

Taiwan's Role in WWII Forgotten

by

Clinton H. Whitehurst, Jr.*

Emeritus Professor of Management and Economics

**Clemson University,
Clemson, South Carolina**

2000

**THE
STROM THURMOND
INSTITUTE**



Taiwan's Role in WWII Forgotten

By Clinton Whitehurst

For several weeks in August, many nations will observe the end of the World War II in Asia. It will be celebrated as VJ Day or something else, depending upon who is doing the celebrating and whether historical accuracy or political correctness is the deciding criteria. Many will forget, however, that the war in Asia actually started many years before Pearl Harbour when Japan began a full-scale, no apology offered, invasion of the Republic of China.

During this 50th anniversary observance, Americans will remember Pearl Harbor, Corregidor, and the Bataan Death March. Britons will remember Burma and Singapore, and Australians jungle combat in New Guinea and the Battle of the Coral Sea.

Few, however, will remember the brutal battles that took place in China, or that a poorly equipped, if equipped at all, Republic of China army doggedly fought 1.2 million Japanese troops for almost a decade. Or that Chinese Communist militia then in rebellion against the central government, contributed little in the fight against the Japanese. Or that Chiang Kai Shek's government consistently refused Japanese overtures for a separate peace, a tantalizing offer that promised an end to Chinese suffering.

Most Americans accept that the atomic bombs dropped on Japan saved both Allied and Japanese lives by ending the war. But few will reflect on what the outcome in the Pacific might have been had the Republic of China surrendered, thus allowing Japan to throw an additional million men into the battles for Australia and India.

In 1949, four years after Japan's surrender, communist forces took control of mainland China and brought into being the People's Republic of China. The government of the Republic of China established itself on the island of Taiwan and, against all odds, survived. After the communist victory in 1949, American policy with respect to the Republic of China was a classic example of political duplicity — from an open embrace as a valued ally in the Korean War to renouncing its mutual security treaty with the ROC in 1979, and ultimately recognizing the Chinese communists as the legitimate rulers of China.

In 1995, the People's Republic of China remains a communist dictatorship, a confirmed aggressor, and a government with little or no respect for human dignity, but nonetheless a coveted market for Western products and investment. The Republic of China on Taiwan while a major military power in East Asia, a world economic power, and a democracy in the accepted Western tradition, is still an international outcast — not recognized by the United States, the United Nations or most of the world's countries.

Thus, while much debate can be expected as to what should the defeat of Japan be called — VJ Day or something not nation-specific — a more important question will probably be ignored. The question is, Will the contribution of the Republic of China in bringing about the defeat of Japan be recognized? Or will political correctness prevail and the People's Republic of China be designated representative for the anguish and suffering of the Chinese people during World War II and many years before?

Although most of the world's governments - pressured, threatened and cajoled by the People's Republic of China — will ignore the Republic of China's sacrifices in World War II, countless individuals, more honorable and perceptive than the governments that represent them, should not. Thousands upon thousands of American, British, Australian, Philippine, Korean, Malaysian, and Indonesian grandfathers fathers, children, and grandchildren are alive today only because the courageous Republic of China refused to give up when more than half of its country was occupied by the enemy and its casualties numbered in the hundreds of thousands.

Clinton Whitehurst is a senior fellow at the Strom Thurmond Institute at Clemson University.