

MERCER MEMORIAL DAY 500

FORMER PRISONERS OF WAR



HAROLD ANDREWS, U.S. Army, was 17 in 1950 when he joined the US Army and headed for Korea as an infantryman with L Company, 17th Regiment, 7th Division. They advanced into northern Korea behind enemy lines and couldn't get back out. Harold was captured at Chechon and held for 31 months in a number of camps, the last one being near Chang Song. He became ill and was taken to a hospital area. When he returned he discovered a fellow Pennsylvanian had moved in and, though he hadn't known him back home, discovered that he had been raised just 15 miles away from Curly Beerbower. What a joy to discover someone from home! One place he stayed was called Bean Camp because they fed the prisoners twice a day, beans, and soup. Nearly 40% of all Korean prisoners of war died before being rescued.



HAROLD "CURLY" BEERBOWER, U. S. Army at 18 became a machine gunner in the US Army with D Company, 7th Infantry, and G Company, 20th Infantry fighting in Korea. During the fighting he found himself in a foxhole with his buddies on each side of him dead and a bayonet at his own neck. His regiment was overrun at the Imjim River near Yongwon-ni, South Korea in 1951. He was marched 500 miles. Only 700 of the 1500 prisoners survived the march, to the infamous Chinese Communist Prison Camp 1 near Chang Song at the northern border of North Korea along the Yalu River near Manchuria. The 28 month captive proudly remembers the Chinese called him one of the "Incorrigibles", one who would not co-operate with them. He was confined in a 6' x 6' area at times and forced to stand in temperatures 45 degrees below zero. There was no medicine. "If you got sick it was up to you to get over it or die". 250 men would typically share worm-filled rice or soy beans, sometimes with a small piece of ham added.



KARL GABER, U.S. Navy was a gunner, top turret, on a PB4Y-2 Privateer. His plane was part of Patrol Bombing Squadron 121 in 1945 and was the last 4-engine bomber to be shot down in WW II, 2 days after the second atomic bomb was dropped on Japan and 3 days before the Japanese surrendered. Flying a patrol mission 200' above the water's surface the plane got hit and burned and Karl ended up on a life raft. The Japs picked them up and took them to a camp where the Japanese counterpart to the German Gestapo interrogated the prisoners, often by the use of torture. Speaking was strictly forbidden, and if you were caught doing so the punishment was severe and often in front of all the others. The camp had no regular interpreter and the prisoners didn't always understand commands. Misunderstanding a command would be understood as a demonstration against the rulers, punishable by a fist or a bamboo cane. He was stripped, tied, beaten, blindfolded, pushed down a flight of stairs. He lived in a 6' x 8' cell with an 18" window and fed rice, weak tea, and potato peels going from 136# to 98# in a month's time. Each day brought mistreatment at the hands of his captors, more than Karl can or will tell. "It's too brutal." Of being a prisoner Karl says, "It put a crease in your mind. It never leaves."

THESE HEROES will ride on a special POW Transport in the Memorial Parade and be recognized at Citizens Cemetery at Noon Monday, May 28th, 2012 **AS A REMINDER OF WHAT FREEDOM HAS COST SOME**. Their biographies may be printed off our website www.mercermemorialday500.org. For more information about the event contact us at parade500@me.com & 724 662 2786 for copies.

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Harry NYE, U.S. Army, was 19 when he was assigned to “Blue Ridgers” of Company A, 317th Infantry, 80th Division, 3rd Army and served under General George Patton. After 2 months of battle against the Germans in the Fall of 1944 all but 4 or 5 men out of 205 in his company were wiped out and were taken as prisoners. Harry had been shot through his helmet but not badly wounded. They were stripped of their uniforms, given thin clothing, loaded 80 to a box car traveling for 7 nights and 6 days with no food or water in freezing temperatures to Stalag 4B near Berlin. . It was Christmas Eve when they arrived. Some of the men had died standing up in the box cars. After being forced to stand outside in the snow overnight more died and the prisoners were forced to stack the dead like cordwood.

Some were taken for slave labor, walking 5 to 15 miles a day in deep snow to “work sites”. They dug 20’ wide water trenches in frozen ground by hand; hauled 40’ logs for miles; cleaned out sewer ditches; hauled 300# blocks of ice. Daily rations for six men were a 1 1/2# loaf of brown bread being 40% boiled barley, 40% sawdust, and the rest leaves and floor sweepings with glass in it. Added to this was thin carrot or turnip soup and coffee made from acorns. In his 6 months of captivity Mr. Nye went from weighing 175# to 91#. “I think if I had weighed more the Russians would have kept me and sent me to Siberia”.



LEWIS VILLA, enlisted in the U.S.Army and became an Airborne Ranger headed for Korea. He participated in the famous raid at Chang-mal and seige of Chipyong-Ni against the Chinese. Lew was wounded in the leg but came back to fight again. His leg became infected and he suffered a small wound in the other leg before being taken prisoner for 28 months along with other Rangers at Hill 710 near Kumnol-gol, 8 miles south of the 38th parallel in central South Korea during the May Massacre Battle. They were walked to a Camp at Suan 120 miles away and were bombed several times. The were given a soupy mix and, being without any utensils or bowls, had to use their hands. There were 150 Americans in their group. One fled-was caught and put

in cage with no food or water. Another fled-killed a guard, and was shot by a firing squad. Work parties walked 7 miles to bring back bags of sorghum. Diarrhea, BeriBeri, lice and scurvy weakened them and one or two men died daily there in appalling conditions. After 4 months when peace talks began the prisoners were allowed to bathe, 15 at a time, using the same water. Then they were marched 190 miles to the main camp, Chang-Song, on the Yalu River. Then constant rain added further misery to their filthy, hungry lives. At Chang-Song Camp that detained 900 Americans and 500 Brits. It was another 170 days before they washed again, this time in the river which was 32 degrees. Here was they only time they were given a change of clothing. It was 30 below zero and they lived 8 to a mud floored hut that was somewhat warmed by underground pipes from the kitchen. With a change of diet here (two buckets of millet and barley soup daily for a squad) his BeriBeri cleared up. After a year they were permitted to write one (censored) letter a month. Lew received 8 letters in the 23 months he spent at Chang-Song. In August of 1953 trucks began carrying POWs to Panmunjom and Freedom Village.

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