They provoked us in order to find out the exact location of our hidden armaments. They then shelled our newly-revealed positions until everything was completely wiped out. The clear sky was darkened by dense powder smoke. We were again confined to our shelters.

Our defence installations along the coast, namely, the six alternating lines of drums of petrol and mines, had been discovered by the Americans before their invasion. The infantrymen of our 38th Regiment strove to defend themselves at the foot of Mt Alifan. However, the US landing troops broke through our lines with great ease, and they were already approaching us on the mountain. It was 10.00 hours when our supply company was ordered to prepare for a battle. However, the US invasion was supported by close air cover. Therefore, we were hardly able to come out of the shelter before evening. We were then ordered to retreat, and so encamped in the jungle on the other side of the mountain. Even after dark, the Americans lit up the night sky with their abundant star bombs, climbed up Mt Alifan, and from its top, where we had had some shelter, they machine-gunned all over the jungle below where we were hiding ourselves.

Presumably, the Americans had unexpectedly encountered a ten-