

## **SINS OF OMISSION**

### **Japan's Wars of Aggression**

by Roger D. McGrath

"Japan didn't fight wars of aggression. Only China now says so," declared Yuko Tojo, the granddaughter of Japan's wartime Prime Minister, Gen. Hideki Tojo, in an interview with the Japan Times in late June. .Yuko was half right. Although Japan fought several wars of aggression, only China seems to raise the issue today. America dropped the topic during the 1970's. By the 1980's, the yen was up and American memory, down, when the National Park Service introduced a new film for those visiting the Arizona Memorial. I was astounded to hear the film's narrator proclaim that Japan was simply defending her "unique culture" and that American sanctions had left the Japanese "with their backs to the wall." My letter to the Park Service never received a reply.

Yuko Tojo is now reiterating the revisionist theme, claiming that her grandfather and Japan were fighting a war of self-defense against the United States and other Western powers. In invading China, she argues, Japan was only defending her interests secured after World War I. China claims Japan killed 30 million Chinese doing so. Although the numbers may be inflated to camouflage the communist massacres following the close of World War II, the Japanese certainly killed millions of Chinese and went far beyond simply defending their interests.

Japan's wars of aggression began in 1894 with her invasion of Korea. Wrestling control of Korea from China, she began an occupation that would last until the end of World War II and include a formal annexation in 1910 and the reduction of the people to vassals, slave laborers, and slave prostitutes—the latter euphemistically called "comfort girls" by the Japanese. At the time of her invasion of Korea, Japan was also contemplating war with Russia. Knowing that she was not yet strong enough to wage war with the bear to the north, she opened negotiations over the fate of Manchuria. While negotiating, she modernized and strengthened her army and navy. Then, in 1904, without a declaration of war, Japan launched a sneak attack on the Russian Pacific fleet anchored at Port Arthur on Manchuria's Liaotung Peninsula.

The Russo-Japanese War raged for a year and a half before President Theodore Roosevelt intervened and brought the belligerents together at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. The resulting Treaty of Portsmouth gave southern Manchuria,

including Port Arthur, and the southern half of Sakhalin Island to Japan and recognized Japanese supremacy in Korea. Though Japan could have expected little more, Japanese leaders told their people that the American President had cheated them out of vast territorial gains.

The victory over Russia was a tremendous achievement for Japan. It altered the balance of power in Asia and, although Russia was controlled by a moribund and calcified czarist regime, demonstrated the ability of an oriental power to defeat an occidental one. Japan gained great confidence and began to think of extending her control over all of East Asia and the western Pacific as well.

Japan entered World War I on the side of the Allies but only to gobble up German possessions in the Pacific, including Saipan and Tinian in the Marianas. Everything Chamorro was brutally suppressed, and more than 25,000 Japanese were settled on Saipan, their numbers surpassing the native Chamorros six to one. Japan quickly began the construction of air and naval bases on the islands—in violation of Japan's League of Nations Mandate—but protests were to no avail. Japan was also given a mandate over the Carolines and Marshalls and began to transform islands in those groups into unsinkable aircraft carriers.

Japan took German holdings on the Shantung Peninsula in China, as well. When China pressed for their return, Japan issued the 21 Demands. If all of the demands had been met, China would have become a virtual territory of Japan. As it was, Japan kept the German possessions, took control of steel and iron works in Central China, got special privileges in Chinese ports, and was allowed new opportunities to exploit Manchuria.

Useful to Japan's dreams of empire was her army of occupation in southern Manchuria. Known as the Kwantung Army, it precipitated several incidents in Manchuria in hopes of creating a pretext for further conquest. One of the incidents bore fruit. In September 1931, the army claimed that Chinese soldiers had tried to bomb a South Manchurian Railway train. Capitalizing on the "Manchurian Incident," the army moved swiftly to capture the capital city of Mukden, followed by the occupation of all of Manchuria. By 1932, Japan had turned Manchuria into the puppet state of Manchoukuo. The League of Nations demanded that the puppet state be dismantled and Chinese sovereignty, restored. Japan answered by formally quitting the League.

During 1933, the Japanese pushed from Manchuria into north China. This new

aggression led to the establishment of a demilitarized zone between Beijing and the Great Wall, diplomatic protests notwithstanding. In 1934, Japan declared that she would allow no interference in her China policy. In 1937 came still another "incident." At the Marco Polo Bridge in Beijing, Japanese troops were fired on by—take your pick—Japanese provocateurs, Chinese communists, or Chinese soldiers. No matter: The Japanese used this "China Incident" as a pretext for a general invasion of China.

By December 1937, the Japanese had reached Nanking and began a two-month orgy of looting, burning, raping, torturing, and murdering. Even the friendly Germans were aghast at the Rape of Nanking and, in an official report, condemned the Japanese soldiers as "bestial machinery." At least 100,000 (perhaps as many as 300,000) Chinese civilians were slaughtered, more than 20,000 of them young girls who were raped and then dismembered. Thousands of men and boys were used for bayonet practice. Thousands of others were decapitated by Japanese officers testing their swords. If this was not a war of aggression—and a stunningly brutal and sadistic one, at that—I don't know what is.