Any one of us could die tomorrow. Of course, nobody in this room. Let me ask you how many people know what Kamikaze really is… nobody. Even though many Americans know the word “Kamikaze,” they do not know what it really is. Having grown up in Japan, I know all about Kamikaze. So, I am here to tell you what Kamikaze really is. Today I will talk about several aspects of Kamikaze.

Let me start with what Kamikaze is

Kamikaze were Japanese suicide pilots who crashed their aircraft into an enemy fleet in the Pacific Ocean during WW2, and attached to each aircraft was a 250-kg bomb. According to the website Ancient Origin, the name Kamikaze means "divine wind" and refers to a typhoon that destroyed an enemy fleet from The Mongol Empire in the 13th century.

Steve Zaloga reported in his book *Japanese Special Attack Weapons* that During World War II, about 3,900 kamikaze pilots died, and less than 20% of kamikaze attacks managed to hit a ship.

Now you understand what Kamikaze is, let’s look at modern history.

BBS news magazine reported that during 1944, hundreds of American battleships sailed towards Okinawa, Japan. If Okinawa was invaded, then the Americans would be able to use it as a base to attack the main islands of Japan. Unfortunately, the Japanese were not able to build as many ships and aircrafts as they were losing in these battles. The Japanese admiral realized that it was almost impossible to defeat the Allied Powers with so few airplanes and not enough good pilots. For this reason, the Japanese admiral decided to create a special attack group, Kamikaze.

Now you have learned its background, let’s move on to why thousands of young Japanese men volunteered to kill themselves.

Let me show you a video from YouTube. As you watched the video, you saw a Kamikaze pilot crashed his aircraft into an enemy ship. Additionally, he could not survive after taking off anyway because he had only enough fuel to fly one way. Some of these pilots survived only because of engine trouble. A Japanese website reported 19-year-old Tadamasa Itatsu was one of them. Because of his engine trouble, he had to ditch his aircraft into the sea. Even though he returned to his unit, the war had ended before he could try again. He said, “I never look back with regret about volunteering. The people who died did so willingly. I thought at the time it was really bad luck to survive. I really wanted to die with them.” Like him, many kamikaze pilots were very young, mostly between 18 and 24. As Itatsu said before, they believed that dying for Japan and their emperor was more honorable than to live. But more importantly, they wanted to protect their families even if it costs their lives.

Let me summarize

Kamikaze were Japanese suicide pilots during WW2. Now you know what Kamikaze really means. It is not a car. It is not a T-shirt. It is a way of life.