

On the first VJ day, 75 years ago, America was overwhelmed by many emotions. Combat soldiers and marines on Okinawa and elsewhere in the Pacific were at first ecstatic, then overcome with the most common of the post-trauma symptoms – survivor’s guilt. They grieved over their lost friends and wondered if they could ever speak to the folks “back home” of the horrors they witnessed. For the support troops like my dad, emotions were a bit more complex. They of course wanted those who endured combat to get home as quickly as possible but after a while, they became increasingly anxious to return to resume their own lives.

In America, folks couldn’t wait to shower adulation on “Our Boys” who won the war. Later, as war production ceased and with millions of discharged servicemen returning to compete for available jobs, the adulation faded. Major social and political changes were also in the wind. Rosie the Riveter enjoyed working outside the home and was not quite ready to yield her job to Willie and Joe, back from the front. The Tuskegee Airman and other soldiers and sailors of color were beginning to seriously question “separate but equal” as they were forced to move to the back of the southbound train when it pulled into Washington D. C. Germany was now needed to counter the Soviets and Japan was rebuilt to serve as a new “Great Wall” to stand against Communist China. In Southeast Asia, America chose to support our former French allies who were fighting a communist insurgency to retain their colony of French Indochina, now Vietnam.

So, as the initial emotions of 14 August 1945 faded, Americans shifted their focus to what would come next. With respect to war itself, history has sadly shown that what came next was little changed from what came before. In my first Pacific War blog on 6 December 2016, (written 75 years after the eve of the Pearl Harbor attack) I discussed the forces that propelled the Japanese carriers toward towards a wholly unprepared American fleet in Hawaii. I concluded with, “I do not hold the view that Japan was correct in attacking America and I do believe they brought the mushroom cloud upon themselves. I do hold however that racism, xenophobia and hubris led America and Japan to the abyss of December 6, 1941. Tomorrow the bombs would fall on Hawaii and the world would change forever - or would it? On Dec 7, 2016, 75 years later, racism, xenophobia and hubris are still political malignancies that exist in no small way here and abroad and if unchecked, will be the end of humankind. This is what we should talk about on Dec 7, 2016.”

It is also what we should continue to discuss on 14 August 2020 as we mark the 75th anniversary of the end of the Pacific War. I will focus my final essay on the Pacific War on two organizations, one in Japan and one in America that have tried to face the lingering hatreds of the war in a non-judgmental way, understanding that such hatreds were justified in their time, but now stand as an impediment to creating a climate of understanding as first steps to expunging war itself. I’ll conclude with a bibliography to recognize the authors I consulted for these essays.

Keiko Holmes was born in Japan after the war. She met and married her British husband, Paul Holmes, in Japan and later moved to England. Holmes began to witness the extreme and, in her own opinion, well-deserved hatred of the Japanese by British veterans, especially former POW’s held in forced labor camps on the Thai-Burma railroad. Recognizing the toxic nature of hatred no matter how well justified, she founded a charity called the Agape World which brings former Allied POW’s to Japan and Indo-China. The former POW’s visit the places of their captivity and for those held in Japan, meet and learn about Japanese citizens from the towns and neighborhoods nearby. Agape World recognizes that most Pacific veterans have never had an outlet to express their hatred for the Japanese to the Japanese. The organization gives them an opportunity to express their feelings without being judged for what they feel. Many who have participated in the program have found it a cathartic experience to learn about modern Japan and have returned with a great load lifted from them as the came to realize many

Japanese did earnestly regret their country's conduct of the war and treatment of prisoners. In April 1998, Keiko Holmes received an honorary OBE from the Queen and today the organization focuses on descendants of veterans, continuing their mission of promoting peace through the mitigation of hate.

As good luck charms, Japanese soldiers carried on their persons their country's flag (Yosegaki Hinomaru) which was adorned with good luck messages and the signatures of friends and relatives. "Field stripping" enemy corpses (removing souvenirs and valuables) has been a common wartime practice since antiquity and was widely practiced by both sides in the Pacific War. Yosegaki Hinomaru flags were prized souvenirs among Allied soldiers and marines and an untold number found their way back to American homes.

Few Japanese soldiers and sailors returned from the war alive and most families received a ceremonial white box with the "ashes" of their loved ones. These boxes rarely contained actual cremated remains, most contained a piece of wood so the box wouldn't sound empty. Japanese families seldom learned where or how their relatives were killed. 62 years after her grandfather's death in Burma, Keiko Ziak's mother received the surprise gift of her father's Yosegaki Hinomaru flag, which had come into the possession of an American collector who had the hope of returning it to the family of the owner. It was something of a miracle that through a great deal of expense and effort, this flag was identified as the property of Keiko's grandfather. Keiko could hardly describe the depth of the emotions she felt on seeing this flag and learning her grandfather's fate. Keiko's mother said her father's spirit was now at rest.

Hoping to share this experience with others, Keiko and her then fiancée, Rex, founded the Obon Society, headquartered in Oregon, which accepts flags and other personal items collected by Pacific veterans and if the owner can be identified, returns them to the owner's family in Japan. If the owner cannot be determined, these items are donated to Japanese cities or museums where they will receive proper adulation and respect. Japanese families who receive these items have waited over 7 decades to learn of the fate of their loved ones and the effect on them is beyond description. Veteran donors of these items also report a feeling of relief and reconciliation through parting with these items. In the name of promoting world peace through understanding, the Obon Society has developed a sophisticated system to identify owners of donated items and actively seeks personal items taken from Japanese corpses - all items they receive are returned to Japan. The Obon society does not accept military items such as weapons, medals, field gear or uniforms, nor do they accept body parts which unfortunately still are found among many veteran's possessions. Bones, teeth and other Japanese human remains should be returned to the nearest Japanese consulate.

That former enemies in the Pacific War can endeavor to expunge the hatreds that drove them to this most vicious of conflicts, gives strength to my conviction that humanity need not be doomed to extinction by its own self-destructive tendencies. Faith in the future is an abstract term with nothing palpable to confirm it. The people of the Agape World and the Obon Society are concrete proof that evil is not innate to the human mind, that humans are not "programmed" to follow endless cycles of hatred and war and that there exists within us a latent instinct strong enough to overcome that which propels to violence.

On this 75th VJ Day, let us imagine a world in which war is relegated to a historical curiosity and devote the power of our minds to forging a peaceful future by devoting some part of this day to contemplate one constructive alternative to armed conflict. Our survival as a species will be assured when a growing number of minds dedicated to the pursuit of peace eventually overpower the many minds that today are dedicated to promoting hate and conflict. But let us also on this VJ Day, resolve never to

forget the Pacific War and the memory of those who fought it, died in it and were lucky enough to survive it – lest we fail to recognize the forces that caused so great a carnage then, propelling a new generation to repeat it in the future.

Michael B. Sturm, Staten Island, NY, 12 August 2020

Other than my father, my greatest source of firsthand information in the preparation of these essays was Mr. Ed Sloan, 142 AACCS, Biak. I am sad to report that my dear friend Ed passed away on June 30th of this year. 15 years ago, I happened to be browsing the web site of the Army Airways Communications System, my father's unit, when I came upon a post from Ed, seeking other veterans from Biak. I checked a newspaper my father edited while on Biak and found Ed's name in a story about the unit's basketball team, of which "Toledo's Ed Sloan" was a star. I contacted Ed in our long conversations, he admitted that the passage of 60 years had erased any memories of my father, but Ed was sure he worked for him. We've been in constant contact ever since, sharing memorabilia and stories and we spent an incredible day together at his home. I wish Ruth, his wife of 71 years, comfort in the adulation of your wonderful family. Every conversation with Ed began with news of his family and ended with a mention of Ruth. As long as my father remains in my memory so will Ed Sloan, may their memory and that of this incredible generation continue to inspire us.

Following is a list of books I have read for the preparation of these blogs, I am indebted to these authors for the information I've gleaned from their works, which I used to develop my own analyses of the events I've described:

U. S Veteran Authors:

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| Burgin, R. V | Islands of the Damned (Combat memoir.) |
| Leckie, Robert | Strong Men Armed (The USMC in the Pacific.)
Guadalcanal, Challenge for the Pacific
Okinawa
Helmet For My Pillow (Combat memoir, Guadalcanal, Cape Gloucester, Peleliu.) |
| Sledge, Eugene | With The Old Breed, Peleliu and Okinawa (Combat memoir.)
China Marine (Postwar duty in China and his struggle with PTSD.) |
| Tatum, Chuck | Red Blood, Black Sand (Combat memoir of Iwo Jima.) |

Japanese Veteran Authors:

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| Hara, Tameichi | Japanese Destroyer Captain (Naval combat memoir.) |
| Sakai, Saburo | Samurai (Air combat memoir.) |
| Yahara, Hiromichi | The Battle for Okinawa (Infantry combat memoir.) |

Historians:

Bradley, John Flags of Our Fathers (The Iwo Jima flag-raising and his father's role.)
Flyboys (The air battles of Chi Chi Jima and Japanese cannibalism.)

Johnston, George H. The Toughest Fighting in the World (New Guinea.)

Keith, Don The Ship That Wouldn't Die (Career and sinking of the fleet oiler, USS Neosho.)

Lech, Raymond B. All The Drowned Sailors (The loss of the cruiser USS Indianapolis.)

Mundy, Liza Code Girls (The story of the 10,000 women code breakers of WWII.)

Prados, John Storm Over Leyte (The Battle of Leyte Gulf.)

Toll, Ian W. Pacific Crucible (Pacific War, 1941-1942.)
The Conquering Tide (Pacific War, 1942-1944.)
Twilight Of The Gods (Pacific War, 1944-1945 – due in September.)

Wukovits, John One Square Mile of Hell (Tarawa.)

Web Sites:

Army Center for Military History publications.

U.S. Army, Navy and Marine Corps historical websites.

Historic Naval Ships Association online documents and manuals and the 1944 Navy Cookbook.

A special note of thanks to my new old friend from Picatinny Arsenal, Mike Chinni, for proofreading and suggesting edits for many of these blogs.

Dedicated to my personal greatest generation: My mother, Cecille H. Sturm (1922-1991) educator.
My father, SGT Philip Sturm (1913-1999) 142 AACCS, Biak, Netherlands East Indies, Army Air Corps,
1943-1946.