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## The atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki saved more lives than they took and ended an era of citizen-heroes.

EVERY year at the height of summer, the world is reminded of those two fateful days in early August 1945 when the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were obliterated by American atom bombs.

This year the annual memorial service for those that perished in that atomic holocaust was, in the name of nuclear disarmament, attended by representatives from France and Britain for the first time. Even America sent a representative to Hiroshima.

In this show of solidarity, however, let us not forget that the Japanese were aggressors

rather than victims and the reason their cities were destroyed was because their rulers and their military refused to stop the imperialistic war they were waging against their Asian neighbours.

By all accounts, the Japanese military's sadism and savagery were unprecedented. There are

bloodcurdling documentaries and archives of horrendous atrocities.

Rape, torture and baby-killing were liberally used as instruments of terror and it is claimed, to enhance the soldiers' "martial spirit".

In China where resistance was fiercest, humans were used for biological experiments and

### ZIYING'S BRUSH



**Imperial army:** Japanese troops advancing through Malaya during World War II.

300,000 inhabitants of the then-capital Nanjing were systematically slaughtered between December 1937 and January 1938 (the Nanjing Massacre), a fact that many in Japan still refuse to admit.

In all, by the time the Americans dropped the bombs that ended the murderous war, over 20 million Asians, the vast majority of them Chinese, had been killed, with more on the verge of starvation.

It is therefore not surprising that many who lived through the Japanese War view the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with detached coldness. The 120,000 Japanese lives lost seem insignificant compared with the millions who died, the lives ruined as well as the torment inflicted upon millions more by the invaders. Many who lived through that period in fact remember the bombing with gratitude to the America of 1945.

Last fortnight's edition of *Ziying's Brush (Historical Archive)* highlighted the fact that Malaysia's National Museum has given short shrift to the victims of this nightmarish era.

Malaya's Chinese population, especially, suffered the brunt of Japanese brutality as they were targeted in an extension of the ethnic cleansing ("Sookching") undertaken in Singapore as punishment for their support of China's war of resistance against Japan.

That darkest of times also produced heroes like Sybil Karthigesu whose indomitable spirit should serve as inspiration to all. Tested to the limit, they stood out as shining examples of character, courage and integrity.

There are others, too, unknown heroes who in their own way stood firm against oppression.

Here is a true story of one of them - A-Gong.

One evening at the height of the war, A-Gong's nephew, a member of the underground resistance, appeared at his door. Burning with malaria, the nephew asked for shelter as the Japanese were hunting him down. Without hesitation A-Gong hid him in a small air-raid shelter, a two-room bunker with 60cm thick walls that he had constructed adjacent to the main house.

It was raining heavily that night and the nephew near-delirious with fever when the soldiers came looking for him accompanied by an informer. Luckily, darkness and the downpour obscured the air raid shelter and the soldiers missed it, surrounding and searching only the main family house.

The whole family, young and old, was herded into the living room. A-Gong, of course, refused to admit harbouring the resistance fighter. The Japanese roughed him up, slapped him, held a gun to his head and threatened to kill the whole family if he did not produce their prey. Still, his integrity would not allow him to betray his nephew and eventually the soldiers left. The resistance fighter, too, slipped away the next day.

A-Gong was, of course, my grandfather who arrived in Malaya early last century and the story is one of many told to me by my father who, as a teenager, was among the family members held by the enemy that terrifying night more than 65 years ago.

In China's Nanjing city, there is a museum that commemorates the 300,000 victims of the Nanjing Massacre, which I have never had the nerve to enter. I have seen too many pictures of what the Japanese imperial army did to men, women and children.

As I understand it, the barbarism directed at the Chinese was in retaliation for their stubborn resistance and refusal to submit. Each year, China remembers these millions of victims in memorial services, sometimes attended by ordinary Japanese citizens of conscience.

In Malaysia, the thousands (estimated 100,000) who died under the Japanese Occupation or who gave their lives resisting it seem to have been forgotten and denied their place in history.

It is now up to ordinary citizens to keep their memory alive. Moreover, at each anniversary of the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it should be remembered that the two atom bombs saved Asia and preserved more lives than they took. Without them many of us may not even be here today.

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