

THE MANDARIN ORANGE

A
TRUE
STORY OF LOVE IN WAR

BY
FRANK J. PERHATS, SR

The Mandarin Orange

A story of love in war

FORWARD

Love is life and life is a gift of love; a gift from the Creator to the created. Life is the process of passing love from one to another. Love, the love of caritas, not the LUV of decadent society, is the most powerful force in the universe, LUV a gross debasement of it.

“The Mandarin Orange” is a true story of a young teenage soldier who, during World War II discovered from the enemy, that love exists in all humans regardless of race or culture. The discovery came to him after exposure to the fears and horrors of war. He had presumed the love of his family to be parochial and he had taken it for granted; until he saw it in his enemy and realized its universality.

This soldier was typical of many of the sixteen million who served in this war. He was born to immigrant parents during the “Roaring Twenties” in what is now known as the Old Town section of Chicago. He lived in six locations within Chicago before he and his family settled in 1932 in the DePaul Lincoln Park neighborhood at the height of the depression.

He and his only sibling, a younger sister, grew up knowing how to make do with the bare necessities of life during the depression years. They received the security of family love, discipline, food, clothing and shelter and the opportunity for a good education.

Instilled in him was pride in the city of his birth and a love of his country under whose flag he would soon serve. Since his youth and because of his parent’s experience during the first war, he had been exposed to international politics at an early age; listening and later participating in the family discussions about World War I, the Communist Revolution and its spread in Russia; the increased interest in Communistic Philosophy and materialism by idealists and the American intelligentsia; Hitler and the rise of Nazism, the Spanish war and Franco’s fight against the spread of communism in Western Europe with aid from Hitler.

And he watched and studied the atrocities of the Japanese Military in China and Manchuria.

Despite his exposures to world affairs as a young boy, his experience and outlook was confined to his neighborhood and the people in and around it; even on the day he boarded the train to Fort Sheridan after his induction into the Army July 13th, 1944. Until that day, he had never set foot outside of the city limits of Chicago [except for a short trip and his first train ride to a picnic in far away Round Lake, Illinois].

The story was written over months last year at the request of his children and grand children with whom he has been so enormously blessed. America’s involvement in another war and the release of the movies “Letters” and “Flag of our fathers” might make reading “The Mandarin Orange” of greater interest. Movie critics say one should see “Letters” first then “Flag of our fathers”. Seeing either may help to understand “The Mandarin Orange” better.

If you received this story electronically, print it out instead of trying to read it on the computer. Sit by yourself in a quiet place at night and read it. Or, read it to your family when you’re all relaxed, quiet and together. If you read it to young children, skip over the gross and horror parts, it’s not for young children to hear of these things.

THE MANDARIN ORANGE

A Lesson Learned from the Enemy.

This early September night the humidity was higher than usual. Only the breeze from the ocean a hundred yards away kept our tents cool enough for sleep. But the forward, bottom hold of the cargo ship received no ocean breeze. It made our task of loading and stacking drums filled with gasoline, exhausting.

Although it was dark now, it was still hot and humid in the hold of the ship. Both of us were stripped to the waste wearing only combat boots and fatigue bottoms. Our clothes and bodies were soaked with sweat and we reeked with the overpowering stench of volatile gasoline. Everything we touched was slippery with the dampness of a humid, tropical South Pacific island.

After rolling and positioning each pair of heavy drums upright, Dominick and I joked and speculated while we waited for the next pair of drums: what would happen if the crane operator, invisible somewhere five decks above our heads, accidentally dropped a pair of these drums into the hold? Each drum we knew was eighty times more powerful as an explosive than an equivalent weight of dynamite!

This was not the first time I had faced the danger of injury or death. Shortly after arriving in July, another replacement and I took a jeep on a short ride around the shoreline to inspect the island. We went only a few miles when we encountered an impenetrable barricade across the road. It was marked with a sign forbidding passage beyond the barrier.

I parked the jeep and the two of us decided to reconnoiter the beach. We walked a few feet over the short sandy beach to the water's edge. As I turned to view the jungle on the other side of the road, a sniper's bullet whirred out of the jungle past my right ear passing so close I felt the whirring zing before I heard the shot.

The hated enemy, seldom seen now, was still there; hidden in the jungle ready to kill or be killed. Unarmed as we were, we left in a hurry.

The six hour loading shift finally ended at midnight. Both of us were exhausted and half drunk from the poisonous gasoline fumes. It was close to one O'clock by the time I got back to my tent; much too tired to wash up or sleep. I dropped my combat boots and soaked fatigue bottoms outside my cot, crawled under the mosquito netting, tied and tucked it shut and sprayed the inside with DDT.

I was physically exhausted but my mind was wide awake and I could not fall asleep. The flashlight, paper and pencil I used to write notes and letters, were close at hand. I began to jot what came to mind. Was this now the end of the war.... the beginning of the end of future wars?

I pondered the historic meaning of the great events unfolding of which I was now a part. I recalled how my father's family [his older brothers] had been involved in combat on both sides of World War I. He lost his two oldest brothers while two survived the "war to end all wars" – historically, one of the main causes of this one – a war called: "A war of brother against brother" and "the war to end all wars".

I could not convince myself that this was, or even could be the end of all war; even the end of this one much less the end of all future wars? Could mankind's leaders have learned anything from the carnage of this world wide war?

We had defeated the Nazis but the Commies were still around!

As the tired mind churned, the words of a crude poem began to form; and was completed within the hour. It described in base terms the horrors of war throughout human history, denigrated its heroics and pinpointed how and by whom it would be repeated again and again. I first wrote: "A rock, a stone a dead man's bone lay upon...."

The Fruits of War

Rocks and stones and dead soldiers' bones
Lay over the fields with battle shields.

They lived on earth then wet the dirt
With rich red blood that turned to mud.

For what they fought that too they sought;
That blessed peace that would not cease.

For this they died and from heaven spied;
Selfish men with treaty pen,
Who set the way for another day
Of:

Rocks and stones and dead soldiers' bones.

The Beginning of a Long Journey

We had arrived on Cebu Island in the Philippines as replacements from the replacement depot on Leyte Island in early July after an almost four week sea voyage from The Presidio in San Francisco. The troop transport, a converted combination cruise ship and freighter was the U.S.S. L. M, Hersey. It had prop troubles the captain told us, which caused the ship to dwell a week anchored in Pearl Harbor while attempts were made to make repairs and we had to wait on board never setting foot on Hawaii.

The repair attempts were without much success, because two weeks later we stopped again in the Marshall Islands and again in the Caroline Islands.

As long and boring as this sea journey was, we were lucky in many other ways. The ship had left the States in early June and sailed this "peaceful" ocean when it was mostly calm. Added to that, it was our good fortune to have on board Bob Crosby and his famous orchestra. Every evening after chow but before sunset, everyone not on duty would gather on the aft hatch cover to hear his orchestra play and sing the romantic music of the jazz era.

For all off duty personnel on board, this last night was going to be special. The concert had to end as always, well before sunset. We sailed the south Pacific at night completely blacked out. No lights of any kind were permitted and smoking on deck after sunset was strictly forbidden.

On moonless nights, this gave us young Midwesterners a fascinating and delightful sight. We could stand forward or aft and watch the bow waves or the wake glow in the dark. The millions of sea life the ships passage disturbed caused the sea foam to fluoresce. Sadly, this dramatic sight is seldom seen on today's sea voyages. The cruise ships are too brightly lit. However, for a "landlubber" at sea for the first time, it was magical nighttime entertainment.

When our ship left the Caroline Islands on the final leg of this weary journey, it seemed our handicapped ship was traveling more hastily than ever as we approached and entered the Philippine

Sea; joined now by a Navy Destroyer Escort. We estimated we were about a day or two out of Leyte and conjectured we must be entering sub infested waters because, for the first time since we left the States, we had a naval escort.

The Destroyer Escort was now zigzagging about a quarter of a mile off and ahead of our port bow. Bob Crosby's Orchestra had just begun playing its second set and the music had us in a trance. Some of the guys really got into it and were jitterbugging with each other [there were no women in army combat units in those days]. A few added to their excitement by playing poker for high stakes or shooting craps for money most did not have.

These side shows crowded the deck and every horizontal surface. No one could move or walk – everyone was essentially frozen in place. We were all out to enjoy this last show of the journey and many were standing, crowded shoulder to shoulder or if lucky, seated on any horizontal surface.

Suddenly, the aaooga, aaooga of the Destroyer Escort's Klaxon horn urgently sounded, quickly followed by the same sound from our own ship's alarm - aaoogha, aaoogha - a sound not easily forgotten by anyone who has sailed a warship in wartime.

The Destroyer Escort had detected an enemy submarine!

Over the ship's loud speaker came the Captain's urgent command repeated twice; "All navy personnel, man your battle stations – all navy personnel, man your battle stations" followed by "all army personnel, return to quarters below –all army personnel, return to quarters below".

But the deck was jammed with army and off duty navy personnel wearing bulky life vests. No one could move. Sailors trying to reach battle stations could not move.

Army personnel were to go into the bowls of a ship that was about to be torpedoed – torpedoed with us deep inside?

The sailors needed to reach their battle stations to man the forward naval gun as fast as possible. But no one could move on these crowded decks!

At any moment the D.E. Boat would start to lob depth charges.

We urgently needed to get the trapped sailors to their battle stations.

In typical military discipline, no one panicked. Instead, they put on a show of American ingenuity. The army personnel lifted the sailors over the crowd's head and passed them overhead toward their battle stations.

The D.E. Boat, now circling a half mile away, would surely begin dropping depth charges.

We waited for the muffled BOOM! But none came.

By the time half the decks were cleared, the all clear signal sounded and navy personnel were ordered to secure battle stations. This sudden introduction to the "enemy" put an abrupt end to what we had hoped would be a grand musical finale to a long and boringly slow journey.

The concert did not resume that night.

Unknown to us at the time, the Cruiser Independence was also sailing toward the Philippines after having delivered its world changing cargo to Tinnian Island. Unescorted and in the Lingayen Gulf, it was torpedoed by a Jap sub and sank with the greatest loss of life in the history of the U. S. Navy. Well over twenty five hundred lives were lost.

The following morning, written orders were handed to everyone giving notice that all army personnel were to offload the next day at Leyte Island and report to the Repel Depot for physical exams, interviews and, assignment to various Military Units such as the 1st Cavalry, 24th, 77th and 89th Infantry Divisions now scattered throughout the Philippines.

We would be replacements for those wounded or killed in previous engagements. These units needed to be at full strength and trained for the planned invasion of Japan.

I was assigned to a tank mounted Howitzer Regiment that was part of the 77th infantry Division. Within days I boarded another ship to sail from Leyte to Cebu Island to join my new regiment.

Unknown to us at the time, our stay on Cebu Island would be short and there, we would meet the enemy again.

Preparing For Invasion

I was assigned to the 307th Infantry Regiment on Cebu Island and we received what my army experience had taught me was very little training. Nor did we participate in any large scale training exercises that would normally be expected in preparation for the invasion of Japan. Instead, the days seemed to be routine and mostly devoted to R & R [rest & relaxation] for the combat vets of the 77th Infantry of which the 307th was a part. The 77th Infantry Division had arrived on Cebu just a few weeks before we had and had been involved in the invasion of Kerama Retto, Keise Shima and Ie Shima Islands.

Unfortunately, Ernie Pyle had been with the 77th Infantry on Ie Shims when he was killed by a sniper's bullet. This was one of the few things some of the vets of this campaign who knew him, could talk about. They sorely missed this much beloved foot soldiers' reporter.

Many would talk about how much they hated the nips or gooks as we often referred to them. And some showed us the gruesome results of this hate as they retrieved from their pockets gold; these treasures were in the form of teeth, gold teeth retrieved by these soldiers with the heel of their boots from the mouths of the dead enemy!

One old guy [anyone over twenty five was old] didn't say much but kept nervously reaching into his pocket shaking what he retrieved in his right hand as if shaking a pair of dice. One day, when a bunch of us were sitting around BS'ing, one of the guys got up the nerve to ask Pop what he had in his hands. That's when he and a couple of others showed us their war booty - gold teeth!

"It's go'in ta make me rich by duh time I gets through with this here war" he said!

We were learning quickly what war was like and how hate and fear of death can affect the human heart and mind.

A few times we took our medium tanks and other vehicles on patrol into the Jungle chasing the now scattered and disorganized enemy. Always returning with muddy and mud filled vehicles and rifles to clean from shots fired at a scattered, unseen enemy.

We received daily indoctrination training and other regular lectures but participated in no large scale maneuvers or exercises. We attended Sunday Mass said on an improvised altar in the jungle and went to Confession in preparation for combat, but no training. Something was going on but none of us knew what. Even the seasoned combat vets thought the lack of training exercises was odd.

“Shouldn’t we be training for the invasion of Japan?” We asked each other.

To protect our supply tents at night from the occasionally marauding enemy we stood guard duty in pairs in an unorthodox fashion devised by the battle hardened vets. They showed us how they had devised a safer, non regulation form of guard duty. Two guards sat on the ground back to back literally protecting each other’s back. It would prevent the nips from sneaking up from behind and slitting the guard’s throat. But now they mostly came by raft or rubber boat rather than from the jungle around us.

Many of the young replacements looked forward to this type of guard duty, especially if the duty was pulled with a seasoned combat vet. The stories he would tell would be informative and interesting and made more mysterious because they were usually whispered in the dark.

Occasionally, a Jap would be so hungry and brazen he’d creep out of the jungle in daylight clothed in stolen native Filipino garb. He would get in the chow line with us pretending to be one of the native workers. These workers would sometimes stand in the chow line and eat with us. We usually caught these desperate nips. Their big toe gave them away every time. It stood out, separated from the rest of their toes in the Japanese soldier’s boot. We never did tell them how we knew they were nips.

As replacements we of course drew K.P. [kitchen patrol] usually for a week at a time. Even though I was now a private first class, I had my share of guard duty and KP. One of my early pleasures on KP duty was cleaning up after meals.

Because they lived close to our encampment I had the opportunity to quickly become acquainted with the native population and their primitive way of life living in grass and bamboo huts. These barely adequate shelters were raised on stilts and the families slept at night with the entry ladder pulled up preventing entry by unwanted jungle and human visitors - except mosquitoes. To keep them at bay during sleep, smudge pots were lit and smoldered under the center of each hut through the night; the smoke rising and drifting through the floor and into the hut engulfing the family asleep on grass mats.

These grass and bamboo huts had no electricity, no running water and of course no toilet facilities or glass windows. But each grass hut contained a foot pedal powered Singer Sewing Machine! A copy of my mothers back home!

At daybreak the children would be up early and hungry. They could smell the mess sergeant cooking a GI breakfast of gruel or powdered eggs, chicory coffee or powdered milk and farina. Lunch consisted of more canned or preserved food mostly containing meat while dinner consisted of powdered potatoes, a canned vegetable and of course bread, ever present at every meal. The “favorite” was SOS, chipped beef in a white gravy sauce slopped on two slices of white toast.

This was not considered by most soldiers to be tasty fare; certainly not for hungry young men dwelling in a hot humid climate and not in need of extra calories, so we usually ended up with lots of leftovers.

After meals these leftovers were discarded in the regimental dump. On my first day on KP and shortly after dumping the leftovers, we noticed the kids scavenging to retrieve them. The next day we asked the mess sergeant and he agreed to let us portion out any leftovers directly to the kids before we dumped them.

After the next meal we made the young ones line up and we filled their tin cans, palm leaves, pots, old dishes and even cupped hands with these scraps. We enjoyed seeing these malnourished little ones savor what we had previously thrown away and instead, take them home to share with their families.

The three to seven year old children lived and played around and under these grass and bamboo huts and many of the three year old and older boys smoked cigarettes – when they could find them. They were constantly begging us for cigarettes and many appeared to suffer from malnutrition. This malady was exhibited by their grossly distended bellies which seemed more obvious in the boys than the girls.

The clothes they wore made this malady more visible on boys than girls.

As in many eastern cultures, the male person appeared to be valued more than the female. The sources for the clothes were identical. It was the style of the cut that distinguished the female “dress” from the male “shirt”.

They both were cut from gunny sacks with holes cut in the center of the bottom for the head and each corner cut at an angle for the arms. What distinguished the boy’s gunny sack from the girl’s was its length; the girls reached to just above the knee. The boys ended at the belly button proudly exposing the child’s gender identity for the world to see.

Once or twice a week we would have a movie night. During one of these movie nights in early August, an unmemorable movie was interrupted by our Regimental Commander. He announced to the assembled troops that earlier that day, a huge bomb had been dropped on the Japanese City of Hiroshima completely obliterating it. The communiqué had called it an “Atomic Bomb”.

An ATOMIC BOMB?

But what was an atomic bomb?

None of us knew; most didn’t even know what an atom was.

It must be some new, powerful explosive: a new version of dynamite or plastique: more powerful perhaps than anything we had ever experienced or previously worked with, we conjectured.

Many of the replacements in this regiment were trained in the Mechanized Cavalry as I had been and had received 4 weeks extra basic training that had included among other things, demolition training using different types of explosives.

I quickly recalled that as a young boy, my mother had read to me a fascinating article about a scientific discovery concerning the vast amount of energy thought to be locked up in an atom; and how one pound of this material could possibly contain as much energy as many tons of coal. If only mankind could learn to harness it.

Had we really learned to harness it?

A few days later on August 9th another announcement came. This time it was about the obliteration of Nagasaki by a second Atomic Bomb.

Would the war be over now? The answer was, yes!

World War II finally ended a few days after the dropping of the second Atomic bomb on Nagasaki. On August 14th it was announced the Japanese Government had accepted the terms of an unconditional surrender.

General Douglas McArthur and the Japanese Envoys would sign the surrender documents on the Battleship USS Missouri September 2nd 1945 in Tokyo Bay. World War II officially ended that day.

Combat was over and the 77th Infantry Division was now preparing to leave Cebu Island.

The Invasion Fleet

The secret war plans for the invasion of Japan had scheduled the initial landings to be executed on the Southern mainland Island of Kyushu. Because this island is located in the southern most part of Japan, the planners surmised the invasion could be delayed until November without having to give consideration to the coming of winter in the Northern hemisphere. Unknown to us at the time, the invasion plan specified holding the 77th Infantry Division in reserve. The other southern island Shikoku and the remaining mainland islands were assigned to many different army and marine units with some being recent arrivals from Europe.

With the surrender, the plans were changed. The 77th Infantry was assigned the task of landing on and securing the Northern island of Hokkaido; the coldest and the snowiest of the Japanese Mainland islands.

The original invasion plan had estimated casualties during the initial landings to exceed one hundred thousand killed and many, many more wounded. Some estimates went as high as a half million Allied Soldiers as casualties.

All who served and survived war in the Pacific would thank President Truman for having had the fortitude to order the dropping of the Atom Bomb and save these American lives.

Instead of an invasion with the 77th Infantry Division being held in reserve, we now were assigned the task of landing and securing Hokkaido. Our contingent was to leave the main convoy and sail north to the port city of Otaru and later move inland to Sapporo.

By the end of August the task of loading the various supply ships assigned to transport the 77th Infantry Division from the Philippine Islands to Japan had been completed. My part of the 307th Regiment was assigned an LST [Land Ship Tank] upon which to load our tracked and wheeled vehicles, tanks and troops. The plan was to head northeast out of the Mindanao Sea past Leyte and into the Philippine Sea to join a convoy of 27 capital war ships and transports rendezvousing to head north to occupy Japan's Main Island.

An LST is a shallow draft ship about 200 feet long consisting of three tubes running fore and aft. The large, open central tube is designed to carry tanks and other heavy, tracked equipment like bull dozers and large 6X6 trucks for direct exit onto a beach through giant opening bow doors and a ramp. The side tubes are vertically segmented into decks and used to carry troops. The ship's bridge is located at the rear with the engine compartment below and to the rear of the main cargo hold.

The layout of the LST would become important as we headed north into the turbulence of fall seas.

Because we would not be hitting beaches on this journey, the LST carried extra cargo lashed to the top deck and exposed to the elements. The extra deck weight added to the instability of a shallow draft vessel. This extra cargo consisted of 6X6 trucks along with lighter vehicles such as jeeps and ¾ ton Dodge trucks loaded with supplies and ammunition.

Shortly after entering the Philippine Sea, our small convoy began rendezvousing with other ships that would make up the 27 ship convoy heading for Japan. The convoy consisted not only of LSTs but also supply ships, cruisers, destroyers, and some troop ships. All were proceeding north in a column of three as the invasion armada entered the Pacific Ocean and heavy seas.

By the following day, the seas were so rough everyone except the most salty of sailors was seasick. The convoy had entered the tail end of the typhoon of 1945 that had just devastated Okinawa. The voyage would be getting rougher each day for the next few days the ship's captain announced.

It would get much worse; worse than even the captain had predicted.

Neither the crew nor the passengers knew just how rough it was about to become. Later we learned that a few ships leaving the Philippines had actually been ordered to turn back. We half heartedly joked and later prayed that our invasion force would not suffer the fate of the invading Spanish Armada.

I was assigned responsibility for the vehicles lashed to the upper deck. They were now straining at their rope lashings more and more as the seas got heavier and heavier. We had to add additional restraints to each vehicle and had to constantly reapply the wheel chocks to each wheel as the seas got rougher.

The seas finally became so rough that no personnel other than those on watch, were allowed on deck and they were required to wear bulky kapok life jackets. Even the cargo began shifting inside the vehicles and had to be repacked and restrained.

By the morning of the third day, I was so sea sick I could barely go on deck for my watch. I had not eaten anything for almost two days. The seas were so rough now that even the large capital ships in our convoy, ships such as cruisers sailing only a mile away in the three lines of the convoy, would disappear in the troughs of the ocean waves; only to reappear again a few seconds later.

After being relieved of my watch midmorning, I headed below to the head for a necessary visit. The sight that greeted me was sickening beyond description.

Seasick troops were trying to sit on some of the johns while the contents sloshed out onto the deck as the vessel rolled and bounced on the giant waves. A few stood at urinals. Some were so sick they lay on the deck of the head; and water carrying the foul contents spilling from the johns and urinals, sloshed back and forth over them as the deck heaved fore and aft and rolled starboard to port, port to starboard, over and over and over again.

I left without relief. I later found a head reserved for sailors that seemed in better shape and was mainly unoccupied.

By the fourth day the ship was apparently beginning to breakup. Three sailors were running around the main hold wheeling tanks of acetylene and oxygen and a welding torch. The welder wore a welder's helmet and went around the ship welding plates to the ship's beams, spanning what they told us, were cracks in the ship's structure caused by the heavy seas. This went on even after the seas began to calm as we passed north of Okinawa and into the East China Sea.

As the convoy approached the northern edge of the East China Sea, the convoy split. Our LST and other parts of the convoy stayed west of the Japanese Mainland and headed north through the Korea Straits into the Sea of Japan. The convoy continued north toward the northern most Island of Hokkaido and sailed into Ishikari Bay for disembarkation at the port of Otaru.

It was late October of 1945 when I set foot on the enemy's home soil. But the enemy wasn't there – to greet us or to fight us.

A securing party had arrived from another ship a day earlier. They had landed under Naval cover to enter and secure both the port area and the important infrastructure of the city which at the time was small and typically Japanese in layout and architecture.

After disembarking, one company from our regiment quickly dispersed to give backup support to the earlier landing party. Shortly after unloading the heavy equipment, our regiment moved out of the dock area to temporary encampment in a group of small but now essentially empty warehouses.

Soon word came to the regiment that the city was empty of people except for a few old men who were milling about watching the foreign invaders unload. This was of some concern to our commanders. Had the civilians fled from the town to arm themselves and then attack en mass? Not too likely because everyone was gone, woman and children of all ages and almost all men, except a few of the very old.

We knew the Japanese were fanatical and many of the veterans had first hand experience with Bushido and the Kamikaze pilots and waves of suicide attacks on Iwo Jima and during many of the other island campaigns of the Pacific. We also knew that the Japanese people were very obedient to the Emperor.

After all, he had ordered them in a radio broadcast, to surrender peacefully.

Regardless of these surprises, the 77th Infantry now had thousands of troops ashore. Each regiment had been ordered to establish a secure perimeter around their area of responsibility while they prepared to move inland to the city they were assigned to occupy. The 307th's assignment was the city of Sapporo and this would remain the regiment's permanent station until the 77th Infantry Divisions disbanding in spring of 1946.

Orders called for all troops to carry their weapons at all times. Weapons were to be carried with a full ammo clip but without a chambered round, except during guard duty. Rifles and carbines were then to be carried with chambered rounds and weapons on safety. Because I was tank mounted I usually carried a 45 automatic except on guard duty when we all carried M1 rifles.

The weather was getting cold at night now and darkness seemed to come earlier each day. The regiment posted guards day and night around the warehouse we were temporarily billeted in. A pass word of the day was posted each day on the bulletin board and every soldier was ordered to memorize and use it when he returned to the secured area from his day's duties.

On the first day, a few of the guys neglected to look on the bulletin board in the morning or simply forgot the password, thinking the guards would know who they were and would let them pass. The first day this happened, the guard on duty challenged the approaching soldier requesting the password of the day. The returning soldier stated he forgot but would go to the bulletin board, look it up and return to tell the guard.

The guard on duty that day did not simply overlook this soldier's lapse. He happened to be a combat veteran and didn't think the soldier's cavalier attitude toward security in enemy territory was funny. He

called for the sergeant of the guard. The returning soldier was taken to the company commander who confined him after his duty hours, to quarters for a week.

Everyone memorized each day's new password before breakfast after that incident.

I hated guard duty, particularly at night when my stint was lonely and cold. One particular night I was sound asleep in my fatigues nice and warm under the blankets when the sergeant of the guard came to wake me at 130 hours for my 200 hours to 400 hours guard duty shift. We walked our post alone and would meet the other sector guards on a routine schedule formally reporting to each other that each guard's sector was secure. If you did not meet regularly with the other guard on each end of your sector and receive a satisfactory report, you were required to immediately call for the sergeant of the guard.

Guard duty was cold and lonely at night. And in enemy country, anything could happen.

Toward the end of October or early November some of the troops noticed a few people walking around town during the day and commented about it. In a day or two we all began to notice the ever increasing presence of women, children and young men. Within a few days, the influx was growing to the extent that it was not unusual to see a dozen people on the streets during daylight hours.

Curious, the regimental brass made further inquiries and we soon became privy to what had happened prior to and since our arrival weeks earlier. By radio broadcast, the Emperor had requested all Japanese civilians, Government and the Military to peacefully surrender.

The local government and what was left of the Japanese Military apparently did not agree with the Emperor's assessment and advised the local population, that for the safety of the women and children, especially young girls and boys, all able bodied persons were to gather what supplies and belongings they could and flee into the mountains for the coming winter.

By fleeing they could escape the burning, rape and pillaging by the invading American hoards. As news filtered back that no pillaging or burning was taking place; that this was an organized, disciplined army bringing hoards of supplies, they slowly began to return.

They returned to a meager existence in a country now mostly drained of its imperial wealth; but as it turned out not of its talent, work ethic and what would become a new-found ambition.

Within days Otaru became a different place. Virtually abandoned, it now appeared as a small but busy little port town preparing for a long and harsh winter.

Since landing, all army enlisted personnel had been required when outside the secured zone to travel in pairs carrying rifles at all times with full clips of ammunition but no round [bullet] in the chamber.

A few days after the civilians began returning to their homes, I suggested to Dominick that the two of us explore what appeared to be a small, tightly packed residential area of Otaru. It was only a block or so from the warehouse area where we were temporarily quartered since our arrival and I was curious to see how the ordinary Japanese civilian lived.

The houses in the enclave were typically Japanese in appearance. Built low to the ground, they were covered with vertical and horizontal wood siding severely weathered to a dark reddish brown. The roofs were shingle covered, low pitched with little overhang. They seemed to be placed at random and the passageway between them seemed too narrow for motorized military vehicles. They were wide enough though to accommodate the necessary donkey or horse drawn HONEY cart.

It was late in the afternoon on a dreary fall day when Dominic and I took our walk. The air was hazy, the daylight grey. A low, nondescript cloud hung over the city and the small enclave. This ceiling appeared even lower as it quickly captured the smoke rising from a few of the many tilting chimney pipes pointing toward the sky. The smoke rose leisurely, turning as it reached the low cloud ceiling then spread horizontally as the smoke blended its grey with the cloud, disappearing as the two became one.

The light was slowly beginning to fade and though the air was still, a cold, fall chill penetrated my fatigues and jacket. The area was devoid of any Japanese civilians and we had intended to walk only for a few minutes. When the two of us were fifty feet from the first building in the enclave, a small boy appeared on the path slowly walking towards us. When the boy got within twenty feet, he stopped, bowed deeply and gesticulated with his little finger as he spoke; "Come Joe, come".

He bowed again and began walking backward as he bowed and kept calling and urging over and over again, "Come Joe, Come...Come Joe, Come" he urged.

Dominick looked at me with a quizzical look and me at him. "Is this a trap"? What does this little kid want with us?

He seemed innocent enough, but it wouldn't be the first time a kid was used to set a trap. Usually women were used to lure soldiers into traps. None-the-less, a little kid could still be used by desperate people.

During the few moments this took place, we both decided the people of this small enclave would be foolish to start anything. We out-numbered and out-gunned them.

We kept following the young boy and he kept walking backwards toward the first little house gesticulating, bowing and gently pleading, "Come Joe, Come. Come Joe, Come".

As we arrived within ten feet of the house, the door slowly opened and the little boy was joined by what appeared to be an elderly couple, both bowing deeply and respectfully while joining the child in his gentile Chorus, "Come Joe, come. Come Joe, come" they politely urged.

Mamasan and Papasan shuffled backwards thru the door with the young boy following. As we entered we both bowed slightly at the waist to clear the low door opening which our "hosts" interpreted as a polite return bow. Inside this small space and alongside these slight people, we seemed like giants as we removed our steel helmets. We unslung our rifles from our shoulders and cautiously looked around.

Our host motioned for us to enter while repeating the invitation as they continued to bow, "Come Joe come, Come Joe come".

They motioned for us to be seated on the depressed floor around a little hibachi.

We surveyed the room and noted two rooms divided from this one by paper covered sliding doors. We decided to keep an eye out for possible other occupants. We were still suspicious and cautious.

When we seated ourselves around the tiny hibachi, Papasan gripped a pair of small tongs and retrieved a fist sized chunk of coal from the few stored in a small scuttle and added it to the fire. He warmed his knurled hands over the warm hibachi and with a gold-toothed smile motioned us to do likewise.

The couple now began speaking to us slowly in Japanese and a few broken words of English. And we spoke English and a few broken words of Japanese; and along with sign language, smiles and bows, recent enemies managed to communicate, "Hello" ...and our first "Welcome".

Papasan retrieved a small bamboo smoking pipe with a brass, thimble sized bowl on its end and a stash of tobacco folded in a small cloth rag - perhaps the last of his war ravaged stash. He took a small pinch, stuffed it into the brass bowl, picked up a small sliver of wood which he dipped into the tiny fire of the hibachi. With the flaming brand, he lit the tobacco in the bowl, took two savored puffs and dumped the ashes into a small bowl.

Gracefully, Mamasan rose, bowed and excused herself in Japanese as she walked backward from the gathering. Moments later she reappeared accompanied by a young man about 17 years of age. While she spoke to us, she pointed with her open right hand palms up, toward the young man on her left who bowed profusely as she spoke in Japanese and he slowly interpreted in broken English.

"I am Mamasan's son"

As this new arrival joined us, Mamasan held a very small can in her hand which she had just opened. With chop sticks she ceremoniously retrieved single slices of mandarin oranges which she gently and gratefully offered her guests and family as she explained in Japanese while her older son interpreted:

"Since the beginning of the war I have saved this small can of mandarin oranges and now wish to celebrate with you and my family the safe return of my son from the war".

This mother, halfway around the world from my home celebrated as my mother would a year later, the safe return of her son from war.

Frank J. Perhats, Sr.