

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

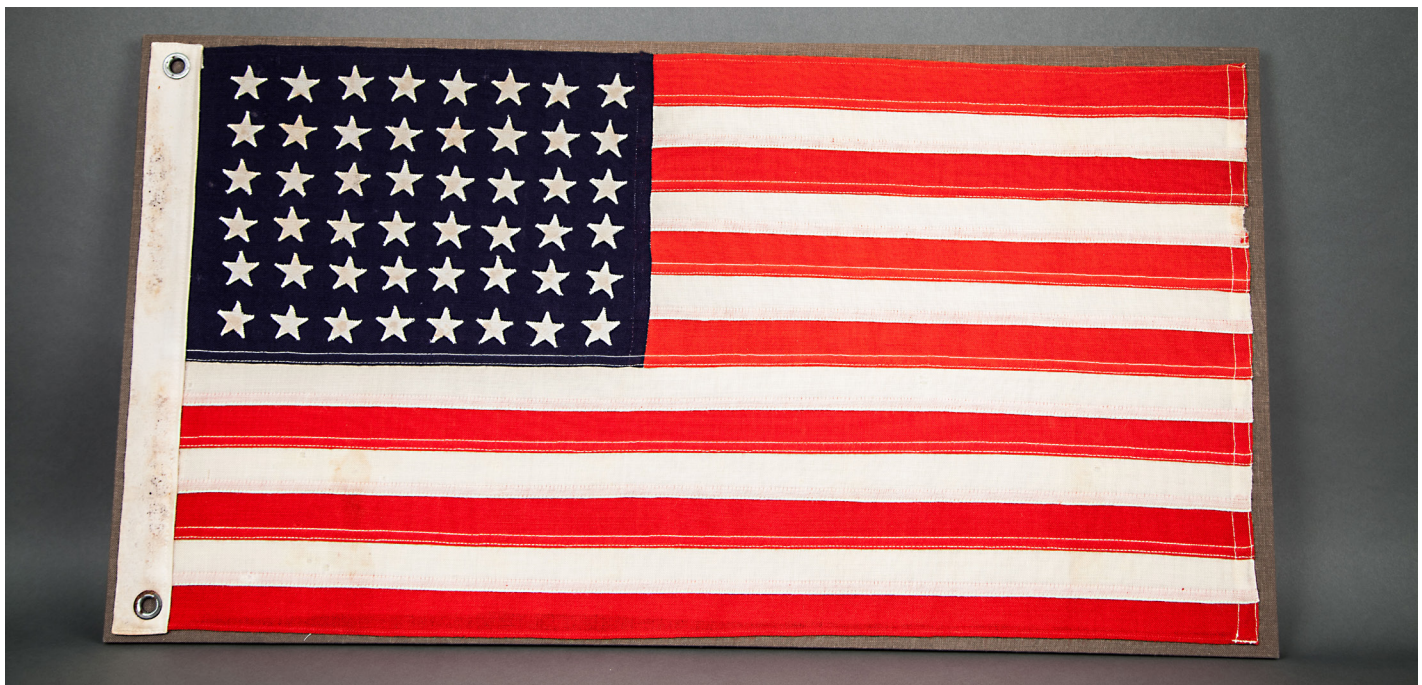
By Richard B. Frank

The historiography of the Asia-Pacific phase of World War II spans almost as much contested terrain as the conflict itself. Those controversies don't just revolve around issues between the United States and Japan, but also encompass disputes involving many more participants. The following comprises a small sampling of the provocative debates regarding the Asia-Pacific War that students can explore.

First, to what degree did the United States achieve its stated war goals? The Atlantic Charter, which the United States and Great Britain adopted in 1941, called for the right of all peoples for self-determination. The 1943 Cairo Declaration demanded that Japan surrender the territories it acquired by conquest. The policy of "Unconditional Surrender," which the Allies articulated at the Potsdam Conference in 1945, formed the legal foundation for a program of postwar occupation reforms intended to assure that Japan became and remained peaceful and democratic. How does the war's outcome compare to these benchmarks?

Second, the US strategy in the Pacific theater of operations generated both lively challenges and defenses. "Germany First" (Hitler as the foremost enemy) formed the fundamental US strategic policy. Yet the United States supported parallel advances in the central Pacific under Admiral Chester Nimitz and in the southwest Pacific under General Douglas MacArthur. Would a single axis of advance have proved more effective and lowered Allied losses, or did the dual advance keep the Japanese off-balance and lower Allied losses? Should one or both advances have been suspended until Germany was defeated? And, if so, what would be the costs of such delay to subjugated peoples within Japan's empire?

The third question to consider relates to China's role in the war. Chinese students today typically learn about American aviators who fought for China in World War II like the "Flying Tigers" and the transport plane crews who flew "Over the Hump" across towering mountains to deliver supplies to beleaguered China. But did you know that at least 15 million Chinese perished in the



On August 28, 1945, Robert Demorest Miller was part of a small advance party sent to Atsugi Air Base near Yokusuka, Japan, to prepare for the beginning of the American occupation. Shortly after landing, he raised this flag on the radio mast of a C-47. It was recognized as the first American flag to fly over occupied Japan.

(Image: From the Collection of The National WWII Museum, Gift of Robert D. Miller, 2001.165.001.)

Sino-Japanese war between 1937 and 1945? Further, China's refusal to surrender tied down about one million Japanese soldiers. Some of these soldiers could have been repositioned to confront US advances in the Pacific. Why have China's sacrifices and contributions in World War II been so little addressed in the United States?

Fourth, Japan's Pearl Harbor attack crippled part of America's naval power and gave Japan significant advantages in the early stages of the expanded war. The attack, however, unified a previously divided American public and triggered Hitler's declaration of war on the United States. On balance, was the Pearl Harbor attack more advantageous to Japan or the United States?

Fifth, what explains the intense savagery that marked the US conflict with Japan? Some argue that this fundamentally arose from racism inculcated in American and Japanese societies. Others argue that the much more significant factors constituted the battlefield dynamics of fighting the Japanese, particularly their refusal to surrender and their brutal treatment and execution of captives. In this context, the differing rates at which the armed services of participating nations took enemy combatants as prisoners of war shed some light. At the end of hostilities, China had lost about three million combatants killed facing Japan. The Japanese presented 56 men as Japan's total number of Chinese prisoners of war. About 480,000 Japanese combatants perished fighting in China, and in 1945 the Chinese held 8,317 Japanese prisoners of war. US forces held at least 22,500 Japanese prisoners of war as a result of just the campaigns in the Philippines and Okinawa, where about 225,000 Japanese were killed.

Sixth, were atomic weapons necessary to end the war with Japan? Even if necessary, was their employment morally justifiable? Had Japan's leaders resolved to continue the war, or had they agreed to capitulate?



During his years as a POW, Dutchman Fred G. Oberman risked his life to record details of the brutal treatment of prisoners, writing on scraps of paper that he bundled together and hid in a two-part canister. (Image: From the Collection of The National WWII Museum, Gift in Memory of Fred G. Oberman, 2001.507.)

What did US leaders know of Japanese plans to defeat or inflict massive casualties on an initial invasion of Japan and of Japan's attitude towards surrender? What moral distinctions exist between US plans to use atomic bombs and plans to compel Japan's surrender by inflicting a mass famine?

Finally, during the first year of the postwar US occupation of Japan, several million Japanese nearly perished from starvation. The United States provided about 800,000 tons of food to Japan, barely heading off famine. Meanwhile, US health authorities working closely with Japanese counterparts prevented a series of deadly epidemics and reformed the Japanese public-health system, ultimately saving at least two million Japanese lives. How do you explain these events in light of the ferocious hostility that marked the war with Japan?

These debates demonstrate that the history of World War II in Asia and the Pacific is not so much a set of dates and facts to remember as it is a host of questions to explore. By tackling these questions, students like you honor the legacy of the war and ensure its continued relevance for future generations of Americans.

INDIVIDUAL FLIGHT RECORD

(1) SERIAL NO. 0-361713 (2) NAME TIBBETS, PAUL W. JR. (3) RANK Colonel (4) AGE 1917
 (5) PERS. CLASS 01 (6) BRANCH Air Corps (7) STATION APO 336
 (8) ORGANIZATION ASSIGNED 20th (9) ORGANIZATION ATTACHED 313th 509th
 (10) PRESENT RATING & DATE Sr. Pilot 6-2-43 (11) ORIGINAL RATING & DATE Pilot 2-16-38
 (12) TRANSFERRED FROM (13) FLIGHT RESTRICTIONS None
 (15) TRANSFERRED TO (14) TRANSFER DATE

DAY	AIRCRAFT TYPE, MODEL & SERIES	FLYING INCL. IN 15 MIN. TIME	CD. PILOT	OHA! PILOT OR	FIRST PILOT		RATED PERS.		NON-RATED		SPECIAL INFORMATION	
					DAY	NIGHT	NON-PILOT	OTHER CREW & SERVICES PASSENGER	INSTRUMENT	NIGHT	INSTRUMENT	PILOT IN COMMAND
6	B-29	1	12:15									3:00
24	B-29	1			7:25							6:05
26	B-29	2			7:05							

CERTIFIED CORRECT:
 GEORGE W. MARQUARDT,
 Captain, Air Corps,
 Asst. Operations Officer

COLUMN TOTALS 12:15 14:30 9:05

(43) TOTAL FIRST PILOT TIME 14:30 0:00 26:45
 (44) TOTAL PILOT TIME 97:00 0:00 105:40
 (45) THIS MONTH 111:30 0:00 132:25
 (46) PREVIOUS MONTHS THIS F. Y. 296:45 46:20 376:25
 (47) THIS FISCAL YEAR 3726:55 46:20 3801:50
 (48) PREVIOUS FISCAL YEARS 3631:25 46:20 3900:50
 (49) TO DATE

377 THIS MONTH 14:30 0:00 26:45
 378 PREVIOUS MONTHS THIS F. Y. 97:00 0:00 105:40
 379 THIS FISCAL YEAR 111:30 0:00 132:25
 380 PREVIOUS FISCAL YEARS 296:45 46:20 376:25
 381 TO DATE 3726:55 46:20 3801:50

CARD NO. 1 CARD NO. 2 CARD NO. 3

AIRCRAFT	NO.	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35
B-29	1		12													
B-29	2				15											

C-54 4.5
 B-29 12.6

Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the bomber *Enola Gay*, recorded his missions in this flight log. His final mission in World War II was dropping "Little Boy"—the first atomic bomb—on the city of Hiroshima. (Image: From the Collection of The National WWII Museum, Gift of Madlyn and Paul Hilliard, 2014.310.001.)