



POW/MIA Update

by Marty O'Brien

Kapaun Resolution Approved by KWVA

On October 5, 2005, at the KWVA Convention at Bossier City, Louisiana, the KWVA Executive Council and members approved the resolution to posthumously award the Medal of Honor to Chaplain Emil Kapaun. It was sent to the Army's Senior Decoration Board for their consideration. As we go to press for this issue, I have learned that the National Catholic War Veterans also have sent a recommending letter to the Army.

Father Kapaun touched many lives. It is evident from the many testimonials about him that he was a man greatly loved and admired by soldiers of all faiths for his compassion and leadership in administering to the many hundreds of POW in his "flock" and saving lives.

After Father Kapaun's tragic death on May 23, 1951, POW Marine Captain Gerald Fink was so moved by Chaplain Kapaun's good works that he worked for two-and-one-half months to carve a cross made out of cherry wood upon which was placed a scrub oak figure of Christ. The cross presently resides at Father Kapaun's home parish in Pilsen, Kansas.

Captain Fink had this to say: "If the meek shall inherit the earth, it will be because of people like Father Kapaun willed it to them. I am a Jew, but that man will always live in my heart. He was a man among many who were not. I saw the biggest, huskiest, and toughest men crack under the strain. Father Kapaun not only served Christians well, but he served everyone else with equal goodness and kindness. Never thinking of himself, he was always doing something for others. He represented to me saintliness in its rarest form and manliness in its rarest form."

Another soldier who admired Father Kapaun was Tibor Rubin. On September 23, 2005 Corporal "Ted" Rubin of Garden Grove, California, was awarded the Medal of Honor by President George W. Bush at the White House. He was cited for his valorous actions for the period July 23, 1950 to April 20, 1953, both on the battlefield and while a POW.

Rubin, a holocaust survivor, entered the U. S. Army in 1950. He was a member of Company I, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 1st Cavalry Division. He was captured along with Father Kapaun and others at Unsan. During the death march to the POW camp, Father Kapaun and Cpl. Rubin together carried stretchers and assisted those who could not walk. During rest breaks, often risking death, both men urged lagging soldiers to carry on lest they be shot by the enemy.

During his imprisonment in Camp 5, Corporal Rubin worked closely with Father Kapaun to aid the sick, the diseased, and the wounded.

KWVA Approves Purple Heart Resolution

On October 5, 2005, at Bossier City, the KWVA approved a resolution to support H. R. 2369, "Honor Our Fallen Prisoners of War Act."

The bill would amend Title 10, U.S.C. to provide for the Purple Heart to be awarded to POW, past or present, who die in captivity under circumstances not otherwise establishing eligibility for the award, such as deaths from beatings, freezing or starvation.

Rick and Brenda Tavares of Campo, CA, and "Tiger Survivor" Shorty Estabrook of Murietta, CA, continue to lobby vigorously for the bill. They have mailed copies of the KWVA resolution to the 66 members of the Armed Forces Committee and the remaining 369 members of the House of Representatives.

The Saga of Kiyohito Tsutsui

An unknown number of Japanese nationals served in combat with U. S. forces during the Korean War. Mostly, they worked for the Occupation in Japan, and when hostilities broke out in Korea they found a way, by hook or crook, to tag along with their American buddies.

One of them was Kiyohito "Mike" Tsutsui. In 1950, Mike was employed as a mess hall worker at Camp Hakata, Japan. Mike went to war with Headquarters Battery, 63d Field Artillery Battalion, 24th Infantry Division. On July 4, he became a POW.

He was used as an interpreter by the Communists and beaten savagely by them on a daily basis. After 40 years of occupation, the Koreans harbored no love for the Japanese.

Mike was repatriated in August 1953 and sent home to Japan. Later, he traveled to the U.S. on a student visa, where he lived in Maine for a while with Shorty Estabrook, who was in the same prison camp with him. Mike eventually joined the U. S. Army and went on to serve his new country for 20 more years, including a tour in Viet Nam. He is highly decorated.

On July 29, 2005, the Army ruled that his time of internment as a civilian from July 14, 1950 to August 17, 1953 could be counted as credited time for retirement pay and benefits.

The Saga of Kenzo Takatsu

When Corporal Robert Tait of Bar Harbor, Maine, went to war with Headquarters Battery, 57th Field Artillery Battalion, 7th Infantry Division, out of Hokkaido, Japan, he managed to successfully smuggle "houseboy" Kenzo "Benny" Takatsu onto the ship taking the battalion to Korea.

The 57th FA Battalion landed at Inchon and went south to Pusan, then north by ship again, landing on the Sinchang Coast. The unit saw heavy action near and east of the Chosin Reservoir, where Benny was wounded and suffered from frostbite. He was returned to Japan, where he received treatment in Army hospitals. On December 6, 1950, Corporal Tait was captured after being wounded in both legs. He died while a POW on February 15, 1951. His remains were not recovered.

In 2000, Benny attended a KWVA reunion in Bangor, Maine, where he was made an "honorary" member of the Tait family.

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