

The Survival of an American Soldier

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In Memory of Willie

This story is dedicated to a United States Fourth Marine Corps hero by the name of William Wetherington, who was killed with the first group of GI's who died in the Philippines on December the 8th, 1941, defending our country at the beginning of World War II.

The Jap squadrons came in at noon to wipe us out. They destroyed the Cavite Navy Yard, killing about 90 percent of the people working there, including a detachment of Marines who were on their way back to the States, after having served a two-year hitch in Shanghai, China.

Willie was at his post just inside the front gate of the yard, standing on top of a car directing traffic out of the Navy Yard. It was his first and last post of World War II. After the enemy had dropped their ordnance and retreated back into the Pacific, the Captain of the Yard blocked off the gate and would not allow anyone inside to look for their buddies.

About a week after the raid personnel was scarce and I was promoted to driver for the Yard Captain. Having thus gained access to the yard, I searched for over an hour around the gate and finally found Willie about fifty feet to the east of the gate where he had been thrown by a direct hit. For a positive identification I had to remove one of his shoes to read his name printed inside the shoe. His body, shredded by the blast, had been riddled with fifty-caliber machine gun fire and his corpse having endured the tropical sun for over a week had been burned, and if he had not had his shoes on, I never would have been able to identify him.

Willie, John, Keith and I were boot camp buddies. We had pulled duty together for over three years. John and Keith have disappeared from the face of the earth; I never heard of or saw them again. I told that dead piece of blackened carbon that was once Willie, that I would write a book about him and the rest of us out there some day. So hear me, Willie Keith and John, this is for you.

Chapter One

Before Bataan

The year was 1927. That's about as far back as I can go unless you count my fifth birthday when I received a big red fire truck and a platter of potato candy that my mom made for me. Between that time and 1927, I mostly remember mom and dad fighting all the time. My folks got a divorce that year and I went to live with my old Grand Pappy.

After Grand Pappy was born, I think they threw away the mold. I think he was one of the original Indian fighters; at least he was a back woodsman who knew all the tricks to keep food on the table and a roof over our heads.

The judge gave me to my father at the divorce, but that did not last long. Mom and Dad shifted me back and forth quite a bit until I was nine years old. Dad had me in Des Moines, Iowa. Mom had hitch-hiked from eighty miles away and moved into the house across the street from where we lived. She watched me leave the house that fateful morning for school. Then she sent the neighbor out into the yard to tell me to go around the block until I was out of sight of my Dad's house, and then double back, because my Mom was in her house waiting for me.

My step-mother was a hell-cat who hated me with a passion. Without going into detail, I think I was the most mistreated child in the state of Iowa. You can easily imagine the delight with which I received Mom's message that she was there waiting to take me home with her.

We hitch-hiked back to her hometown where my Grand Pappy was ready to take off for Oklahoma. Our transportation . . . an old 1919 Model T Ford, the convertible type with canvas curtains and the top laid back in hot weather. We were all packed up and ready to pull out of the driveway and Papa (We always called our Grandfather Papa) said, "Hold it a minute. I forgot something." He got his ax out of the car and walked over to the woods and cut a sapling tree down and trimmed it up and cut it off where it was about ten feet long. He came back and tied the pole to the running board. I asked him what he wanted that for. He never did say any more than he had to, and this time was no exception. "You'll see."

It was a week before I found out what the tree was for. The roads from Iowa to Oklahoma back in 1929 were not the roads we have today. They were mostly trails across fields, you might say. The only paved roads we could find were those that went through the towns we hit. On the day I found out what the tree was for, we were on a very sandy road and the wheels sank down almost to the hubs. Papa got out the tree-pole and used it for a pry or lift bar, shoving sticks, coats we had, or anything we could find under the wheels to get us out of the sand. The tree also worked wonders when we got stuck in the mud.

There were five of us in the family with my grandfather, my brother who was the youngest (one year old) and my sister who was four at the time. Mom was pregnant with Brother when she was divorced, so my father never saw his youngest son. Brother turned seventy in 1998. I turned 78 in 1998. Not much time left. I hope I have enough to finish this book.

We finally arrived at Oklahoma. We stopped along the way and helped the farmers dig and harvest their potato crop around Topeka and Lawrence, Kansas. We had to pick up a little more money to make the trip on south. I got a job driving the water wagon, pulled by a couple horses. The other boys in the field were mad because they did not get that job, and I got whopped with a few potatoes in the back as I drove past them.

There were no high-priced machines built yet to dig potatoes, the state of the art being a team of horses dragging a plow. The harvest was picked by hand. In fact, all crops in that far off time were picked by hand. The farmers' power tools were horses and mules.

After we reached a farm outside Randlet, pronounced Ran-da-let, Oklahoma, we were able to live there without paying rent. My grandfather cut fire wood for money, fished and hunted for meat on the table, raised a couple of hogs for winter meat, also was able to come up with two good milk cows.

I grew up in Southern Oklahoma, where I stayed for two years. At 18 I joined the Marines, during the two years between 16 and 18 I did a lot of traveling. I hitch-hiked a little, but mostly I would ride the rails. I have been booted off too many trains by the railroad bulls; missed a few meals when I was on the road bumming around; met a lot of good people who were older than I was. All a fine bunch of citizens looking for work anywhere it might be found. The 1930's depression was in full swing and we were getting precious little help from our beloved government.

Before my family moved to Sapulpa we had moved in the old farmhouse I spoke of. It got moved around by a "northerner" a huge storm with powerful winds. Inside we felt like ice cubes in a tall water glass. After that we moved to another house near Devol, Oklahoma. The old Model T Ford had been converted into a buzz saw for cutting fire wood. So we borrowed a team of horses and a wagon to move us. We were within a quarter of a mile when the horses spooked and took off like the devil himself was chasing them. They scattered our wagon-load of furniture for the next quarter-mile until they wound up at the end of the road in front of the house. We spent nine months to a year in the storm cellar of a country school that had been blown away by a tornado. I remember a time when there was nothing in the house to eat except cornmeal, but we never did go hungry for long. Ol' Papa would come to the rescue.

When we left Ranlet and headed west, we did not know where we would end up, but we did stay along the Deep Red River, because we were looking for more timber to cut, by asking along the way we were guided to the farm I spoke of where the team had run away. The old house there could not have held a cat with the door shut, and there was only one door. The sides of the house were built with one-by twelve boards. The builder left cracks between the wall boards about an inch wide. The boards had never been painted and the weather had rotten out some of them to the point where a cat could actually walk through the holes.

Papa never bothered moving the heating stoves from one house to the other. He would always find a new fifty-five gallon oil drum and build another one as he did in our

present abode for winter heat. We went to our neighbor about a mile upstream from us, who gave us enough newspaper and cardboard to cover the cracks in the old house, but the back bedroom away from the heating stove was one cold place. But I kept warm because I slept on a feathered mattress made by mom.

By now we had geese for down, chickens for eggs, and meat, a pig or two and the cows. We also had two dogs, one German shepherd given by a previous owner who said she was not worth her keep. He said she would not work the stock and would never go to the trouble of barking, even if a stranger walked into the yard and right on into the house. It was not long before Papa had that dog trained as a darned good watchdog! We could tell her we were going squirrel hunting and she would run over the other game and never look at it. And when it was time to bring the cows in she would take off hunting the cows and bring them in for milking with the other dog, which was a mixed breed.

I learned from that old man that you could train any dog to do anything within reason. When the dog is young, you use a newspaper to correct him. You never hit him with your hand or any heavy object, and if you give and show them love and affection, you will always win, and it has worked for me ever since with every dog I have ever owned. I learned that if you take your dog, young or old, and treat them like they were your son or daughter you will soon see that they are not just a dumb animal. They will talk to you in their own way, they will use whatever sign language you will understand, and they will understand what you say to them.

Those were good days living along the banks of Deep Red River. There were no schools close enough for me to go to since we had moved to Oklahoma, so all I had to do was enjoy life and learn a lot about the nature of the woods, and I had a first rate teacher. Papa, my old grandfather was well into his sixties and close to seventy. He kept up the good fight until he was eighty-four and smoked that awful house-grown tobacco in a pipe all his life.

Once it rained so much that the river came up out of its banks, and the two dogs and I caught seventy-two rabbits in three days. We had no gun at the house that I could shoot, except an old single shot twelve gauge; I was a little young for that blunder buss. If both dogs got to a rabbit about the same time I always got back two halves. If one dog caught it I would get back a live rabbit. Both would bring their catch back to me to take from their mouths.

I cut a stick from a live tree about six feet long, leaving a pronged fork at the small end, and used it to twist the rabbits out of the holes the dogs had run them into. Some of these holes were in tree trunks, some were in the ground where groundhogs or prairie dogs had taken up housekeeping. If you like rabbit sausage you should have been there for Mom made sausage out of those seventy-two rabbits.

We were squirrel hunting one afternoon and spotted a momma squirrel and five babies lying out on a limb. The next morning we went back to the tree and cut it down for

firewood to sell and to get the baby squirrels to sell for cash so we could buy sugar and flour needed for the house.

My job on that squirrel capture was to run up to the tree when it hit the ground and shove a stick of wood into the den hole to keep the squirrels from running out. At that point we sawed the limb off below the bottom of the nest and took it with the babies still in the house. Then we let the babies come out of the limb after we had placed it in a large cage we had built for this purpose.

The mother squirrel left the tree as soon as we started to cut it down and just as I stuck the piece of wood into the den hole, a baby squirrel was trying to get out. The impact knocked the squirrel unconscious. For three days I kept that baby with me and when he finally came to his senses I suspect he remembered nothing of what happened. He took to me like I was his mother.

Papa had already taken the other four babies to a store about three miles away and sold them for five dollars each. My squirrel was about fully grown when we let him run around the house and yard like any of the animals we had. The dogs learned very soon that the squirrel was special and never bothered him. Papa came to me one day and said, "Let's take a walk." He told me that he did not want my Mom to see me crying and that we had to sell my squirrel to put food on the table. I had to go along with his request, but I did not cry. Okay, I did get a little choked up, but I did not show Papa that I was concerned at all.

After Papa left to take the squirrel to the store I cried for over an hour. When Papa got back he had two big sacks of food and still had ten dollars in his pocket. He had received fifteen dollars for the little guy. Man! That was over fifty years ago. My little friend is long gone.

I remember drinking my first Coca-Cola at that little country store. On my first swallow I thought the top of my head was going to blow off, my eyes watered, my nose ran, and I could not breathe. I did survive and I am still drinking Coca-Cola today but they don't taste now like they did then.

The year that we captured the five squirrels was a hard spring and summer weather wise. I remember a hailstorm that tore up the roof of the house we lived in. It was a tin roof and the hailstones were six inches deep when the storm was over and there were a lot of repairs needed around the place. Papa was a good carpenter and repaired everything with little or no outside supplies.

About a hundred cows grazed on the adjoining property which was mostly wooded. They were left there to forage for themselves and the farmer would come in the fall and take them to market. However, that summer most of the topsoil went with the wind heading northwest. After the soil took its leave most of the farmers in Oklahoma headed west to California.

When the rains did not come and the land dried up, the cows in the field next to us would go to the ponds to get water that wasn't there, and wade out into the muddy bottom and sink down in the mud unable to get out, and would die there. The farmers and stockmen were so broke from all the crops failing that year that there was no money to try to save the cattle. There was a for sale sign on that one hundred acres priced at twenty-five cents per acre, \$25. There were no buyers.

One early morning the dogs and I were out hunting in an open pasture. A wet ditch, six feet deep and ten to fifteen feet wide, bisecting the pasture had been carved across the field by runoff from the heavy rains. In normal rainless weather the ditch was dry. As I approached the ditch I saw a mother skunk and about six babies running along the outer rim. I made a wild dash toward the skunks so excited that I did not realize the dogs had frozen in their tracks and were barking at me.

By the time I reached the edge of the ditch the skunks were in the bottom and trying to hide. I managed to catch three, made very sure that the ones I caught were not the mother. I came home lugging those babies by the tail. As long as you hold their tails they can not squirt their perfume. In order for them to shoot the tails had to curl back over their backs. The dogs did not stay with me; they had gone on back to the house. Now, my mom, grandfather, brother and sister, with the dog's help, tried running me off. I made a wide circle around the house, got out to the barn where there was a fifty-five gallon barrel and I deposited my latest catch in the barrel, put some straw in it for a bed, and hid the barrel where I thought no one would find it.

For about a week I played with those skunks and made pets out of all of them. But one day I got a little too rough with those little dudes and they got me, and before I could get to the creek to wash off the smell, my family was on my back again. They made me take the skunks to the creek and leave them. I smelled so disgusting I did not object to their orders. Mom gave me a bar of homemade soap to bathe with and told me not to bring my clothes back into the house.

We finally left Devol and moved to Comanche, Oklahoma about a hundred miles south of Oklahoma City. Papa had relations there. I never did know how the lady was related but she had a good house and we were welcome because she was in her eighties and was living alone. I started back to school there but missed the dogs so much I couldn't stand it. We had left them with a neighbor farmer there at Devol. I ran away from home without telling anyone where I was going.

I was about fifteen and a half years old when I hitchhiked back to where the dogs were left. It was about three or four in the afternoon when I got there and no one was home. Only the German shepherd was there, and I thought she would die of happiness when she saw me coming. I was just about that bad too. Since no one was home I did not have to explain why I was there. So, Queenie and I took off for Comanche. The other dog was nowhere to be found.

There were few cars that Queenie had been around and much to my surprise when I would get a ride on my way back home, if the driver did not want the dog in the car, she would jump on the running board and lean against the hood for support. All cars in that era had running boards and fenders over the wheels. I guess the dog knew if she was going home with me she had to do the best she could to ride with me. I only had to show her one time how to ride on the running board. She was the smartest dog I have ever known. Now fifty years later, if there's a dog heaven, I know she is there.

I did not get very far during the first night heading back home. The dog and I spent our first night together sleeping in a haystack. We had about ten miles to walk before we could get back to a highway where we could hitch a ride. We made it back home the next morning and of course the family was glad to see the dog, but I got one of the worst whippings that I think I ever got and was not allowed to leave the place except to go to school for the next thirty days. It was worth it, I had my best friend back with me.

Another bit of history lived next door to us in Comanche, an old man in his late seventies or early eighties. I made friends with him soon after we moved there. No one ever went to visit the old man and the only place he could go was to buy groceries. I used to sit on his front porch for hours talking with him. The family had told me to stay away from his house; everyone knew the old man was weird. No one knew anything about his history, his kinsfolk, or his past. He had been known to run visitors off with a .38 pistol in his hand.

In one of the cylinders of that .38 the old man kept a folded up twenty dollar bill, which he told me was taken from the last bank that he had helped Jessie James hold up. He said one of his best friends had been killed in that robbery. The day we left Comanche the old man cried. It is a terrible thing to see an old man cry. I couldn't keep my tears back. I knew that old man, with not one friend in the world left, was going to die alone. I never saw nor heard from him again.

Another lesson I learned while living in Comanche was not to steal. I was bored one day in the late summer and decided to take a hike around the countryside. I left early that morning and around noon I came upon a farmhouse where a young man lived alone. He had a couple of horses which I admired, a few chickens, but not much of anything else really. He fed me and when it came time for me to go I remembered that he had a real nice lariat rope hanging on the horse corral between me and town.

I headed for the corral because he had told me the railroad tracks were in that direction. And that was the shortest route back to Comanche. As I passed the corral I took the rope. On the tracks a crew of men were working and one of them saw the lariat and offered me a dime for it. I took the dime and handed over the rope. As soon as I got into town, I spent the dime.

Arriving back at the house I summed up my day as pretty satisfactory, but when I went into the house the sheriff was waiting for me. He had me dead to rights and I admitted I had taken the rope which he said the man wanted back in the worst way. He said if I

couldn't produce the rope I would have to go to jail. No one in my family would give me the dime I needed to get the rope back, so I took off back down the tracks crying every step of the way. I caught up with the crew and told the man who had bought the rope my story. He said if I would give him his dime back he would return the rope.

I cried, I begged the man to give it to me so I would not have to go to jail. But he steadfastly refused. I went over to the side of the track and sat down about thirty feet from where the crew was working. I did not know what to do. I couldn't go home, I had no place to go, and it was the end of the line for me. I sat there for close to half an hour trying to figure out what I was going to do. One of the crew members came over and handed me a dime and explained to me why it was wrong to steal. He made me promise never to steal again. It was one of the hardest lessons I have ever learned but I learned it well for I have never stolen another thing in my seven decades on this earth.

A long time after the lariat episode I was walking up town when a big old tall boy walked up to me asking if I knew who he was. I studied him a long time without success and then he told me. "I'm the guy who gave you that dime so you would not have to go to jail." I was glad to see him again because I had not properly thanked him that day at the tracks. I hugged him and cried again and thank him again and again until he finally told me he had been thanked enough.

By the time I had turned sixteen we had moved to Sapulpa, Oklahoma and shortly after that I quit school. I got a job at the local cab company working from six in the evening until six the next morning answering the telephone calls for taxis. I was paid the glorious rate of fifty cents per hour. I took my whole paycheck home and gave it to mom to help with the expenses of living.

When mom remarried, her new husband did not want me around. So I decided to ride the rails to Des Moines, Iowa and visit my dad. In fact for the next year or so I bummed around from Iowa to South Texas where one of my uncles had family. Something always drew me back to Sapulpa and when I met a pretty lady who eventually became my wife, I knew why I had kept coming back there. I had to go back and make sure she was still waiting for me. Then she became my wife and when I turned eighteen I applied to the U.S. Marines for enlistment. It seemed like ages before they called me to go to Dallas for the exams.

But I finally made it and when I got to Dallas I asked the recruiter why he had waited so long to call me. He said he was waiting for me to put on more weight because 120 pounds was not enough to qualify for the Marines. But I weighed only 120 pounds at the examination and they took me anyway. That was July 5, 1938. They had made me wait from March 29th.

Western Union

KM13 129 G9VT EXTRA=Washington DC VIA SWEETWATER TEXAS

May 12, 1942

Mrs. Jesse Newman, 311 WEST TAFT

The commandant US Marine Corps regrets to advise you that according to the records of this headquarters your husband, Private First Class Junior H. Newman, US Marine Corps was performing his duty in the service of his country in the Manila Bay area when that station capitulated X He will be carried on the records of the Marine Corps as missing pending further information X No report of his death has been received and he may be a prisoner of war X It will probably be several months before definite official information can be expected concerning his status X Sincere Sympathy is extended to you in your anxiety and you are assured that any report received will be communicated to you promptly X=T Holcomb Lieutenant General USMC, the Commandant US Marine Corps.

Western Union

KM2 NL Govt=Washington DC Feb 26

Mrs. TW Finley =, Box 53, Sapulpa, Oklahoma

An intercepted short wave broadcast from Japan mentioned the name of CPL H. J. Newman as a prisoner of war STOP one personal message was included STOP This information supplements previous official report received from the International Red Cross Guillon=Provost Marshall.

Chapter Two

The Day Corregidor Fell

If I remember the name correctly, I believe it was Sangley Point. That's where I holed up after the surrenders. It was straight north of the power plant about three quarters of a mile. We had a kitchen there so we had to walk there from our trenches to get our meals. There was a large tunnel there which we used for storage and a bomb shelter.

I still remember vividly what was going through my mind as I walked out of that tunnel into the daylight, seeing two Japanese machine guns pointed at me. Fifteen to twenty men stood along the path with pistols drawn and the rifles at ready, all pointed at us.

We were nervous as cats, maybe scared would be more accurate, not knowing how the Japanese were going to act. Thoughts were going through my mind at ninety miles per hour. One of them was that the war was over for us. No more air raids, no more shelling, no more lying in hot wet trenches. Ha! That was a fantasy. I had no idea what was waiting for us.

I had an empty water canteen in my hand as I came out of the tunnel past the machine gun positions, and I figured that since they were in charge, I did not need the canteen, so I threw it aside. As I walked on out to the road where all the prisoners were lining up to be

taken to the power plant, our first staging area, I realized as a prisoner I needed it more than ever. Regardless of the danger I had to go and retrieve that canteen.

I caught the eye of one of the guards and pointed to a canteen one of the other prisoners was carrying and then pointed to my waist showing that mine was gone. Then I pointed back to where I had dropped my canteen and indicated that I wanted to go get it. That was my first conversation with the Japanese soldier.

These Japs were the “regular” army and we were quite surprised at their actions in dealing with us. They were direct in getting us to do what they wanted, but there were no beatings or harassment, no personal vendettas to settle or anything like that. Had they not been the enemy you would have thought they were on our side of the war. We were soon to find out that all Japanese were not the same.

When all the Americans were out of the tunnel and lined up on the road we were marched on up to the power plant area. The weather was hot and dry, there were no meals nor water handed out, and we were all hungry and thirsty, the Japs as well as the Americans.

By the time we left the staging area and headed toward the east end of the island the sun had only about an hour left. My guess would be that the hike we made was between six to eight miles. Just before dark we spotted a fifty-five gallon steel barrel that had six to eight inches of rain water in it. I think I was about the first to fill my canteen. The guards made no moves to stop us from getting the water. That was the first water we had tasted since morning.

When we arrived at the east end of the island it was dark and we could not tell where we were except we did hear the water from the bay splashing on the shore line. The guards told us through an interpreter they were going to take us where we were to bed down for the night. No one had blankets or even a change of clothes. We all just lay down in the open and slept on the ground.

The morning after we arrived at the east end of the beach we were really surprised to see the number of Americans who had been on the island of Corregidor, thousands on thousands. The third morning, after we had arrived, we saw three cargo ships lying off the shore about half a mile.

My mind was in such a tormented state at this time that I have never been able to remember exactly what took place while we were on that beach. I do know that we had to wade and swim to the ships, but that was forty-six years ago and my memory is not as good as it once was. I do remember climbing the rope netting to go aboard the ship that would take us to Manila.

We arrived at the Manila docks just before daylight, were unloaded and formed a column of four. We were marched through the streets of Manila until dark; we still had received no food or water. The Philippine people tried to pass food, but if a guard saw the food

being passed, he would throw it to the ground and step on it. This, they told us, was the “March of Shame.”

The people of Manila were crowded on each side of the roads as we passed by. They all cheered us and thanked us for what we had done for them. Tears still come to my eyes when I think of that day, not only were the American boys crying, the entire population of Manila cried with us that day. On the entire trip around that town we did not see a dry face. It would not be wise to run down a Filipino in front of an American Fourth Marine who fought in that country.

I do not remember seeing any of the prisoners fall by the wayside as a result of exhaustion, hunger or lack of water. Here again my mind floats in and out of those days from the time Corregidor fell until we arrived at Cabanatuan, which was about eighty miles north of Manila. We had been put in boxcars after the Manila march and transported to Cabanatuan by rail. The train came within thirty miles of Cabanatuan and from there we had to march on into camp.

I do not know if this is true or not but in the back of my mind somewhere I can see an American prisoner passing out from the march and being bayoneted by a Jap guard. This picture has flashed back to me many times since that awful time more than half a century ago. I cannot truly say that I know when or where it happened. I cannot say that this actually happened but in my mind I know it is true, and it did happen, and I saw it happen.

I know I made that walk from the railroad to the camp and I do remember arriving at the camp. We were issued two blankets and mess gear. We were searched and anything of value was taken from us and we were fed. This was the first meal we had received since the day of surrender. I cannot say for sure but I believe it was the evening of the fourth day. We were given half a canteen cup of fish soup, not soup as we know it, just a cup of water flavored by a few fish that was in the pot that cooked it, and the mess kit level full of dry steamed rice. That was our diet for the next three years and four months.

The next morning we were fed our rice and fish soup and assigned to our barracks. The building was about sixty feet long and about twenty-four feet wide. Inside there were two platforms on each side of the building with a four foot dirt walkway down the center. The bottom platform was about eighteen inches up from the floor. Both ran the length of the building with ladders about every eight feet to climb up into the upper sleeping area. Each prisoner was assigned a three foot wide by ten foot long space for sleeping. That was how we started life as prisoners of war. Many wasted away and died, and many were killed outright.

Chapter Three

Survival as Prisoner of War

There were several ways to die in these circumstances. One was the quick death; another was the slow death by starvation or sickness, or slow torture. Many valiant young Americans met their maker while interned by the Japanese.

We lived with this threat for three years and four months. You would think with the situation lasting so long you would get use to the problem, but that was not the case at all. How does one get use to the wild animal-like guard who was always looking for an excuse to take your life? This he in fact did many times. It was one of those favorite sports. One of their favorite methods for snuffing you was to gut shoot the prisoner so they could give him a burial while he was still alive, and sometimes still conscious. The prisoners were forced to dig the grave and cover the man with dirt while he was still screaming and begging for help. This was the quick way to die.

Then there was the threat of starving to death. There is no way I can give an accurate count of the men who died from starvation alone. One day the man would seem to be in fair health and the next morning he would be lying in his bed dead. One man that I knew died happy. It was Christmas; the Japs had issued everyone a Red Cross food package. This man sat and ate the entire contents of his box. That evening he died in his sleep with a full stomach.

Sickness took many of my fellow soldiers too. Beri beri would cause water to start forming in your feet, like filling a glass of water very slowly. When the body got full up to the chest, they would die and silent death. Dysentery was also a big killer. We had American doctors but there was no medicine. The Japs had set up a camp across the road from the main camp for dysentery patients. There was a small building about twelve by twenty feet, four large latrines had been dug. We slept on the dirt floor of the building. They brought our food in buckets and set it outside the gate for us to come and claim. They only fed us twice daily. There was neither toilet paper nor water to wash with, only for drinking.

The odds that a prisoner might ever get back to the main camp was about one in twenty or twenty-five. I was one of the lucky ones. I stayed across the road for three weeks or so and lived to return to the main barracks.

Then there were the personal contacts you invariably made with the camp guards as you tried to survive. It was sometimes necessary to break the rules laid down by our captors and once you made that step there was a very slim chance that you would live to tell about it.

Another live saving tactic was the use of the buddy system. They looked out for you, in return for which you looked out for them. If a prisoner did not have a friend or buddy, he died. Usually it was his own fault because he was proud or selfish, two personality traits not conducive to a long life as a prisoner of war.

One's mental attitude also helped to determine how long you might live. If someone were to just give up, he could die in three days or less, because our bodies were in such precarious physical shape to begin with. I fell into this trap during my second year of imprisonment. Five of us had banded together to promote mutual survival. One day during work I got depressed and when I came into camp I missed my evening rice. The boys came to me where I was sitting with my head in my hands and forced me to eat part of the food, all the time reminding me what I would miss in life by not hanging on and getting back home to my wife and family. We all knew intimate things about each other, an unavoidable set of circumstances after a year of such close contact, and they used this knowledge with the utmost skill to coax me back from the brink. They did not allow me to die; in fact, we all made it back home finally.

Though none of us realized it at the beginning of our imprisonment, each of us had a mission in our prison life which was to see that our buddies made it home, and it came to the point of caring about the other fellow's life more than our own. It created a powerful esprit de Corp which provided energy to carry on during those impossible years.

We were working outside Manila at Nichols Air Field, it was raining and we were building a runway using narrow-gauge mining cars for transporting the dirt from the high spots to the low ground using picks and shovels as the only tools to do the job. On dumping the car one of the four men who was helping to dump the car, slipped and when the car come back down to the tracks, it hit my left foot, smashing my big toe.

The head guard saw the problem developing and decided I had left my foot on the track intentionally. He pulled me out away from the other boys to work. Everyday before sick call I took a two by two board and hit the toe until it swelled up enough to stay off the work detail. I did this in the hopes of picking up more weight for I had seen too many of the boys, even those who weighed more than I, die from the overwork and starvation sort of life we led.

While working there at Nichols Field one of the men tried to escape right after the noon meal of dry steamed rice, and the half-canteen-cup of fish head soup. We called him Red, his red hair was fire red in color. He could have been a model for Norman Rockwell. He was such a perfect well-built man, about five feet, ten inches tall, with a smiling face to match.

At quitting time that evening, when we had the count to go back to our schoolhouse barracks, he was missing. There must have been five hundred Jap soldiers called out to help find him. The rest of us prisoners were ordered to sit in a tight group in front of our meal shack, which was a building set up on poles just to hold up the roof, with tables and benches to eat on. The building was about thirty feet wide by sixty feet long.

When they found Red hiding in a rice paddy ditch that was full of water, they brought him back before us, washed the mud off of him, gave him a cigarette and offered him a blindfold. He refused the blindfold, pushing the guard's hands away from his face. The guard who was ordered to shoot Red was pro-American, or at least he had no use for the

war. He had brought us food and cigarettes every chance he got, but had been caught in the act, and for retribution, he had been ordered to execute Red. All the other Japs knew how this guard felt about the war and when he was instructed to shoot Red they all stood around laughing at him. The executioner stood ready with his rifle crying. The order was given and before the shot was fired, Red jerked to attention saying, "God Bless America!"

To see a man shot in the movies is one thing, to see a young man in the prime of his life shot down is entirely different. The bullet caught him in the center of the forehead, he never knew what hit him, and he dropped to the ground as you would drop a wet blanket. The guard was merciful with his shot.

Then there was the Mexican boy who got the stomach cramps after he ate his noon lunch. He was hurting so bad that he could not stand upright and was unable to return to work after the lunch break. The cramps came often with all the boys but none had them as badly as this fellow did. The guard told the boy to get back to work. The boy tried to go but fell to the ground in pain. The guard shot him in the center of the stomach. They left him lying there while the rest of us went back to work. We could hear him screaming and crying for help all afternoon. When we assembled to go back to the barracks we could still hear the boy screaming. When we neared the building another guard shot him in the stomach again. He continued to cry for help as four prisoners dug his grave. In my notes I wrote that the boy was shot seven times, but today I cannot clearly say how many times he was shot. I do, however remember with clarity that he was screaming and crying to God while our boys were forced to shovel dirt over his tortured body.

Then there was the day that one of our boys was whistling while he worked. This the Japs did not understand. We were prisoners of war, what reason could we have to sing and whistle? Though we had done this many times in the past to take our minds off our problems, this day the top honcho decided he would stop the whistling and singing. He slipped up behind the boy with a pick handle and started beating him. He kept it up for seven or eight minutes. The boy was unconscious when he stopped. We all thought he was dead.

When the beating stopped the Jap called the interpreter and told him to tell us that the next time he heard singing or whistling the man would be shot because we had no right to be happy while we were prisoners of war. This did stop us from doing it again. Then they told one of our boys to throw a bucket of water on the boy to see if he was dead. They would not allow us to touch him. He finally revived and was forced to go back to work.

At the barracks one night one of our fellows broke into the Jap warehouse for the purpose of getting some sugar. He got into the room by going over the ceiling rafters and dropping down into the room. Once he was into the room there was no way he could get back up to the ceiling to get out. They found him the next morning.

I will try to paint you the picture. Take a two by four board, place the board below your knees and tie your elbows to the board adjacent to your knees. You are now in a squatting

position with both arms and legs attached to the board. They placed him where the sun would hit him all day. He stayed in this position for three days and two nights. On the evening of the third day they dug his grave where he could watch. When the grave was finished they dropped him into it and burned him alive. Every man in the camp could hear his screams. Every American who was ever a prisoner of war in the custody of the Japs heard those screams. I am sure we can all still hear them today, they never stop.

After staying in the Philippines for a little over two years, I was in a group that was shipped to Japan. We were marched on board cargo ships and put into one of the cargo holds. We marched in single file, the first man going to the far corner of the hold and standing with his back up against the corner of the room. The second row was then formed by the oncoming men backing up against the man standing against the wall. This pattern continued until there was only about an eight foot square in the center of the room where no men were standing. They then closed the cargo doors at the top of the hold.

We were in a convoy of three ships carrying prisoners and were led to believe there were two Japanese destroyers accompanying us because five days out of harbor, depth charges were dropped, the sounds coming from two different directions. The Japs told us we had been attacked by American subs. God was on the ship with us that night.

We spent about ten days on that trip and no one was allowed to go topside unless dead or unconscious. There were no bathrooms, no toilet paper, no bunks, and just one big empty room with over a thousand men trying to survive. Dry rice was lowered down through the hatch doors twice a day in three gallon wooden buckets. Water was issued once a day. The fish soup we had learned to drink was not issued those ten days. It is not difficult for the reader to imagine the feelings of despair that pervaded that hold for those ten days.

After arrival in Japan, the ground was covered with snow but we were not issued winter clothing until after boarding a train, when we were issued winter army uniforms to change into from our tropical loin cloths that we were wearing. We were taken to northern Japan to the Hanawa Copper Mines by train to work until the war ended.

The Hanawa barracks were built much better than those in the Philippines the weather there was about the same as Alaska, I guess. I know the telephone poles would be covered with snow in the winter and the houses would have steps cut in the snow going down into the front door of the homes. The snow would completely cover the houses. Inside the top of that mountain were the copper mines where the temperature was always above sixty degrees while the weather outside often fell well below zero.

The prisoners have now learned to barter with just about every one except the Jap guards by now, and the Jap civilians became the next target. I was riding an ore car down the tracks one day to the dumping place and the car got to going so fast that as it went around a curve, it leaned to the side and caught my index finger between the wall and the car nearly tearing my finger off. I bandaged my hand with the first aid kit the Japs had furnished us with and I was assigned the job of counting loaded cars at the dump site.

I had only been at the mines a few days when I met a civilian who told me he had tuxon cigarettes and asked me if I had any soap to trade. I jumped at that offer; I could now get cigarettes but more importantly I could trade for food with the other prisoners. I was working alone at the dump station; no guards were neither present nor working prisoners. The civilian slipped me a few cigarettes at our first meeting. I told him to meet me there the next day and I would have soap for him.

At quitting time that afternoon I made a deal for half a mess kit of rice from one of the prisoners for one of my cigarettes. We were lined up to leave the mines and head back to the barracks when he lit up the cigarette. The boss man saw him smoking and asked him where he had gotten the cigarette. Without too much encouragement he pointed me out.

My brain shifted into high gear in the contemplation of my fate. Even to talk to a civilian was death for the prisoner and the civilian. The guard knew there was no issue of cigarettes at camp. He took me into his little office and asked me where I had gotten the cigarette and whether I had any more. I handed the dozen or so butts to him and answered "Hi que," which means "issue." I no more than got the words out of my mouth when I hit the ground. He had been waiting for my answer and was ready when I gave the wrong one. He clipped me good on the left jaw bone. I got up and was knocked down twice more because I continued to give him the wrong answer.

I don't know but maybe the boss guard knew that even if what I had done was wrong, I was trying to be honorable to protect the man who gave me the cigarettes. Finally, with no alternative, I told him where I had gotten them. I told him about the meeting with the man the next day and he set up a plan to catch the guy giving me cigarettes. He asked me if I would go along with his plan. Had I refused I would have been shot right there. We both knew it when he asked for my cooperation. I agreed.

The next day the civilian showed up right on time. He must have had over a hundred cigarettes with him. The honcho guard was hiding in a dark tunnel where he could see everything around me. He was only about twenty feet away when the cigarettes were handed to me. Before the civilian could get the soap into his pockets the guard had him by the collar.

The rest of the work crew had been waiting at the guard shack, held up from work, waiting on us to bring the poor civilian back from our encounter. They took the civilian into the guard shack while I remained outside with the other prisoners. We could hear them talking to him but shortly the talking stopped and the beating began. When they finished beating the man the drug him out where we could all see him and dropped him against the wall. At noon when we came back for lunch the man was still lying in the same position we had last seen him that morning. That evening when we came back to the barracks the man was gone. We never found out whether he had died, but we surmised they had killed him before they brought him out of the office after the beating. Nothing more was said to me about the situation. I had gotten to smoke only one of the cigarettes. The most expensive cigarette I ever smoked.

There was no defense for my actions at Nichols Field or on the cigarette deal. I was at the mercy of a very sadistic enemy who thrived on killing. I handled it the only way I could, by not showing fear and by looking them in the eye. I showed them that I could take their punishment without groveling. In doing this I was silently asking them to let me live. They did. I was lucky.

There were thousands of prisoners who had been captured in the Philippines who had not been so lucky. They were brutally killed by gut shooting and then buried alive. There were men who had to sit with a two by four tied to their arms and legs and made to sit in the sun for three to five days and then buried alive. Our ranks were thinned through death by starvation, by falling rocks where the men worked unsteady banks, dysentery, and other diseases. No medical attention was allowed for anyone other than first aid now and then. Today half a century later, I still have recurrent nightmares about my imprisonment in Japan. The war will never end for the men who were there. Even now as I write tears come unbidden for the dear friends who never came home. I have tried so many times before to write this story but the tears blinded me and I continued to postpone this task I knew I had to someday finish.
