

To: The one who posed the questions and the Family of the Flag Bearer

Mr. Ishakawa relayed several questions for me to answer related to the flag experience and my part of it. Let me with your permission answer the easy ones first.

The time was between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m., the weather was sunshine and clear skies.

Why did I take the flag? At the age of barely 19 years of age the flag was in my young mind a trophy of war. At that time I had no understanding of the deep meaning of the flag to the Japanese soldier or his family.

Next, I believe, came the hardest question for me to either understand or answer. As relayed to me it was asked about how the war had later effected me spiritually. Perhaps because of the vast differences in our two countries and cultures my answer may not be correct in your eyes. However after pondering the true meaning of the questions I will attempt to give you my answer.

During the incoming Japanese artillery barrage in the open field I dived behind the soldier's body. Shells landed very close and showered us with dirt. The soldier was laying face down with the left side of his face resting on the ground; his helmet was still on. When I stood up and shook off the dirt I turned him over. It was then that I saw the cause of his death, a severe shell or mine shrapnel wound that had damaged the left side of his face and head causing instant death. His helmet had tumbled off and lay open. In the webbing was the neatly folded flag. Inside the flag were three small photos. One of which I believed to be of the dead soldier. As I looked at the picture I said out loud, "My God he is only a boy!". Now all these years later I learn that he was probably thirty years of age at the time of the war. There were three or four Japanese bodies lay near by, none were killed by bullets.

Now perhaps is where my spiritual connection with the flag and photos began. I prized this flag so highly that I sewed it safely into my front dungaree pocket so as not to lose it. Later on the hospital ship USS Hope where I was sent for amputation of my wounded right leg. An Army nurse saved the flag for me from my blood soaked pants. The shipboard doctor saved my leg and today I wear a brace to make my right foot move. For some reason unknown to me I never as other war veterans did show off the flag or brag about its capture. I instead put it away with the photos. Several times years later I would get it out and look at it and recall that fateful day, always wondering about the writing. As the battle hatred in my mind healed another deeper set of questions emerged but not from the flag. This time it was the photos.

The photo of a family I took to be father, mother, brothers and sisters. A family group not

unlike the families of dead American marines killed around me. How would they ever know what had happened to their beloved relative? Then there was the young man standing proud in his armor. Was he really the terrible enemy? In other circumstances could he have been my friend? Did he have the love of plants like I? Was he old enough to be married, and if so did he have children back home.

Now was this the spiritual growth you spoke of? I truly do not know nor did I share my long held feelings for the flag return for over 30 years. I became a soul-searching desire to try to find a way to return the flag to the soldier's family if they still lived. Also to tell them where and how he died. Relating to his swift merciful death with honor on this battlefield of Okinawa. The safe return of this precious flag to his family is a reward I have sought for years.

The photo of his relatives and their priest I will now treasure as I have all these years their flag. My only regret is that I could not find a way to safely return it long ago and I apologize for that. Our mutual heartfelt thanks to Mr. Ishakawa who made the reunion possible.

As for war, all men and boys who experienced the daily hell of dead and dismembered comrades unfold; they though not wounded on the outside all suffered the internal scars that never go away. I for one still see vividly the face and pleading eyes of a sergeant I held in my arms as a medic fought to save his life. In his wallet was a photo of his wife and three young sons. There are those who seldom talk about it, I believe because there is no way to describe the terrible carnage and even more important to justify it.

Perhaps someday I will meet this young man in the after world. If so I hope we become friends.

My favorite quotation about War,

Who has ever told the evils and the curses and crimes of war? Who can describe the horrors of the carnage of battle? Who can portray the fiendish passions, which reign there? If there is anything in which earth more than any other resembles hell, it is its wars.

Albert Barnes