

Zygmund Budzaj
Chief Gunner's Mate
United States Navy

The President of the United States takes pleasure in
Presenting the SILVER STAR MEDAL to
ZYGMOND BUDZAJ, CHIEF GUNNER'S MATE, UNITED STATES NAVY

For service as set forth in the following CITATION:

For gallantry and intrepidity in action during a bombing attack on the U S.S. CANOPUS in Mariveles Harbor, Bataan, Philippine Islands on December 29, 1941. When an armor piercing bomb exploded in the vicinity of the after magazine, crushing or exploding seventy rounds of ammunition, killing six men and wounding six others, BUDZAJ, with complete disregard for his own safety, opened the ammunition scuttles on the deck directly above magazine and climbed down the trunk with a fire hose to supplement the flooding system. His courageous action in the face of an imminent general magazine explosion was a contributing factor in saving the ship from destruction.

For the President,
Frank Knox,
Secretary of the Navy

Text from Hamp, USS LCI (L) & (G) 450, WW II Gator Navy:

On May 24 10,000 POW's marched down to the south docks and boarded three Japanese freighters to set sail for Manila. There were about 4,000 men on each ship, which was designed to accommodate 12 passengers.

The ship dropped anchor in Paranaque, a suburb south of Manila. The men were kept overnight in the holes of the ship until the afternoon of the next day. Then the men were jammed into barges and literally dumped into neck deep water a hundred feet from shore. This only added to their dismal appearance of torn, dirty and bloodied clothing. These men were then hazed through the streets of Manila by bayonets for the Japanese Victory March down Dewey Blvd. to the old Bilibid Prison. As they passed the Filipinos that lined the route the men saw tears for them. The prisoners that had dysentery were forced to strip and relieve themselves on the road in view of all the Filipino people.

Around May 27 the men were ordered to Cabanatuan POW Camp approximately seventy miles north of Manila, in the Providence of Luzon. They were marched to the railroad and boarded onto iron boxcars with only room to stand. The Japanese forced 100 men in each boxcar. Many of the men already had dysentery and had no place to relieve themselves. The POW s were packed in like rats with little ventilation. The heat increased quickly due to the sun beating down on the metal roofs, which made each boxcar an oven. Many of the men fainted and remained in upright positions due to the closeness of all the other men s bodies.

They arrived at the Cabanatuan Camp #1 on May 28. After a short stay, they were moved to Camp #2 which was six miles further in the jungle. Upon their arrival it was discovered that there was no water. They continued to march for a total of twelve miles to Camp #3. No preparations had been made for their arrival. The lack of food did not seem to bother them for they could barely drag themselves into the barracks and throw their bodies on the bare floor.

During the first night four Naval Reserve ensigns walked off into the darkness of the jungle and escaped. They simply walked out of the front gate and down the middle of the road. The next morning the Japanese lost no time in discovering which of the three men were missing. Barbed wire was hastily thrown around the camp perimeter. The Japanese went through the camp and counted off every ten men into groups. If one man escaped from his group the other nine were to be shot. These squads became known as the shooting squads. The four men were apprehended and brought back to the camp.

They were tied to the corner posts and beaten for the next two days . No food or water was given to any of the men. On May 30 the POW s in the camp were made to witness the execution of these four ensigns.

On June 2nd the first of the arrivals of prisoners from the Bataan Death March soon came into camp. They were brought into the camp in trucks because so few were physically able to stand up or walk more than a few feet. They were wide-eyed and gaunt with their clothes in shreds and no equipment of any kind. Many used rusty tin cans as mess kits.

Some of the men were in the last stages of what was called wet beri beri. Their bodies were swollen from the hips down and in extreme pain. Many would die shortly after their arrival at the camp. The dead bodies of many of these men remained in rows outside the barracks until the stench became intolerable.

Dysentery was prevalent amongst most of the prisoners due to the lack of sanitary conditions that the men were housed in up to this point. The POW s that were on the march from Bataan found themselves so dehydrated from lack of water that they drank from muddy carabao wallows. At times they went without food and water for up to a week, even though the prisoners marched past running streams. Any prisoners that attempted to drink water from the streams were shot. During the march various methods were utilized by the Japanese to eliminate weaker prisoners. There were witnessed cases of men being buried alive, often with the forced help of an American officer under the threat of death. Some prisoners were made to dig their own graves. This treatment was usually reserved for the Filipinos. There are also reported cases of Americans being buried alive.

July 28, 1942 three hundred POW s were ordered back to construct air bases in Palawan. The day after the men were marched to the docks and to board Japanese transports for Puerto Princesa, Palawan, Philippine Islands. August 1 the ship docked at Palawan, Philippine Islands for the next 27 months the men constructed a 1200 meter landing strip. The jungle growth had to be cleared daily with a juji (pickax) and impi (shovel).

January 10, 1943 the USS ARGONAUT was sunk. Eight officers and ninety-four men were lost at sea. Just before this submarine left on her last patrol, the ship's bell was left at the Submarine Base in Oahu, Pearl Harbor. From the Chapel s belfry lost submarines are mourned by tolling ARGONAUT Bell to this day.

August 8, 1944 more of the POW s were ordered back to Bilibid in Manila. They continue to work out of the hole of the ship for the next month. September 15, 1944 the ship finally was underway for Manila. On the 18th of the month the men disembarked and the next day they marched from the docks to Bilibid Prison.

On the 7th of September the ship Shinyo Maru was torpedoed by the American forces. This ship held prisoners of war, who fought their way out of the ship s hold only to be shot by the Japanese as they tried to make their way off the ship to safety. Out of 750 American prisoners of war 82 survived. There was at least 2 men from the CANOPUS that died that day.

September 21, 1944 there was an air raid in Philippines Islands. This was the first raid in force on Luzon by the carrier-based planes of Admiral William Halsey s Fleet. One hundred and seventy planes from the fleet carrier task force bomb Manila. The Port of Manila was severely damaged, as well as Clark Field Installation. In the city many gun emplacements were rendered useless. Those that were hit close to Bilibid Prison, scattered debris into the prison injuring many POW s. September 22 the bombing continued and sank Japanese transports from Malay to Japan carrying POW s. Survivors were brought to Bilibid Prison.

October 1, 1944, one thousand men were numbered and lined up to march down to the docks to board transports bound for Japan, on the SHIP OF SIDNEY the men that were stuffed into one of two holds of the ship. The trip was to take 12 days. Pea coal had been placed across the bottom to make it level. There was no room to lay down, only to sit, bodies on all sides touched each other and there was absolutely no ventilation of air.

The following is taken from a diary that Hank Henderson wrote prior to his death. He served on the CANOPUS until she was scuttled. He speaks of his experience on the ship CITY OF SIDNEY that was captured from Australia.

His diary entry of October 8, 1944 The northern coast of Luzon, Philippine Islands. This is my birthday. We were in one of ten ships heading for Japan. Late in the afternoon, an oil tanker off our starboard bow was struck by a torpedo. It was so close to us, the spray and debris was strewn on the decks of our ship. God it looked like the end was at long last in sight. We were all so miserable, many of us knew it was impossible for us to get out of the hold of the ship if it sunk.

As his diary continues, We had been getting one canteen of water a day, but when the submarine attacks began, the water was shut off. We were smack dab in the middle of a large Japanese battle fleet. But they were no deterrent to the US Submarines. The submarines had a job to do and they did it. We were without water for about 40 hrs. the bad part was, over half of the men had water before the attack, and the others did not. This created a horrible situation. People that had water were reluctant to share. Because there was no reason to believe the rations would start again. Men started dying from the lack of water, dehydration, dysentery and other causes began to take it toll. We changed course and headed for Hong Kong as a haven for safety.

He continues, A friend Zigman Budjac, even though he did not get water rations either, shared a small amount that he had saved from the day before. He rationed it out, a teaspoon full at a time to both of us. Had it not been for Ziggie, I would not be here today writing this account of the most bizarre ocean voyage imaginable, that is a testimony of mans inhumanity to man. A typical reveille consisted of yelling, shake the man next to you and start sending up the dead bodies. In situations like these, it is imperative to have a friend you can trust your very life with. Before you can have a friend, you have got to be an absolute unselfish friend.

Hank Henderson and Ziggie Budzaj continued their journey together as POW s. Their ship finally anchored in Hong Kong harbor on October 13, 1944. As the US P-51 Fighter/Bombers started strafing and bombing the ship was sent hurriedly back out to sea, only to run into more submarines. In order to avoid being torpedoed the ship maneuvered in a see saw path. As long as the ships were in the harbor, the US B-24 heavy bombers made runs over the harbor and the city. When other ships were sunk the others ships received POW S from those vessels.

The Arisan Maru on October 24, 1944 was torpedoed during a typhoon by the American forces that had no idea that the ship held American prisoners of war. This ship held 1,800 Americans at the time of the torpedo assault. Forty-two men from the CANOPUS perished with hundreds of others on this day.

The CITY OF SIDNEY, on November 5 sailed for Toroku Formosa, Taiwan and arrived three days later on the eighth. Only to be ordered back out to sea due to the election in the states. A twelve day journey turned into a thirty-nine day voyage. Arriving in port on the nineth, the men disembarked and marched to a small compound. Their stay there was for three months working in the sugar mill and vegetable farm. During this time the men were to see their first glimpses of the US B-29 Super Fortress Bombers.

Early in the war the Japanese had a standing order to kill all prisoners if the allied troops should over take them. They were to dispose of all the bodies as well. Originally, the majority of the men in the camp at Puerta Princesa at Palawan were men from Corregidor. Around this time there were about 150 men that remained in the camp. On December 14, after the men returned

from work there was an air raid that was sounded because fighter-bombers were sighted. The Japanese believed that there was to be an assault by the Americans on Palawan.

The men were herded into the shelters and suddenly about 40-50 Japanese entered the camp. These men opened the doors to the shelters and threw in buckets of gasoline and then tossed in lighted torches. As the men started to run out of the shelter they were either cut in two by machine gun fire or bayoneted. Some of the men as they were burning to death attacked the guards allowing time for others to literally crawl out of a fire of hell and under the fence only to fall off the cliff face. Some men jumped into the water and started to swim only to be gunned down by Japanese waiting for them on the beaches with machine guns. Many men that hide in the crevice in the rocks were dynamited out by the Japanese. Some men made it to safety by swimming in the shark infested waters, crawling their ways through the jungles and being found by Philippine

Guerillas, fishermen and other kind people of the Palawan underground. These men were able to testify on behalf of their fallen comrades that were not so lucky. At least four men from the CANOPUS were killed on this day during the massacre.

On December 14 or 16, Commander Francis Joseph Bridget, USN was KIA on the ORYOKU MARU, which was on the way from Olongapo to San Fernando, Philippine Islands. Along with him there were approximately twelve sailors from the CANOPUS and many others died on this day with them. Commader Bridget will always be remembered in history as the aviator that organized and commanded the first Naval Battalion.

The men from the camp in Toroku Formosa, Taiwan left on January 25 to board Japanese transports. They were given physical exams and it was found that around 700 men had sleeping sickness. While they are docked in the harbor the ship next to them was hit with a bomb and ripped in half. A Chaplin administered last rites to all the men as the bombs fall. They move out to the outer harbor and waited four days for a convoy to sail to Japan.

The ship arrived in Moji, Japan on the island of Kyushu on February 14, 1945. The men were clothed in the light Philippine clothing that they had wore in Formosa. Icicles were hanging from the rooflines and they were given over coats. On the next evening very late they boarded a train bound for a two-day ride for Tokyo.

The men arrived in Kawasaki, across the river from Tokyo, in Tokyo War Prisoner s Camp #23D on February 15. There was snow on the ground and more icicles hanging from the barracks eaves. By now the men could bango with the best of the Japanese. Bango was the favorite pastime of the guards. It meant fall out in ranks and count off in Japanese. Pity the new men to the camps that never had the pleasure of leisurely learning to count in Japanese.

On February 19, Admiral Halsey s Carrier planes strafed and bombed everything in site. The Kawasaki area was a heavy manufacturing and chemical factory area. Just what Admiral Halsey s boys like to use as targets. The USMC landed in Iwo Jima causing havoc as they invaded and conquered that hilltop as they planted the American Flag for all the rest of the men that could only be with them in spirit.

During the time between March 8 and 9th of 1945, USAAF General LeMay s B-29 s bombed Tokyo and Kawasaki during which 83,000 people were dead and more than 40,000 injured. Gale winds funneled flames that helped push the fires across the entire area

causing more destruction. Kagaku (formerly Suzuki) factory was destroyed.

April 1, 1944 at 1200 hours bombers appear in the sky that were running out of Iwo Jima landing strip. The men in the camps were treated to their first show of hit and run raids with rockets. Over the next month, this scene was repeated over and over.

The men were marched out of camp on June 1, 1945 and transferred to the Tokyo War Prisoners Camp Number 1. They continue to work at the Kagaku Factory doing salvage and clean up in the area.

August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. Then on August 10, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan. After the second bombing, the Japanese opened peace negotiations to end the war and destruction. Japan accepted the terms of surrender on August 14, 1945.

At 1200 hours on August 15, 1945, 1700 carrier planes plus a whole sky of B-29 super-forts blacken out the sky over Japan. The prisoners of war in Shinjuku, Japan listened intently on a radio to the Emperor of Japan as he spoke to the Japanese nation. The men understood that they lost the war and not to resist any longer. The men march back to camp. The next morning there was not one guard in sight. The POW s were still uncertain about their fates at this time.

August 16, 1945, at 0800 hours Swedish representatives went into the camp to inspect the areas. Japanese soldiers were posted outside of the camp in case of civilian uprisings against the POW S. The B-29 s dropped food, along with medical supplies and clothing. They dropped everything except ice cream to these men. Now the men understood.

The men painted signs requesting special food items along with messages of thanks and come n get us which they plastered on the roof tops in the camps so that the pilots would see them. The next day they received Japanese regulation haircuts and a few yen in their pockets. For the next two weeks the men lazed around the camp just waiting to get their walking papers.

At 0800 hours, on September 2, 1945 the men received word they were going home. Hank Henderson and Ziggy Budzaj, along with everyone else made their way out of camp down to the docks to the ship waiting for them. They were all finally going home.

In the last hours these men spent in Japan, they learned of the many tragedies that befell their shipmates. Many died in the sinking of the Hell Ships, others were massacred at Palawan, more were beaten to death, died of illness or were executed. No doubt each man wondered why he had been spared. Many times they had prayed for their own deaths as well as their mates, so there would be an end to the hell they were living in for the past three and half years. Where ever these men were to land in life, there was one thing for certain. These sailors that joined the Navy to see the world would forever be the crew of the U.S.S. CANOPUS.