

VJ Day 15 August 2020

Three months ago we celebrated, rather quietly, the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day. Now in mid August it is time to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Victory in Japan Day. On VE Day we had been rejoicing that the six year long war in Europe, the Atlantic and North Africa was at last over, the Nazis had been destroyed, Germany defeated and a new divided, damaged, troubled, occupied Europe emerged. Peace at last.

But the war against Japan still had a long, dangerous, uncertain way to go for the already exhausted Allies. Imperial Japan dominated the Pacific Ocean and 2,000 islands, it occupied China, Korea, Manchuria, the British colonies of Malaya, Singapore, Hong Kong, Borneo and much of Burma where fierce fighting continued, it also occupied French IndoChina [Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam today], the Dutch East Indies [Indonesia today] and the American colonies of Guam, Wake and the Philippines. The neutral Portuguese colony of Macau effectively became a Japanese protectorate. There were 37,583 British and Empire prisoners of war suffering terribly in Japanese hands. It all presented a major, long drawn out, demanding challenge.

I was already fourteen years old. Our father was still in France. Mother, my younger brother and I briefly went to stay for a summer holiday with our grandmother in her flat near the sea shore in Sidmouth. The enormous antitank obstacle composed of inter laced scaffolding still covered the beach. We greatly enjoyed climbing over it. At tea time on the 6th August we heard on our wireless, to our absolute amazement, that an American aircraft had dropped a new top secret weapon called an atomic bomb on a Japanese city called Hiroshima. There had been massive damage and casualties, 39,000 died with many more suffering radiation damage for decades to come. The future of Japan was uncertain. Three days later another bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. 80,000 died. On the 15th Japan surrendered. The war was finally over ages before it was anticipated.

We had already gone to stay with cousins at Malahide near Dublin. The boat across from Holyhead having been packed with Irish men in British service uniforms. They couldn't all get aboard and some jumped across the gap as it set off. Their kit bags dropping into the sea. We attended the packed thanksgiving service in the Malahide parish church in neutral Eire.

And here we are 75 years later, still remembering VJ Day and thanking the Good Lord for it.

Major General Sir Michael Carleton-Smith