



REVISITING OUR NATIONAL ANTHEM



BIG CHANGES REGARDING DUES FOR 2020 AND 2021

GOODNESS & KINDNESS REMAINS IN OUR AMERICA

STORY OF SURVIVAL, COURAGE, AND DETERMINATION

SONORA BRANCH 136



Rehn Birthday Party (circa ?) Happy Birthday to our October SIRS!

Message from the “Big Sir

Gene Zanoni (209-532-1989) In spite of local soaring temperatures exceeding one hundred degrees, a layer of dense smoke creating a situation providing extreme low visibility with potentially hazardous health concerns, in addition to rolling blackouts, we were able to conduct an in-person monthly BEC (Branch Executive Meeting) Meeting at the Eproson Park in Twain Harte on September 8, 2020. A quorum was realized since enough officers and directors were present. Besides the

SIRS Mission

To improve the lives of our members through fun activities and events - while making friends for life.

customary monthly reports that were presented and approved, significant progress was made on various other important matters. For instance, it was agreed upon to have our current officers remain in office until such time that we would be able to convene at a luncheon meeting and take a vote regarding new officers for 2021.

In that 2020 has been an abbreviated year with all aspects to our normal annual activities, mandated by the social restrictions imposed by the on-going Coronavirus, Treasurer Eddie Toews was responsible for introducing a benevolent announcement pertaining to our **2021 DUES ASSESSMENT**. Additionally, he introduced an exclusive one-time **“WELCOME BACK MEETING AND LUNCHEON”** event. Not to be overlooked is Eddie’s article entitled **“BRING A NEW MEMBER”**. Since all three topics gained BEC approval, I strongly suggest that all readers of this edition to our Bulletin seek out the appropriate information that provides full disclosure. Such rewarding information should create excitement to all existing members as well as to potentially new members! Yet again, these gestures of goodwill are mere examples that substantiate the benefits extended to those gentlemen that embrace the core SIR values.

Final bits and pieces stemming from the meeting include the following. With the resignation of one member and the relocation of another, our total membership currently stands at a count of 201 through the month of August. Commemorative membership pins, signifying 5, 10 and 20 years respectively, was passed by the BEC. More information honoring such personal membership achievements is forthcoming as the project details become evident.

Notification was recently received that the 39th Annual Home and Garden Show, which was rescheduled for October 24 & 25, 2020, has officially been cancelled due to the Coronavirus. Such news does not come as a complete surprise since public health and safety are a priority. Nevertheless, the 39th Annual Home and Garden Show has been rescheduled for April 17 & 18, 2021. Please retain these dates in your memory bank and remain available to volunteer to man our booth in order that we experience a successful recruitment endeavor. It can be anticipated that volunteering members shall have available to them signup sheets for the two-day event beforehand.

The completed reporting of the annual raffle activity for the fiscal period beginning September 1, 2019 through August 31, 2020 has been mailed to the State of California, Office of the Attorney

Long-term effects of being Quarantined

It’s time to take the garbage out, I’m so excited I don’t know what to wear!

Went to a new restaurant. It’s called The Kitchen. You have to gather all your own ingredients and make your own meal. I have no idea how this place stays in business.

I put liquor bottles in every room. Tonight I’m going bar hopping.

I struck up a conversation with a spider today. Seems nice. He’s a Web designer.

I realize why dogs get so excited when something moves outside. I think I just barked at a squirrel.

If you keep a glass of wine in each hand, you can’t accidentally touch your nose.

Isolation is hard. I swear my fridge said, “what the heck do you want now!”

It’s noon. Time to change from my night pajamas into my day pajamas.

Not to brag, but I haven’t been late to anything in over three months!

The dumbest thing I bought in 2020 was a day planner.

General, for processing. The filing documents included the APPLICATION FOR REGISTRATION (Form CT-NRP-1) and the NONPROFIT RAFFLE REPORT (CT-NRP-2). Basically, such reporting relates to the following: Our Branch is a private, nonprofit organization and we qualify to conduct business in the State of California for at least one year prior to the raffle first held. Moreover, the location (city and county) where the raffle activity occurs, the total funds received from the sale of raffle tickets as well as the total expenses incurred for conducting the raffle are all included in the reporting.

Never in a million years could I have imagined I would go up to a bank teller wearing a mask and asking for money.

Stay well and remain safe.

Committee Chairman & Activities

Are you looking for something to do? Especially during this pandemic! Then please give our various committee chairman a call to get involved in a fun activity. Please also see the listing of officers and committee members on Page 6 should you not find the group you are looking for.

Golf - Danny Lauretta (209-586-4567). Results of our skins game on September 1, 2020; 3 skins - Jeff Juhl on hole #3, 3 skins - Allan Bell on hole #5 & #9, 2 skins - Jim Simmons on hole #7, 1 skin - Felix Espino on hole #8, 1 skin - Danny Villa on hole #10, 3 skins - Rod Salvi on hole #13, 2 skins - Jim Walczak on hole #15, 1 skin - Tom Neiderer on hole #16, #5 CTH 1st - Allan Bell at 8'-10, 2nd - Jeff Juhl at 22'-3, #12 CTH, 1st - Jeff Juhl at 10 inches, 2nd - Mike Coe at 2'-8. Low Net - Mike Baumgartner with a net 63 Our regularly tournaments are typically the third Tuesday of the month. Please call me for specific information as to dates, times, and locations.

Chaplain - Steve Gregory (209-533-0309). **Bowling** - Jerry Fountain (209) 532-0650).

Pinochle - Bob Morrison (209-588-0994). **Car Club** - Rich Rinaldi (209-532-8366).

Fishing - Chuck Simmons (209-532-9550). **RV Group** - Eddie Toews (209-532-3970).

Kayaking/Easy Hiking - Sol Robin (209-651-1054).

Are you registered to Vote?

The presidential election as well as many state, local, and ballot measures are less than 30 days away. Make sure you are registered to vote. Go to <https://voterstatus.sos.ca.gov>. It's fast, easy, safe, and secure.

Revisiting Our National Anthem

From a You-Tube video provide by Danny Lauretta. On September 18, 1918, a crowd sat silently during the first six innings of the first game of the World Series between the Chicago Cubs

and the Boston Red Sox. World War I had sapped the energy and enthusiasm for sports in America and had set the nation on an emotional edge against each other. In Illinois, discrimination against German Americans became prevalent. Chicago streets with German names like Frankfurt and Hamburg were renamed; a German born orchestra conductor was forced to resign; and in Collinsville, IL, a mob dragged a German-American laborer into the streets and lynched him.

In the seventh inning of that World Series Game, something historic happened. The band at the stadium began to play the Star Spangled Banner. Red Sox player, Fred Thomas, a navy man on furlough, immediately stood at attention and saluted the flag. Other players then began to remove their caps and put their hands over their hearts. The players began singing and the crowd quickly followed. As the New York times reported, “a great volume of melody rolled across the field.” At the end of the song, the crowd erupted in cheers making it the highest point of the day’s enthusiasm. The Red Sox were so moved they began playing the Star Spangled Banner at their home games. During the years that followed, it also became a fixture in many other sports. By the end of World War II, the Commissioner of the National Football League would insist that “the National Anthem should be as much a part of a football game as the kickoff. We should never forget what it stands for.”

So what does the anthem stand for? In recent years, a minority have argued that the anthem and flag are divisive and that national pride itself is hurtful. But in September of 1918, the Star Spangled Banner united Americans during a time marked by division and nativism. The flag and anthem still represent all Americans from diverse backgrounds united in a national creed of one nation under god under one national flag.

The lyrics of our national anthem come from a poem written by Francis Scott Key titled, *The Defense of Fort M’Henry*. It was written on September 14, 1814, while 35-year old Key witnessed the bombardment of Fort McHenry by British Naval Ships. The Star Spangled Banner was officially recognized by the Navy in 1889 and by President Woodrow Wilson in 1916. It was made our national anthem by congress on March 31, 1931 and signed into law by President Herbert Hoover. The following is complete version of the Star Spangled Banner from Francis Key’s manuscript.

*O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hail'd at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the
perilous fight O'er the ramparts we watch'd were so gallantly streaming?
And the rocket's red glare, the
bomb bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there,
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?*

*On the shore dimly seen through the mists of the deep
Where the foe's haughty host in dread silence reposes,
What is that which the breeze, o'er the towering steep,
As it fitfully blows, half conceals, half discloses?
Now it catches the gleam of the morning's first beam,
In full glory reflected now shines in the stream,
'Tis the star-spangled banner - O long may it wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave!*

*And where is that band who so vauntingly swore,
That the havoc of war and the battle's confusion
A home and a Country should leave us no more?
Their blood has wash'd out their foul footsteps' pollution.
No refuge could save the hireling and slave*

From the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave, And the star-spangled banner in triumph doth wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave.

O thus be it ever when freemen shall stand

Between their lov'd home and the war's desolation!

Blest with vict'ry and peace may the heav'n rescued land Praise the power that hath made and preserv'd us a nation! Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just,

And this be our motto - "In God is our trust,"

And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave

O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave

Dues & Other Changes for 2020 and 2021

Eddie Toews, Treasurer, 209-532-3970 Due to the COVID 19 situation in 2020 and that there were very few club activities during the 2020 year, the Branch Executive Committee (BEC) has voted that the 2021 dues will be discounted by 52% to \$12.00 per member. **This will be for the year 2021 only and will revert back to the \$25.00 dues per member in the 2022 assessment.** Dues must be paid no later than March 9, 2021 and should be mailed to Eddie Toews, 21795 El Coyote Dr., Sonora, CA 95370.

In addition to the dues adjustment for 2021, the first in person meeting will be a **“Welcome Back Meeting and Luncheon”**. The BEC has voted to lower the luncheon price to \$8.00 per person. All other meals after the first in person meeting will be at the regular price of \$15.00 per meal, unless the caterer changes the price of the meal. You must attend the first regular in person meeting to get this discount. This will not roll into any other meeting.

Bring a new member! It is time to start thinking of bringing a friend, relative, or new acquaintance into SIRs. As of October 1, 2020, the BEC has decided that the \$25.00 new member dues be waived for the rest of 2020 and until April 1, 2021.

The new member has to join SIRs by April 1, 2021 to get this discount. After April 1st, the new member dues of \$25.00 will go back into effect.

All new members will continue to pay the \$10.00 badge fee when joining SIRs.

Since the fee is waived for new members, the sponsor of the new member will not receive a free lunch when that person joins SIRs during this special offer.

Do You Have a Story to Share?

I'm always amazed at what comes across my email server from the members of our community, SIRs, family, and friends. This issue of the *Bulletin* includes many of those stories. If you have something you would like to share, please send it to me for inclusion in our monthly Bulletin. SIRs rules do apply, and not everything may be accepted. But send them anyway. johnwhitecpa@gmail.com



shutterstock.com • 1455502352

DIRECTORY of OFFICERS Branch 136

Big SIR: Gene Zanoni 532-1989 genevzanoni@gmail.com
Little SIR: Paul Squeri 586-4083 paulsqueri@yahoo.com
Sec: Bill Burnes 533-4334 sonorabill401@gmail.com
Asst. Sec: Dick Aberle 532-4066 raaberle2@sbcglobal.net
Treas: Eddie 'Ed' Toews 532-3970 lcoinlady@aol.com
Asst. Treas: Steve Aldridge 770-5287
 stevealdr1147@gmail.com
RAMP - Steve Aldridge 770-5287
Recruitment : Currently Vacant-
Activities - Bill Lobdell-586-7145
Member Relations - Phil Baylis-510-552-7596
DIRECTORS - Second Year
 Bill Guenza 568-7088
 Marty Martin 568-1886 George Cocores 456-9814
DIRECTORS - First Year
 Phil Baylis (510) 552-7596 Chris Methot (408) 218-5221
 Tom Neiderer (714) 886-8574

COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN & CO-CHAIRMEN

Attendance Membership - George Cocores 456-9814
 BEC Advisor - Al Limon 533-4544
 Bowling - Jerry Fountain 209-532-0650
 Branch Photographer - Steve Belochi 533-5315
 Bulletin - John White 408-355-5991
 Car Club - Rich Rinaldi 532-8366
 Fishing - Chuck Simons -532-9550
 Golf - Tom Nischwitz 694-8624 & Danny Laureta 586-4567
 Honorary Life Membership - Al Limon 533-4944
 Internet - Jerry Bellefeuille 533-3630 & Danny Laureta
 Kayaking/Hiking - Sol Robin 651-1054
 Lunch Tickets - Roger Swartz 533-0376
 Luncheon Drawing - Tom Neiderer 569-9003
 Nominating Com. Chair. - Jim Botto 586-0822
 Pinochle - Bob Morrison 588-0994
Poker - Currently Vacant
 Propane - Marty Martin 586-1886
 R.V. Travel Group - Eddie Toews 532-3970
 Senior Member Awards - Jim Johnson 536-1595
 SIR Item Sales - Fred Kehr 785-4358
 Sunshine - Chaplain - Steve Gregory 533-0309
 Wine Tasting - Phil VanSwoll 532-1133

Branch 136 has a Website!

Please check out our branch website at <https://sonorasirs.org/>. It's a great way to find out what has happened as well as what is going to happen.

39th Annual Home & Garden Show Has Been Rescheduled

When: April 17 & 18, 2021

Where: Mother Lode Fairgrounds, Sonora, CA

We need your help to staff our SIR's booth at the Home and Garden Show. This is our opportunity to represent our chapter to the community and bring in new members. Please consider volunteering to serve at this event. To volunteer, please contact the **Big Sir, Gene Zanoni (209-532-1989)** with the time you can serve and your telephone number. The event closes at 4pm.

Someone invited you to attend our branch and look what happened! Now is the time to invite another man and give them the opportunity for fun, fellowship, and much needed friendship.

Special Retirement Announcement

Judy Kindle will retire next month after 33 years as CEO of Sierra Vista Child & Family Services in Modesto. Kindle has worked a total of 36 years at Sierra Vista, which provides mental health, foster care and other services for families.

Judy Kindle is the wife of **Rick Kindle**, our SIR Region 2 Director. Judy is a very caring and a wonderful person.

From all of us at Branch 136, we wish Judy a very happy and well deserved retirement.

Goodness and Kindness Still Remain in America

(Story provided by Danny Lauretta) On Monday, a friend played the Disney Lake Buena Vista course. As usual, the starters matched him with three other players. After a few holes they began to get to know each other a bit. This is the rest of what he reports:

One fellow was rather young and had his wife riding along in the golf cart with him. I noticed that his golf bag had his name on it and after closer inspection it also said - "wounded war veterans." When I had my first chance to chat with him I asked him about the bag. His response was simply that it was a gift. I then asked if he was wounded and he said yes. When I asked more about his injury, his response was, "I'd rather not talk about it, sir".

Over a few holes I learned that he had spent the last 15 months in an army rehabilitation hospital in San Antonio, Texas. His wife moved there to be with him and he was released from the hospital in September. He was a rather quiet fellow; however, he did say that he wanted to get good at golf.

We had a nice round and as we became a bit more familiar I asked him about the brand new set of Ping woods and irons he was playing. Some looked like they had never been hit. His response was simple.

He said that this round was the first full round he had played with these clubs. Later in the round he told me the following. As part of the discharge process from the rehabilitation hospital, Ping comes in and provides three days of golf instruction, followed by club fitting. Upon discharge from the hospital, Ping gives each of the discharged veterans, generally about 40 soldiers, a brand new set of custom fitted clubs along with the impressive golf bags.

The fellow I met was named Ben Woods and he looked me in the eye and said that being fitted for those clubs was one of the best things that ever happened to him and he was determined to learn to play golf well enough to deserve the gift Ping had given him. Ben is now out of the service, medically discharged just a month ago. He is as fine a young man as you would ever want to meet.

Ping, whose products are made with pride here in Arizona, has the good judgment not to advertise this program. Veterans America and the game of golf. Thank you PING!

Youtube Moment

This October, leading up to the presidential election in November, we will hear a lot about what is wrong with America - how we need to do better, and how we need to change. It's easy to let our fears and emotions get the better of us. As an alternative, perhaps we need to remember how great America truly is, and how we are the envy and hope for the entire world. I hope this video will do that for you.

All you need to do is click on the link and then skip the commercials or copy the address to your browser. It's just that easy. Nothing to download or sign up for.

"America the Beautiful"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLAYuf1l1Q>

Happy Birthday to You!

Both astrological signs Libra and Scorpio fall within October. Libras (Sept 23 to Oct 22) are charming, lovable, and fair. Scorpions (Oct 23 to Nov 21) are passionate, loyal, and brave. Your birth stone is an opal, which is associated with good luck. October has several birth flowers—the Marigold and the Cosmos. The original Roman calendar had only ten months, and October was the eighth month. January and February hadn’t been added to the calendar yet! Like its neighboring months September, November, and December, the numerical name stuck; even after Julius Caesar expanded the calendar year from 10 months to 12.

Flores, Rudy	10/02
Austin, Lynn	10/07
Kraft, Jeff	10/11
Simons, Charles (Chuck)	10/11
Lundin, Rich	10/11
Siudzinski, David (Sudz)	10/14
Harrington, Tom	10/15
Feldman, Raymond	10/16
McGinnes, John	10/20
Simmons, Jim E.	10/23
Simmons, Ron	10/23
Beebe, Roy	10/23
Morrison, Bob	10/24
Guenza, Bill	10/26
Jimenez, Levi	10/27
St. Laurent, Edmund (Ed)	10/31

(Editor’s apologies in advance if I over looked your special day.)

Message from the Editor

John White (408-355-5991). Fall is back in full swing...the kids are back in school, football has resumed, the baseball playoffs are right around the corner, and we even have a national election coming! I was in a hardware store in Sonora over the weekend and both Halloween and Christmas decorations were on display. Wow, where has the summer gone?

Remember President John Kennedy inaugural address where he said, “*Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you could do for your country.*” That quote challenged and inspired all Americans to think differently about their citizenship and to do more for America.

I have been asked by the BEC leadership to be the Little Sir for 2021. It is in the spirit of John F. Kennedy’s statement that I ask you to join me in finding ways that you can do more for our SIRS branch, rather than what you can get out of it. We are fortunate to have such talented and diverse experiences in our chapter. Yet, we are extremely challenged by the limitations imposed upon us by this pandemic and the constraints of both the government and SIRS state organization. My mother would say, where there is a will there is a way. If you will join me in making our SIRS chapter even better, then I’m confident we will find a way.



Incredible Story of Survival, Courage, and Determination

On This Day in 1945, Japan Released Me from a POW Camp. Then US Pilots Saved My Life. Written by George MacDonell



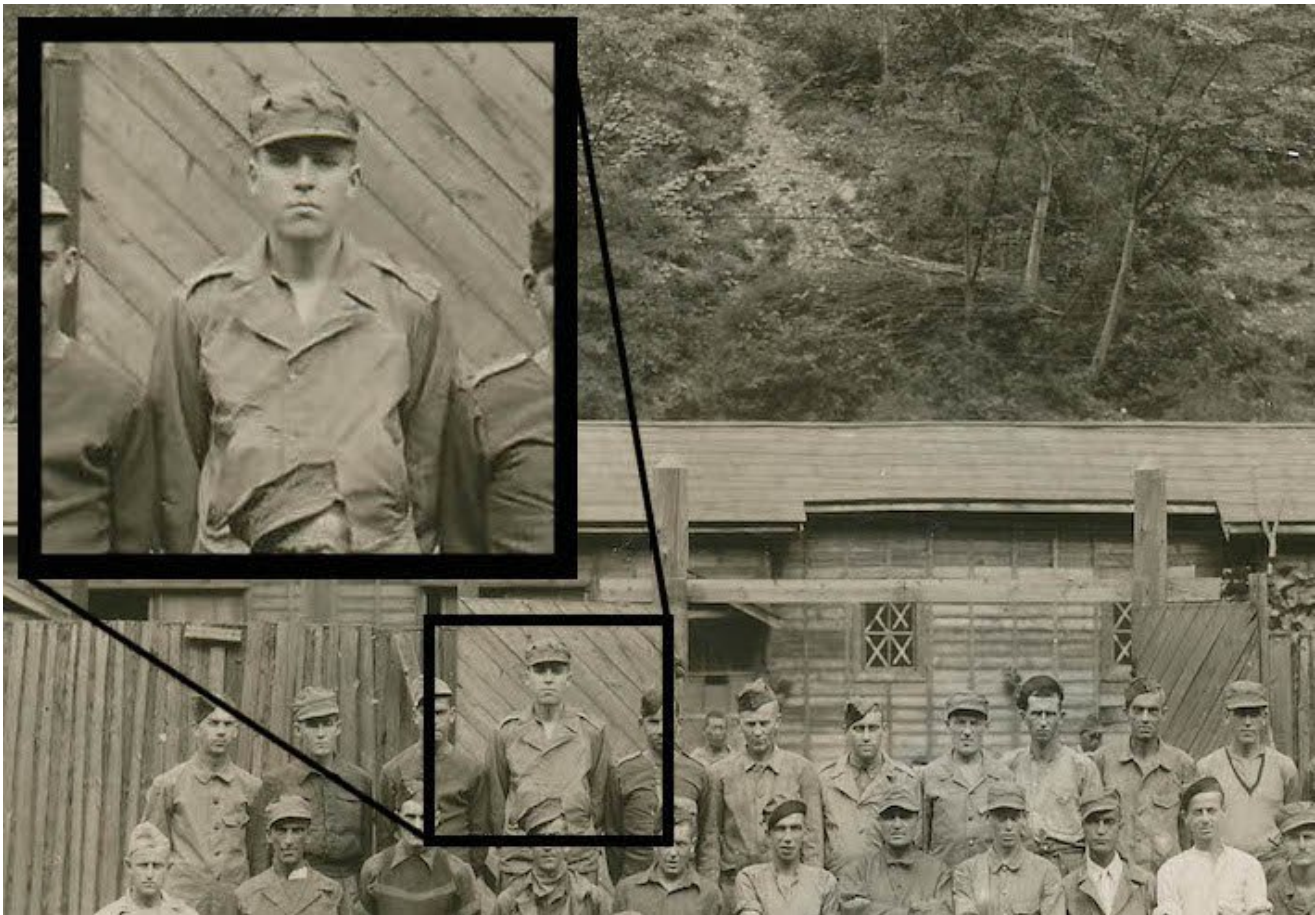
It was noon on August 15th, 1945. The Japanese Emperor had just announced to his people that his country had surrendered unconditionally to the Allied Powers. To those of us being held at Ohashi Prison Camp in the mountains of northern Japan, where we'd been prisoners of war performing forced labor at a local iron mine, this meant freedom.

But freedom didn't necessarily equate to safety. The camp's [395 POWs](#), about half of them Canadians, were still under the effective control of Japanese troops. And so we began negotiating with them about what would happen next. Complicating the negotiations was the Japanese military code of *Bushido*, which required an officer to die fighting or commit suicide (*seppuku*) rather than accept defeat. We also knew that the camp commander—First Lieutenant Yoshida Zenkichi—had written orders to kill his prisoners “by any means at his disposal” if their rescue seemed imminent.

We also knew that we could all easily be deposited in a local mine shaft and then buried under thousands of tons of rock for all eternity without a trace.

We had no way of notifying Allied military commanders (who still hadn't landed in Japan) as to the location of the camp (about a hundred miles north of Sendai, in a mountainous area near Honshu's eastern coast), whose existence was then unknown. Because of the devastating American bombing, Japan's cities had been reduced to rubble, its institutions were in chaos, and millions of Japanese were themselves close to starvation, much like us. The camp itself had food supplies, such as they were, for just three days.

Lieut. Zenkichi seemed angry, and felt humiliated by the surrender. Yet he appeared willing to negotiate our status. And after some stressful hours, we reached an agreement: The Japanese guards would be dismissed from the camp, while a detachment of Kenpeitai (the much feared Military Police) would provide security for Zenkichi, who would confine himself to his office.



The author, who appears in the featured image, fourth from left in the top row

To our delight, the local Japanese farmers were friendly, and agreed to give us food in exchange for some of the items we'd managed to loot from the camp's remaining inventory—though, unfortunately, not enough to feed the camp. Meanwhile, through a secret radio we'd been operating, we learned that the Americans were going to conduct an aerial grid search of Japan's islands for

prison camps. We followed the broadcasted instructions and immediately painted “P.O.W.” in eight-foot-high white letters on the roof of the biggest hut.

Two days later, with all of our food gone, we heard a murmur from the direction of the ocean. The sound turned into the throb of a single-engine airplane flying at about 3,000 feet altitude. Then, suddenly he was above us—a little blue fighter with the white stars of the US Navy painted on its wings and fuselage. But the engine noise began to fade as he went right past us. Please, God, I thought—let him see our camp.

Then the engine sound grew stronger, and changed its pitch as we heard the roar of a dive. The pilot had wrapped around a nearby mountain and came straight down the centre of the valley, his engine now bellowing wide open. From just over treetop altitude, he flew over the centre of the camp. We all went wild: Our prayers had been answered.



*1945 American aerial
photo of Ohashi prison
camp*

Then he climbed to about 7,000 feet while circling above us—we assumed he was radioing our location to base—before making another pass over the camp, as slowly as he dared, this time with his canopy back. He threw out a silver tin box on a long streamer that landed in the centre of the camp. Inside, we found strips of fluorescent cloth and a hand-written note: “Lieutenant Claude Newton (Junior Grade), USS Carrier John Hancock. Reported location.”

The instructions for the cloth strips were as follows: “If you want Medicine, put out M. If you want Food, put out F. If you want Support, put out S.” We put out “F” and “M.” Once more, Lieut. Newton flew over the camp, this time to read the letters we’d written on the ground. Wagging his wings, he headed straight out to sea to his floating home, the John Hancock.

Seven hours later, two dozen airplanes approached the camp from the sea. They were painted with the same US Navy colors, but these were much larger planes—Grumman Avenger torpedo bombers with a crew of two. Each made two parachute cargo drops in the center of camp, leaving us with a ton or more of food and medicine. The boxes contained everything from powdered eggs to tins of pork and beans. There was also something called “Penicillin” that, I later learned, doctors had begun prescribing to infected patients in 1942. (Our camp doctor had understandably never heard of it.) That night, we had a feast and a party. Despite the doctor’s warnings not to overdo it, we did. The sudden calorie intake nearly killed us.



August 28, 1945 photo in the collection of Peter Somerville, son of a naval aviator operating on the USS Hancock

But it was one thing for the Americans to drop supplies, and another thing to get to us. The days passed, until one sunny morning we had another aerial visitor from the east. He circled the camp and dropped a note: "Goodbye from Hancock and good luck. Big Friends Come Tomorrow."

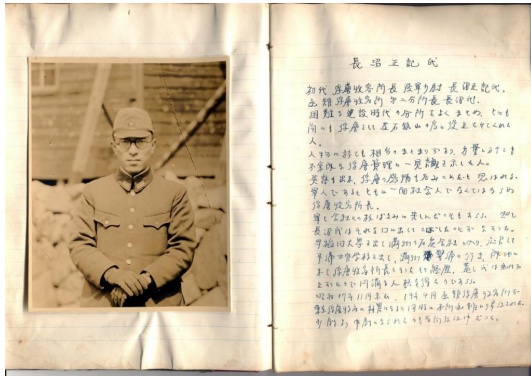
The "friends" arrived at about 10am the next day, and they were indeed big: four-engine B-29 Superfortresses. Like the Penicillin, this was something new: These planes hadn't entered service till 1944, and none of us had seen one.

Their giant bomb-bay doors opened and out came wooden platforms, each loaded with parachute-equipped 60-gallon drums. These were packed with tinned rations and other supplies, including new uniforms and footwear. None of this was lost on nearby Japanese villagers, who saw us POWs going from starvation to a state of plenty. Since our newfound wealth was scattered all over hell's half acre, we asked these locals to bring us any drums they might find, which they did, in return for the nylon chutes (which local seamstresses and homemakers would put to good use) and a share of the food.

That night, we had another party, except at this one, everyone was dressed in a new American uniform of his choice: Navy, Army, or Marine.

The next day brought another three lumbering aerial giants—from the Marianas Islands, it turned out. Again, the local Japanese residents helped us, amid much bowing, collect the aerial bounty. By now, the camp was beginning to look like an oil refinery, with unopened 60-gallon oil drums stacked everywhere.

When the daily ritual was repeated the day after that, some of the parachute lines snapped in the high winds, and the oil drums fell like giant rocks. Several hit the camp, went through the roofs of huts, hit the concrete floors and exploded. One was packed with canned peaches, and I don't have to describe what the hut looked like. There were several very near-misses on our men, Japanese personnel and houses in the nearby village. When the next drop generated a similar result, I looked up to see that I was right under a cloud of falling 60-gallon oil drums. It was a terrifying moment. And I imagined the bizarre idea of surviving the enemy, surviving imprisonment, and then dying thanks to the kindness of well-meaning American pilots.



*Excerpts from a
surviving biographical
monograph on former
camp commander
Masake Naganuma*

We now had tons of food and supplies—enough for months, and more was arriving. The camp had begun to look as if it had been shelled by artillery. So we painted two words on the roof: NO MORE! The next day, the big friends came from the Marianas and, as we watched from the safety of a nearby tunnel, they circled the camp and, without opening their bay doors, flew back out to sea, firing off red rockets to show they'd received the message. It was a surreal scene. But it didn't distract us from the fact that the generous and timely American response saved many of our lives.

In the days that followed the drum showers, we settled down to caring for our sick and to some serious eating. Thanks to the US supplies, we began to gain a pound a day. The American generosity was especially notable given that few of the prisoners at Ohashi were American. Almost all were Canadian, Dutch, or British.

At about this time, I decided to go back to the nearby mine where we'd worked as prisoner labourers. I wanted to say goodbye to the foreman of the machine shop, a grandfatherly man who'd called me *hanchō* (squad leader), and had been as kind to me as the brutal rules of the country's military dictatorship permitted. It was both joyous and sad. We were happy that the war was over, yet sad at

the knowledge that this would be our last meeting. I promised him that I would take his earnest advice and return to school as soon as I got home. “Hanchō, you go Canada now,” he said.



Photo of mine workshop at Ohashi prison camp, where many POWs

I later learned that about three million Japanese soldiers and civilians lost their lives in the war. Millions more were left wounded. The country had been hit with two atomic bombs. Whole cities had been gutted by fire. At every level, the war had been an unmitigated disaster for Japan. Its people had become cannon fodder in a cruel and pointless project to conquer East Asia.

My fellow ex-POWs and I visited the camp graveyard, and said one last goodbye to our comrades who'd found their last resting place so far from home. It was an unjust reward for such brave young men. And it was then that tears I couldn't control welled up in my eyes and streamed down my cheeks.

On September 14th, 30 days after Emperor Hirohito had publicly announced Japan's surrender, a naval airplane flew in from the sea and dropped a note to inform us that an American naval task force would evacuate us on the following day. Sure enough, on September 15th, landing craft beached themselves and hastily disgorged a force of Marines. Their motorized column sped inland to the Ohashi camp, led by a Marine colonel and armed to the teeth. These were veterans of the long Pacific campaign. They'd survived many terrible encounters with the Japanese in their westward campaign across the Pacific, and they looked the part.

After our captain saluted the colonel, they embraced, and the colonel told us how he planned to evacuate us, giving specific orders as to how it was all to be accomplished. After he issued his orders, the Colonel asked, “Are there any questions?” Our captain said, “Yes, I have one. Sir. What in the hell took you so long to get here?” That at least brought a smile to those tough, weather-beaten Marine faces.

Following the Colonel's instructions, we mounted up, said sayonara to Ohashi and, after almost four years of imprisonment, began the glorious journey home to our various loved ones. I was in the last vehicle that left the camp that day. And as we departed, I observed a compound that was now completely empty—save for one forlorn figure, who'd emerged from his office and now stood at the center of a camp that once held 400 men. It was Lieutenant Zenkichi.

George MacDonell was born in Edmonton, Alberta in 1922. He served in the Royal Rifles of Canada, which deployed to Hong Kong in 1941 as part of C-Force, shortly before Hong Kong's capture by the Japanese army.