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**“WINGS OF DEFEAT”
To Premiere on May 5, 2009
on the Emmy Award–Winning PBS Series Independent Lens**

**Film explores the human experience of Kamikaze pilots during WWII,
from the perspectives of both Japanese and American survivors**

(San Francisco, CA) — Reviled in the West as precursors of suicide bombers, yet still hallowed as selfless martyrs by many Japanese, Kamikaze pilots are surrounded by myth, misinformation and cross-cultural misunderstanding. Who were these young men — many still in their teens — who became human bombs for the sake of their country? **WINGS OF DEFEAT** is a historic opportunity to present the real stories of surviving Kamikaze pilots from a bicultural perspective, mourning those from both sides who died in the war and the sacrifices demanded by militarists who refused to admit obvious defeat. The film will have its television premiere on the PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Terrence Howard, on Tuesday, May 5, 2009 at 10:00 pm (check local listings).

Kamikaze pilots remain a potent metaphor for fanaticism yet few outside Japan know that hundreds of them survived the war. In astonishingly candid interviews, former pilots reveal how a generation of young men was forced to pay for an empire’s pride with their lives. Sixty years later, these humble men describe the horrors of the cockpit, their dramatic survival and the survivors’ guilt that haunts them.



Scenes from WINGS OF DEFEAT, coming to Independent Lens May 2009.

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Born in New York, filmmaker Risa Morimoto is the daughter of Japanese artists who immigrated to America. Writer / producer Linda Hoaglund was born in rural Japan, the daughter of liberal American missionaries. Growing up, Risa always dreaded December 7th as the day her classmates would blame her for the Japanese “sneak attack” on Pearl Harbor. Similarly, Linda dreaded any mention of Hiroshima, when all her Japanese classmates would stare accusingly at her.

When Risa learned that her uncle had trained as a Kamikaze pilot (a secret he carried to his grave), she decided to retrace his footsteps, asking surviving pilots about their provocative experiences. She was profoundly shaken by what they shared with her.

Instead of meeting suicidal maniacs, she encountered gentle, sometimes resentful, always thoughtful men in their 80s, willing to share every detail of their experiences.

Through these rare interviews, a complex history of brutal training and ambivalent sacrifice is revealed. As U.S. firebombs incinerated Japan’s major cities and the country ran out of weapons and fuel, the military government refused to accept that it could no longer fight. Instead they sent thousands of pilots off to targets nearly impossible to reach. Sixty years later, the pilots’ stories in **WINGS OF DEFEAT** insist we set aside our preconceptions to relive their human experiences with them. Ultimately, they help us question what responsibilities a government at war has to its soldiers and its people.

Using original animation and graphics, never-before-seen Japanese war propaganda from newsreels and magazine covers, personal photographs and American newsreels from the National Archives, **WINGS OF DEFEAT** tells this story from two dramatically different perspectives. A survivors’ reunion of the U.S.S. Drexler, a destroyer instantly sunk by Kamikaze late in the war, provides a backdrop for the American perspective and a nuanced counterpoint to the Kamikaze stories.

To learn more about the film and the issues, visit the companion website for **WINGS OF DEFEAT** at pbs.org/independentlens/wingsofdefeat. Get detailed information on the film, watch preview clips, read an interview with the filmmakers and explore the subject in depth with links and resources. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions.

He sat behind Hamazono during their aborted Kamikaze attack, firing rounds off of his machine gun at the attacking Corsairs.

Kamikaze Pilots

WINGS OF DEFEAT features interviews with four trained Kamikaze pilots, including three who took off to attack the U.S. fleet off the coast of Okinawa in the spring of 1945:

NAVIGATOR PILOT ENA TAKEHIKO: Ena was a 20 years old college student when he was drafted into the Navy. He first took off to dive into an American ship near Okinawa on April 28th, but crash-landed at a nearby base because of engine failure. Because a Kamikaze assignment is irrevocable, Ena took off a second time, on May 11, crash landing near Kuroshima, a remote island off the coast of mainland Japan.

PILOT HAMAZONO SHIGEYOSHI: Hamazono joined the Navy in May, 1942, when he was 18, to become a pilot. He participated in doomed naval campaigns in Taiwan and the Philippines. Eventually he was assigned as a flight instructor at the Hyakuri Naval Air Base in southern Japan, then assigned on a Kamikaze mission with gunner Nakajima Kazuo.

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GUNNER NAKAJIMA KAZUO: Nakajima worked hard to pass the exams to qualify for Navy Pilot Academy. A restless 16 year-old, he was determined to become a Navy pilot. Several years younger than the other pilots, Nakajima was still in training when he was assigned to a Kamikaze squadron in March, 1945.

PILOT UESHIMA TAKEO: Ueshima was a 20 year-old college student, when, like Ena, he was drafted into the Navy. Ordered to become a Kamikaze in March, 1945, Ueshima trained relentlessly every day. The war ended before he was called on a mission.

About the Filmmakers

Risa Morimoto (producer/director) President of Edgewood Pictures, Risa Morimoto received her Master's degree in film and education from New York University in 1999 while serving as the Associate Director of the Asian/Pacific/American Studies Program and Institute. She produced the independent feature film, *The LaMastas*, and produced and directed several short films and documentaries including, *9066* with Pat Morita. Risa was the Executive Director of Asian CineVision, a NYC-based non-profit media arts organization from 2002-2006. A producer for television (AZN-TV, A&E Networks), she also freelances as a videographer/director/editor including work as a video journalist for the New York Post. A second-generation Japanese American, Risa studied and lived in Kyoto for three years.

Linda Hoaglund (producer/writer). The daughter of American missionary parents, Linda Hoaglund was born and raised in Japan, where she attended Japanese public schools. A graduate of Yale University, after working as a bilingual news producer for Japanese television, she joined an independent American film production company as a producer. Since 1996, she has subtitled 200 Japanese films. She represents Japanese directors and artists and serves as an international liaison for producers. In 2004, she received a commendation from the Foreign Minister of Japan for her work promoting Japanese film abroad.

ABOUT *Independent Lens*

Independent Lens is an Emmy® Award winning weekly series airing on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about unique individuals, communities and moments in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen. Further information about the series is available at pbs.org/independentlens.

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