

The Cause: A Matter Of Life And Death ...

BY DAVE HOSMER
Yankton

Why would a man risk his life to protect an inanimate object? Is life so bad that death would be preferable? Or, was the prospect of living so important that any action in defiance of one's captors was worth it? That small object must have been pretty important.

This is the story of Sergeant J.S. Gray from the Catahoula Parrish, Louisiana. He arrived in the Philippines on November 20, 1941. His job was to load bombs aboard A-24 Dauntless aircraft. The 27th Bomb Group was stationed at Clark Field.

Clark Field was attacked by Japanese planes on December 8, 1941. Most American planes were destroyed. Clark Field was just a small outpost; only 200 men were there. The runways were dirt. The Japanese overran Clark Field. Gray, along with many others, retreated to the Bataan Peninsula.

Once they arrived at the Bataan Peninsula the airmen and their crews were required to "join" the infantry. They gallantly fought, but these Battlin' Bastards of Bataan didn't win. General Edward King, the newly appointed commander, surrendered his Bataan forces on April 9. Approximately 12,000 American and 64,000 Filipino soldiers surrendered. After the surrender, the prisoners were gathered and told to begin marching along the National Highway. Their arduous 65-mile journey was about to begin.

When asked about the March and how he survived, Gray said, "Memories and hate — that's what kept me going." He witnessed horrible Japanese atrocities. You wanted "to live long enough to dance on their graves."

The treatment of the prisoners was deplorable. Some 500-600 Americans died. The March lasted for six days. The days were hot and, although there were some breaks, the men were given the "sun treatment" — no shade and no water. Some of the men who left the march to get water from nearby wells were shot or bayoneted. Men who tried to help were bayoneted. Heads were decapitated. Men were so thirsty that their tongues would swell and cause gagging. The spontaneous torture of Filipino civilians is hideously unspeakable.

After the March ended, the men were delivered via train to Camp O'Donnell, formerly a U.S. Army facility. The crowding on the train and in the camp was intense. Malnourishment was rampant because the amount and quality of food was negligible. Men just gave up. You could see death in their eyes. Diseases such as beriberi, dysentery and malaria, were prevalent and there was no medical care. Gray was given grave detail, a particularly horrible job. He was forced to bury men, some of whom were not yet dead. But he had to do it or face a bayonet in the back. 2,534 men died at this camp.

Gray was later taken to a prison camp at Davao, one of the Philippine islands. While in the camp he and several other men were faced with a choice to act in defiance of the Japanese or not. They decided to do it despite the fact that getting caught would mean certain death. Man after man agreed to do it. With the March fresh in their minds, and as weak as they were, why would they do this?

These insubordinate men did not stay at Davao. As American forces approached, and labor shortages increased in Japan, the solution was to ship prisoners to Japan for slave labor. These men were dumped into "hell ships," which many men said were worse than the Death March. Stored in raging hot and filthy cargo holds of rust bucket ships, the men were so cramped that they could not move. There was no sense of reality. Men were passing out. Some went insane. Food was scarce. They were lucky to receive a handful of rice and a cup of water per day. The toilet was a bucket, which was dreadful because many men had dysentery. 3,840 men died aboard these hellships. Many died from friendly fire because the hell ships were unmarked.

The hell ship disposed of its human cargo at Yokkaichi, Japan in September of 1944. Gray and the others were forced to work as slave laborers at a steel mill. These camps offered no reprieve. Another 1,445 men died. Gray was tortured with a hot poker and a hanging rope. But these men continued their defiance. One by one each of the men hid his prize. Ultimately, the men were released in September 1945.

On Aug. 18, 1945, a plane had dropped supplies for the men. One of the men collected the silk parachute colored red, white and blue. Gray fashioned a needle from a piece of barbed wire. They were about to make the men's private disobedience an open act of rebellion. They sewed and sewed until it was ready. Each man returned his secret scrap.

What was this secret?

Back at Davao, a Japanese officer carried a package into the American barracks. Inside was an American flag. He gave it to them with the explicit instruction that they must destroy it pursuant to American traditions. These men had been through so much. The flag meant freedom and America. They had mixed emotions. The flag, which was four feet by eight feet, represented their desire to survive, but keeping it threatened their lives. It was impossible to keep it in one piece. One man suggested that they cut the stars off and then divvy them up. Another man had smuggled in a hacksaw blade to the camp. It was used to remove the 96 stars, 48 on each side. 96 men received a star and each man hid his star anywhere that he could, including G-strings and mess kits. They hid them for two years until they were gathered again for reassembly into an American Flag. That flag was raised above the camp and flown with great pride. These men surely knew the value of freedom and the importance of symbols. Fly your flag!

Much of this article was gleaned from an oral interview of J.S. Gray at the National Museum of the Pacific War in Fredericksburg, Texas, where the assembled American flag is currently located.

Yankton

From Page 3

in for a treat.

"We have one artist who makes candles out of old liquor and pop bottles, and another who makes woven vases of different colors," she said.

It is those types of creativity that Amsberry looks for.

"It's important that our guests don't get bored with the artists that they see," she said. "With as many artists as we have, I think people will see a lot of new things."

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Karolevitz

From Page 4

Brecht's drugstore for help.

Will Pierson on the same ship suffered injuries from wayward rockets; and Fred Donaldson on the Olympia was severely burned as he tried to extinguish the fire that consumed the smoke-stack on his vessel. Mrs. John Novotny was struck by a failing rocket; and an unidentified man, who climbed a roof to get a better view of the "battle," encountered a nest of angry wasps which stung him so badly that "his lips were several inches in front of his nose."

The cannon which August Goetz constructed out of a gas pipe exploded in his face and one of his ears was "frightfully burned." The

Daily Gazette summed it up by reporting that "all who took part in the battle are of one voice in saying it was the warmest time they ever experienced," as they nearly suffocated amid the fumes and smoke.

A new century had

35th Anniversary Celebration



Mr. and Mrs. Rohde

Barb and Marty Rohde 35th wedding anniversary on the 4th of July.

Loved you then,
Love you now.

dawned, and somehow Yankton had survived all those gala — and obviously dangerous — celebrations of the Glorious Fourth, now almost a forgotten chapter in the Mother City's colorful past.

Soldiers

From Page 3

said. "(They told me) that now that Saddam Hussein (was) gone that they should take over their country and start leading instead of having America there."

When Saddam was in power, Iraqis citizens couldn't gather in a group and show dissent or engage in a demonstration because of a secret police patrol that would have arrested them immediately, Schild said. "They were happy that

Americans were there and gave them their freedom; they were just ready to take over their country," he said. "I (was glad) they felt comfortable enough to come talk to me about it and know they weren't going to be arrested."

Schild has since returned to Yankton, teaching science at Yankton Middle School and coaching varsity football and track at the high school.

However, he still plays an active role with the South Dakota National Guard. He is now a 1st Sgt. Battery B senior noncommissioned officer. "(On the Fourth of July)

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July 4: Memories And Meanings

Press & Dakotan Readers Offer Their Reflections On America's Birthday

By The Press & Dakotan

Independence Day may be the most American of holidays, and for a million reasons and a million memories, it conjures up thoughts and feelings that add to the patriotic drive of July 4.

Recently, we asked our readers to submit their thoughts and memories of the Fourth of July. Here are their responses:

JULIE GROSSHUESCH

The very core of all that is great about our nation is the right we share as Americans to pursue happiness regardless of our race, beliefs and sexual orientation. We are truly a "melting pot" of humanity that contains not only the need, but also the right to celebrate our individuality.

In the number of years that we have been a country, in comparison to many other countries, we are still in our infancy. We have, however, rapidly grown and prospered through our understanding of our citizen's desires to embrace their cultures and religions. We did not gather this understanding without much hardship and loss of life. Much as a young child falls and injures himself, we battled our way through prejudice and are beginning to find our balance. We are the nation we are because we can accept our differences and, to a large degree, embrace them.

As our future presents itself to us, we must remember why we became the country we are now. We have made huge bounds in our understanding of the needs of all people, no matter their race and sexual or religious preferences. We must continue forward and admonish those that would have us believe that theirs is the only right way. Theirs is

the only true religion or that any race is superior to another. When we begin to lose this battle, we have lost all that defines us as the greatest nation on earth. We disgrace our country's heritage and those patriots who have fought for our individual freedom. The blood and tears that our countrymen and women have shed must be honored through our continued growth as a people of tolerance. Our country is unparalleled in its determination to understand and battle for these truths.

As I celebrate this Fourth of July, I will remember our forefathers who bravely sought a new life. I will remember those Native Americans that welcomed them and showed them the beauty of their country. I will remember the government that formed to unite and welcome the masses of immigrants seeking freedom. I will remember all who defended our rights and beliefs with their personal sacrifices.

Above all, I will remember that we, the people, are not only the United States of America; we are the United States of Freedom.

DEE MUNSCH

The Stars and Stripes billowing in the wind from front porches, in yards, along main street and in the park ... red, white and blue is everywhere.

Families get together for picnics, camping, a swim, a day of boating or fishing.

The Fourth of July is celebrated in many ways and memories are being made.

I have a special memory of this day. It is the memory of the cookouts that were held in my Mother and Dad's backyard when their grandchildren were small. As hamburgers were being grilled

and the picnic lunch was being laid out, the grandchildren ran around the yard shooting fancy little cap guns. Throughout the afternoon, the Dads spiced things up by lighting firecrackers such as Parachutes, Smoke Bombs, Ladyfingers and Ash Snakes. Parachute firecrackers were shot into the air releasing tiny paper parachutes which floated to the ground in patriotic colors. Smoke Bombs emitted brilliant colored smoke into the air. Once lit, Ladyfingers popped while Ash Snakes changed color and slithered along the sidewalk until they burned out.

The Grande Finale came at dusk when the Dads lit up Sparkling Wheel Spinners and Fountain fireworks. Wide eyed and giggling, the children waved colorful Sparklers with their tiny hands. Once the Sparklers' light fizzled out, it was replaced by another and another until the Fourth of July sack was empty.

In recent times, while watching the Riverside Park fireworks light up the night time sky with its Grand Finale rain of color over the river, and hearing cheers and applause as another Fourth of July slips into the past ... there are times I recall the Fourth of July with our family cookouts, cap guns, Ladyfingers, colorful Ash Snakes, and the Grand Finale of Sparklers in the backyard at dusk.

This is my special Fourth of July memory.

ROBERT GAINES

July 4 — America's birthday. A celebration of a kind, generous peoples, respectful of WE THE PEOPLE!

Thanks, USA, from a proud, content citizen. In God we trust!

TOOTS MARCHAND

In June of 1912, my parents came to this country and my mother was pregnant. My sister was born on July 4 and the doctor told my parents what the date meant in the USA. So they named my sister Independence, which, as my sister got older, she made into the nickname Indy.

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50th Anniversary Celebration



Mr. & Mrs. Merrill

Tom and Dorothea Merrill of Yankton, SD, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary with an open house from 1-3 p.m. on July 18, 2015, at St. John's Lutheran Church. Friends, relatives, and former students are invited to attend.

The couple has two children: Marc Merrill, Michele Merrill, and one granddaughter, KenZi Alati.