



ALL EARS!!

THE LITCHFIELD FUND WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

"OUR EARS SPAN ALL FIELDS"



ARIZONA; LATE MAY. The temperature will soon hit 100°. A shaded stage - nearby the flag flies at half-mast. A tent covers the first few rows of chairs where the dignitaries will sit. The crowd begins to fill. People seek out the shade - a random tree, the side of a building or a tall saguaro. In the distance there are monuments - a mast from the USS Arizona, lost on that Day of Infamy; an Eternal Flame; & a tribute to the Silent Service, those who will remain forever *On Patrol*. The chairs on the stage begin to fill with the speakers for the day. The first few rows, the shade of a tent to block the desert sun, are soon seated. In the front row, waiting for the event to begin, waits an old man.

THE OLD MAN: The event begins. A welcome message & a benediction. Then the band starts & the Colors are presented by an honor guard. The old man, leaning on his walker, stands, with help, to salute his flag. He stands as straight as he can. He wears his medals & his garrison cap. The Colors are presented, but the band continues. Honor guards from every VFW hall; American Legion post; ROTC, Junior ROTC, Eagle Scout; Boy Scout & Cub Scout troop; police, fire & EMS units; veteran service associations & military bases located near this area, 5 million people in the USA's 10th largest SMSA, march past the stage. But the old man stands & holds his salute. Finally, the band stops. The crowd sits. Now the program starts. Speeches from long winded politicians from every level of government. Touching memorials from veterans & family members. More prayers. The setting of the Missing Man table by school children, with every symbol on the table explained. A few songs. The reading of names. A final prayer. Taps are played. A 21-gun salute. The crowd begins to disperse. Some visit the grave of a loved one, a friend or a brother-in-arms. The hardy ones defy the heat, wander the grounds to see the monuments & show their respect to those lost. Others quickly seek the water fountain or hurry home where guests, the barbeque & the beer awaits. A line forms in front of the old man. He stands, he isn't going anywhere soon. The line is long. Nervously you get in the line. Some people know him, they hug him, whisper in his ear or kiss his wrinkled cheek. Perhaps they share a laugh. As you wait, your anxiety increases. This man has seen a lot, been through a lot. He has not just lived longer than most, some of those years were in themselves, more than a lifetime. More than anyone should ever have to endure in any lifetime. You finally stand in front of him, humbled by being merely in his presence. You shake his hand; the words are hard to utter. A seemingly meaningless thank you & a choked God Bless You. Tears fill your eyes; sobs choke your throat but they are eventually released. You thank him once again, then walk away, the tears still flowing steadily. You shook the hand of a survivor – a survivor of the Bataan Death March.

(Author's note: Our regular readers are familiar that on Memorial Day, *ALL EARS!!* foregoes the weekly news to share a story of service. We do so to honor those who made the sacrifice to defend our precious, sacred, fragile rights & way of life & to defend the lives & freedoms of people in far off lands. We share these stories as today's history lessons likely ignore these stories, or sadly, more often these stories are used to promote an agenda instead of presenting facts. Today's story contains some graphic descriptions & the author feels compelled to warn those readers who may find these descriptions disturbing.)

On December 7, 1941 (*Day of Infamy*), the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor & decimated the USA Pacific Fleet. The Japanese quickly assaulted islands & nations across Southeast Asia & the Pacific. By Christmas, Guam, Wake Island & Singapore fell. In January, Rabaul, New Britain, the Solomon Islands, Bougainville & Manilla were taken by the Japanese. By February, Singapore was captured, Thailand surrendered & Japan was in Burma & New Guinea. Japan was at the doorstep of India & Australia.

After Manilla fell on January 2, 1942, the fighting on the island of Luzon shifted to the peninsula province of Bataan. Bataan & the Island of Corregidor were all that stood in the way of Japan being in control of Asia & the Pacific. For 3 months, the American & Filipino troops on Bataan engaged in a fighting retreat. This delaying action was a command decision. The USA needed time to rebuild its Navy; bring men & machines to the fight. With a decimated USA Navy, there were no supplies, no rearming to help these soldiers. The Americans were bombarded constantly by Japanese artillery & ships along the coast. Often the battles were fought hand to hand, the USA & Filipino troops out of ammunition. During one of these encounters, Lt. Alexander R. Nininger forced his way into a Japanese foxhole, armed with a rifle & a few hand grenades. He sacrificed his life, winning the Medal of Honor, as his actions allowed his unit to retake territory & continue to delay the Japanese. On March 12, General Douglas MacArthur, his family & several senior staff members were evacuated from Corregidor to Mindanao on PT boats

commanded by Lt. Cmdr. John D. Bulkeley. (Bulkeley would win the Medal of Honor & other Navy medals for his actions in the South Pacific. Read the book or watch the movie, *They Were Expendable*.) MacArthur, considered too valuable to lose, was flown to Australia where he delivered to the Filipino people his famous “*I Shall Return*” speech. On April 9, Bataan fell with Gen. Edward King in command & within a month, Corregidor, *The Rock*, an island fortress connected with tunnels & defensive positions, surrendered. Gen. Jonathan Wainwright spent the next three years in captivity, until the Chinese Red Army liberated him from a POW camp in Manchuria days before Japan surrendered. Both Gens. King & Wainwright believed that if they survived captivity, they would be court martialed for surrendering.

When Bataan fell, 76,000 American & Filipino soldiers were taken prisoner & other civilians were captured. The prisoners were to be marched to Camp O’Donnell, then distributed to other camps. Prisoners who were found with Japanese souvenirs, which they believed were taken from dead Japanese soldiers, were immediately killed. The Japanese took the prisoners’ jewelry & gold from their teeth. If a wedding ring could not be removed, they chopped off the finger. The march, in the sweltering jungle heat, began on April 10th. The Japanese provided no food or water. The weak & wounded were bayoneted or killed by an officer’s sword. Those who fell, if not killed, were left to die or were run over by-passing trucks. The prisoners were regularly beaten. But the torture went beyond the physical beatings. While the Japanese bathed & drank from the lakes & streams they passed, the prisoners were forced to sit in the sun & watch. Those who asked for water were shot. At one point, at the San Fernando railhead, the prisoners were forced into metal box cars in the 122° heat. They were on the train from morning to evening. Many died on the trip & when they arrived at Capas, they walked another 9 miles to Camp O’Donnell. The march was approximately 65 miles long. Of the 80,000 men who started the march only 54,000 arrived at Camp O’Donnell. From Camp O’Donnell the prisoners were dispersed to other camps. Some, like Gen. Wainwright, were sent to China, Burma or Thailand to work in the mines, on plantations or building roads. Many were lost in transit, stuck deep in the holds of warships that were sunk in battle. The prisoners were routinely starved, beaten & tortured. The Japanese were especially sadistic to tall Americans, targeting the blonds & redheads. These men were tied up in the sun, beaten until their eyes fell out. They were used for bayonet practice. They were slowly dismembered. Prisoners were shot or beheaded at random. Officers used the prisoners to hone their skills with their sword. Prisoners were placed in hot tin boxes in the sun, given no food or water. There was no medical attention or supplies as rampant disease ravaged the camps. Thousands more died in captivity.

After the war, several of the Japanese officers involved in the Death March were found guilty of war crimes by a military tribunal & executed. Gens. King & Wainwright were not court-martialed for defying orders & surrendering. They were viewed as heroes, protecting their men as best they could. Gen. Wainwright was awarded the Medal of Honor. The state of New Mexico experienced a great loss of young men, as five units of the New Mexico National Guard were in the Philippines & captured at Bataan. In the early days of WWII, USA military units followed the traditional practice of forming units from areas of the country: the Michigan 10th, the Ohio 12th, the Wisconsin Regulars, etc. It was felt that these young men, with common backgrounds & experience, would work together, fight for each other, more cohesively. But that soon changed, when the military realized that the destructive capability of the new war could wipe out an entire town’s population of young men. When the *USS Juneau* was sunk on November 13, 1942 near the Solomon Islands, five brothers, the Sullivans, were lost.

Wars occur for many reasons. Most often war is an economic consideration, a simple case of the ‘haves’ versus the ‘have-nots.’ Someone has something someone else wants. The economic cause is often shrouded by religious, racial, cultural or territorial disputes. One side says, “*Because we are (choose a label of superiority), & you are a (choose a label of inferiority), we deserve what you have & you must obey us!*” Then when the voices of reason speak up, either no one listens to them or they are shouted down & labeled as heretic, conspiratorial, traitors, intolerant or just plain nut jobs. When the voices of reason are no longer heard; when sound judgement is clouded by intolerant jingoistic narrow-mindedness; when debate is barred & any opposition is viewed as a form of heresy, wars are inevitable. The despots rise to power by rallying the narrow-minded. They identify a common enemy or threat. And then, as did the Japanese & the socio-fascist National Socialist Workers Party of Germany, seek destruction of that common enemy only to serve their own maniacal desires.

Life isn’t easy. Life has its hardships. It only takes a few minutes on a news site or on social media to find those who whine about how tough life is. But few of us were forced to walk 65 miles in the jungle heat; spend three years under the rule of cruel, sadistic guards & officers; survive starvation, torture, sickness & witness our comrades-in-arms die by the thousands. The old man at that Memorial Day event survived, returned to America, raised children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, some who followed him into military service. The story recently appeared online, a few short paragraphs on a local news site, that this old man, aged 103, had passed away. He was likely, per the story, the last of the Bataan Death March survivors.

SEEDS, SPROUTS, GROW, HARVEST!

THE LITCHFIELD FUND – *Tom Malenka*

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