

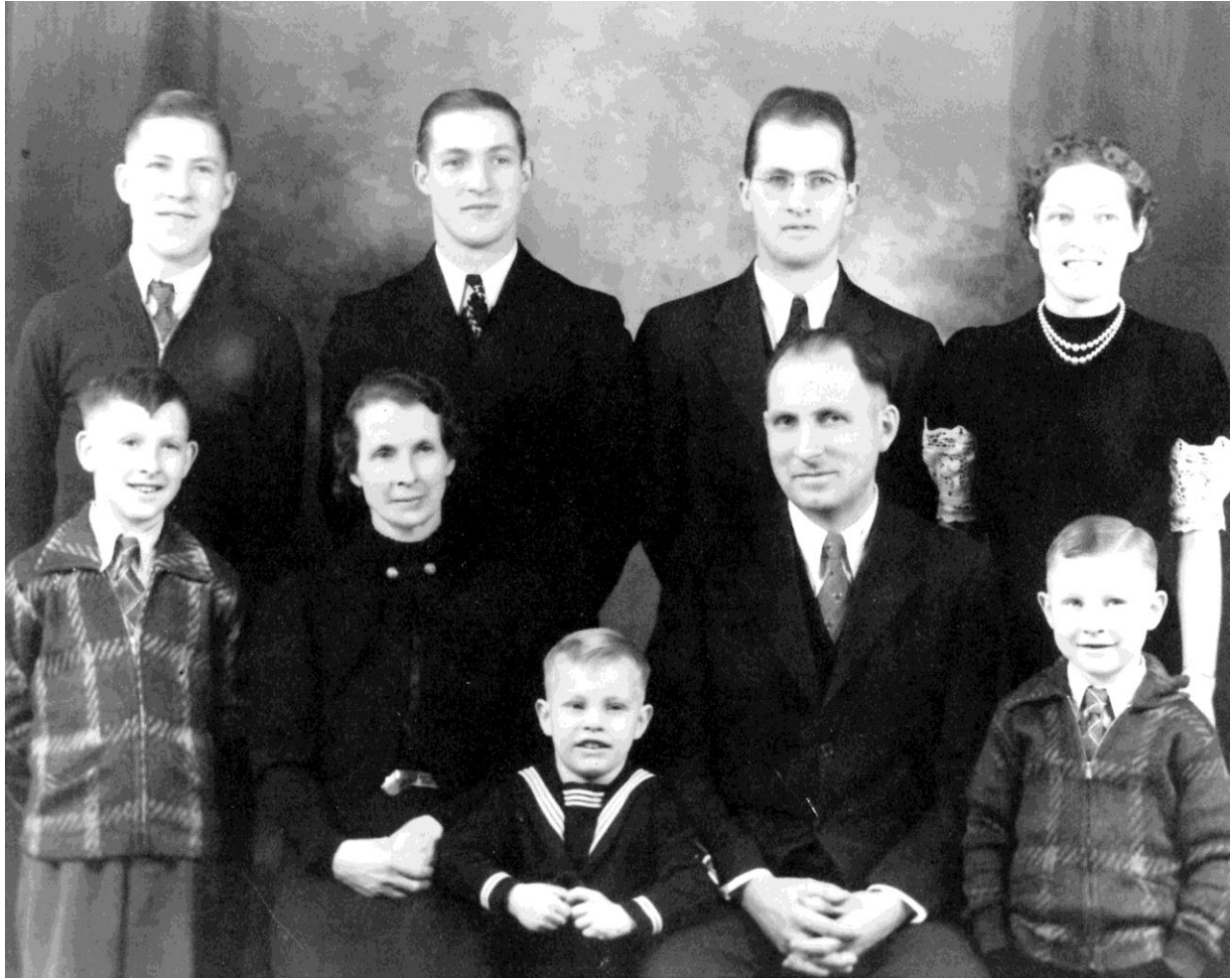
The WWII Sinking of the “Shinyo Maru”:
A Story of Loss and Survival of Two Baker POW’s
by Gary Dielman

On September 7, 1944, the United States submarine “USS Paddle” sighted a convoy of eight Japanese ships off the northwest coast of Mindanao, the southern most of the Philippine islands. None of the vessels showed markings indicating prisoners of war (POWs) were on board. The “Paddle” fired four torpedoes at a tanker with two hits and fired two more torpedoes at the leading cargo ship. In order to avoid being sighted, the sub immediately dived without confirming any hits on the cargo ship. However, during a two-hour bombardment by 45 depth charges, the submerged “Paddle” heard loud noises characteristic of a ship breaking up as it sank.

After the war, the crew of the “Paddle” learned that the captain of the torpedoed Japanese tanker ran his ship ashore in order to avoid sinking; that the “Paddle” had sunk the cargo ship heard breaking up; and that the cargo ship was the “Shinyo Maru,” with 750 American prisoners of war on board, of which only 82 survived.

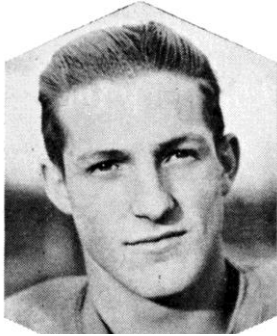
Two of those POW’s aboard the “Shinyo Maru” were Baker men: Willard E. Hall (1920-1985), who survived, and Jesse “Gordon” Smurthwaite (1918-1944), who did not.

Smurthwaite was born November 27, 1918, in Baker, Oregon. (From 1911 to 1990 the town’s name was Baker, which I use throughout this article.) He was the fourth of eight children born to Jesse A. Smurthwaite (1889-1982) and Zina Stark Smurthwaite (1892-1974). His siblings were Angela (1912-2005), Donald (1914-2005), infant Margaret (1916-1916), James (1921-1994), Thomas (1927-2005), Douglas (1931-), and Paul (1934-2005). Their father was a linotype operator for the “Democrat-Herald” and its predecessor the “Morning Democrat,” and for a short-lived newspaper in the 1930s called “The Eastern Oregon News” published by Ryder Bros., which for many years was a job printer.

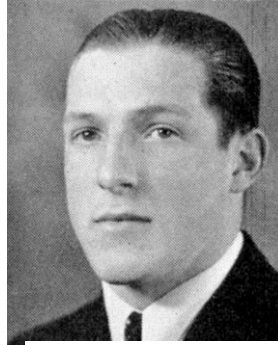


Jesse and Zina Smurthwaite and their sev

Smurthwaite graduated from Baker High School in 1936. From the yearbook “Nugget” we learn that he was a 145-pound halfback on the BHS football team. Included in information printed beside his senior picture in the “Nugget” was his future aspiration: “forestry.” But three years after graduation, while the country was in the depths of the Depression, Smurthwaite had not gone on to college to study forestry. Instead, he worked at Ryder Bros. as a “helper,” and was still living in the family home at 345 2nd Street.



Halfback 1936



Senior Portrait 1936
Gordon Smurthwaite



End 1935



Forward 1938



End 1938

Willard Hall—Junior Year

Willard Hall played end on the BHS football team and in his junior year helped make school history as a forward, the “sixth man,” on the BHS basketball team that won the 1938 Oregon State Basketball Championship. (At the championship tournament in Salem, Baker won the Class A championship tournament defeating Klamath Falls 31-29, Sandy 40-20, and St. Helens 26-10. But then the team still had to play Amity, the winner of the Class B championship. The Oregon championship game took place on March 19, 1938. After trailing Amity by one point at the half (10 to 9), Baker surged in the second half to beat Amity by a score of 27 to 18.)

Hall was born in Baker on November 8, 1920. Not much is known about his early life. His parents were John A. and Elizabeth Emele Hall, both born in 1888. He had two

sisters, Genevieve and Aleta. Using Baker City Directories, one can follow the father's activities in Baker. In 1910 he was working as an unmarried laborer living in the home of Louise E. Hall, widow of David P. Hall, presumably his parents. In 1920, the year of Hall's birth, his father was listed as an ice dealer, married to Elizabeth, and living at his place of business, 3305 Place Street. From 1925 to 1932 John and Elizabeth farmed on Baker's west side. In 1933, Hall's mother died and his father moved to La Grande.



Summers, Ott, Coleson, Sowers, Hall, Coleman, Ragsdale, Huntsman
Taylor, mgr. George Allison, coach

But Hall remained in Baker living in the home of his maternal aunt, Mabel Ragsdale, Baker County Treasurer and mother of Hall's basketball teammate and cousin, Orville Ragsdale. According to Dr. Carl Kostol (BHS '40), during Hall's senior year, Hall chose to live with his father, thinking that La Grande's basketball team had a better chance to win the 1939 Oregon Championship, since four of Baker's best players had graduated. The move to La Grande did not pay off, for Baker again won the district title and came in third at the state championship tournament.

The 1940 U.S. Census lists Hall, age 19, as a service station attendant living in La Grande with his widowed father, John Hall, age 52, a lumber mill worker born in Texas. Also living in the home was Elizabeth McKay, housekeeper, age 40.

On September 16, 1940, the United States started ramping up its military preparedness by passing the Selective Service Act, the first peacetime military conscription in United States history. The Act made men between ages 21 and 35 (later 18 to 65) subject to military service and required that they register at local draft boards.

During the Spanish-American War of 1898, which led to the Philippines becoming a U.S. protectorate, Baker organized a home guard unit, which became Oregon National Guard Company A, later re-designated Company F, 2nd Battalion, 186th Infantry, 41st Division. In the summer of 1940, Company F trained three weeks, instead of the usual two weeks, at Fort Clatsop on the northwest Oregon coast. On September 5 this article appeared in the "Record-Courier":

BAKER GUARDSMEN MOBILIZE SEPT. 16

With the final passage last week of the measure calling for a year's training of national guard units, the Baker company, as part of the 41st Division, will be mobilized September 16, and after 10 days at the local station, they will depart for Fort Lewis.

On September 16, 1940, Hall joined Company E, La Grande's National Guard unit. Companies E and F, along with other units were promptly on their way to Fort Lewis, Washington, as part of the U.S. Army Infantry. Among the young Baker men headed for Fort Lewis was Company F member and recent BHS graduate Carl Kostol. Neither Kostol nor Hall remained in their infantry units. Kostol voluntarily transferred to the Army Air Corps and served as a B-25 bomber pilot eventually based in Southern China. Hall transferred to a newly formed tank battalion.

Kostol believes Hall's transfer was not voluntary. Other units, whose ranks needed augmentation, were being federalized and sent to the Philippines. Company commanders were required to recommend men for transfer, usually men whom they were willing to sacrifice. One day at Fort Lewis, as Major Bean, Commander of the 186th

Infantry, walked by, Kostol observed Hall, instead of saluting, say, “Hi, Maj” and give a wave. “Everyone liked Willie,” says Kostol, but “Willie’s lack of discipline” is why Kostol believes Hall was selected for transfer.

Whether that was the reason or Hall volunteered, on September 8, 1941, Hall shipped out of San Francisco headed for the Philippines as a member of the Headquarters unit of the newly formed 194th Light Tank Battalion. His unit arrived in Manila on September 26.



The map at left shows the Japanese POW camps in the Philippines.

Smurthwaite and Hall both landed at Manila. Smurthwaite sailed on south to Bugo, Mindanao. Hall remained on Luzon Island.

After U.S. forces surrendered, Hall and Smurthwaite both ended up at the Davao POW camp on Mindanao Island.

In the fall of 1941, Smurthwaite was drafted into the Army. After basic training at Fort Douglas, Utah, the Army transferred Smurthwaite to the Army Air Corps. On October 27, Smurthwaite and other members of what became Headquarters Squadron of the 5th Air Base Group of the Far East Air Force, boarded the "USS Hugh L. Scott" at San Francisco, and debarked in Manila on November 20, Thanksgiving Day. "Dinner of sauerkraut and wieners," Smurthwaite wrote in his diary.

(Smurthwaite's diary begins October 22, 1941, when his unit left Salt Lake City headed for San Francisco and the Philippines; it ends Thanksgiving Day, 1942, the day before his 23rd birthday. The last fifteen sheets have been torn out of Smurthwaite's handmade diary, probably covering some or all of the next two years in captivity. All twenty-four surviving pages were initialed by a censor, whether Japanese or American, I do not know. Smurthwaite fashioned the diary out of recycled covers with hand stitching holding covers and pages together. Smurthwaite's younger brother, Doug, loaned me the diary to use in writing this article. Doug, age 83, the last surviving member of his ten-member family, lives in Baker City.)

Within a few days after arrival in Manila, Smurthwaite and most of his squadron sailed south arriving December 1 at Bugo, site of an airfield on the north shore of Mindanao, the second largest of the islands--a little over one-third the size of Oregon--in the Philippines archipelago. (A memoir written by Pvt. Hayes Bolitho, a member of the 5th Air Base Group and a survivor of the sinking of the "Shinyo Maru," is available at this website: <http://www.hlr gazette.com/2009-articles/85-september-26-2009/785-local-ww-ii-herojapanese-pow-1-of-6.html>)

"December 1, 1941, we docked at Bugo, Oriental Misamis, Mindanao, P.I., where the Del Monte Pineapple Cannery is located. We unloaded all night, heading for the interior, setting up camp approximately 26 kilometers from Bugo, across from Del Monte Pineapple fields. The altitude was 1700' and the climate was ideal, being cool in the evenings." (Smurthwaite diary.)

Almost simultaneously with the December 7, 1941, attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese launched an air attack on U.S. bases in the Philippines which destroyed most of the Army Air Corps' bomber and fighter planes, followed by a land invasion by Japanese troops on December 10 on Luzon, the largest of the islands, and on Mindanao December 20.

Smurthwaite wrote in his diary, "December 8, 1941 a radio communique came in stating that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii the day before. We were at war with Japan, an organization without planes, aak aak guns, in other words, a paper outfit with typewriters etc.... The Nips had beat Uncle Sam on the first punch." But there was an airfield on the Del Monte pineapple plantation. "Bombers were coming and going, being repaired, gassed up, oiled with whatever we had to work with. The 'pencil-pushers' manned the gun-pits, handled the gas, oil etc., in other words, done the work of 3 different outfits."

Smurthwaite, who was assigned to Headquarters, was probably one of the pencil-pushers. When the Japanese started bombing the airfield on December 21 and during subsequent bombing raids, Smurthwaite manned a 50-caliber machine gun, a substitute for aak aak [anti-aircraft] guns. During one of the raids a Major and a Private were killed running for cover and three men were wounded. One of men wounded, according to Smurthwaite's diary, was PFC Hayes H. Bolitho, whose memoir I use throughout this article.

Hall's 194th Light Tank Battalion was the first U.S. tank unit deployed outside the U.S. and the first U.S. military unit to enter into combat after Congress declared war on Japan, Germany, and Italy in December 1941. Details of Hall's experiences during the defense of the Philippines are lacking. I do not know whether he was a member of a light tank crew or fought as an infantryman during the four-month retreat west and south from Manila to the bottom of the Bataan Peninsula.

Several months after the Japanese invasion, commanding General Douglas MacArthur moved his headquarters from Manila to small, fortified Corregidor Island, located a few miles south of Bataan in the entrance to Manila Bay. As it became evident that defeat was inevitable, President Roosevelt ordered MacArthur to leave the Philippines. MacArthur left on March 11, 1942, vowing, "I shall return." MacArthur's parting command to his generals was to fight to the last man. What the troops in the Philippines did not know was that Roosevelt had agreed with U.S. allies to place priority on the European Theater, which meant abandonment of the Philippines. MacArthur's return and reinforcements did not come until October 20, 1944.

Smurthwaite noted in his diary, "MacArthur arrived March 13 and left March 18, 1942. Quezon arrived March 25th, and left under guard the 27th." MacArthur had stopped at Mindanao on his way to New Guinea after fleeing from Corregidor. Philippines' President Manuel L. Queson was also fleeing from the Japanese. Eventually Queson set up a government-in-exile in Washington, D.C.

The greatly outnumbered American and Filipino forces held out for almost four months, During four months of retrograde battles, American forces received no air support or reinforcements, and were soon critically short on fuel, ammunition, spare parts, medical supplies, and food. Food rations were cut to half, then to one-quarter.



On April 9, 1942, Major General Edward P. King ordered troops on Bataan Peninsula to surrender.

The map at left shows the route of the Bataan Death March.

Major General Edward P. King, Jr., in charge of defense forces on the Bataan peninsula, realized the situation was hopeless. On April 9, 1942, to spare the lives of his starving, exhausted troops, Gen. King ordered 78,000 troops (66,000 Filipinos and 12,000 Americans), to surrender. Troops on the island fortress Corregidor held out for almost another month. Suffering from the same shortages as the troops on the Bataan Peninsula, on May 6 Lieutenant General Jonathan Wainwright ordered the surrender of all U.S. troops in the Philippines, including those on Mindanao.



*Japanese guarding U.S. and Filipino troops
during the Bataan Death March.*

On December 21 Smurthwaite was dodging bombs dropped on northern Mindanao by a fleet of Japanese bombers. His unit was still on the north coast in late March, when Japanese ships entered the bay and unloaded troops and equipment. Smurthwaite's unit retreated fifty miles south to the Moramag Forest, where there was a small runway. That's where they learned in early April that General Wainwright on Corregidor had ordered Brig. Gen. William F. Sharp, commander on Mindanao, to surrender all troops effective May 10. Two days later Smurthwaite's unit surrendered its weapons and proceeded to Camp Casisang, a former Japanese military camp recently established at Malaybalay City, Bukidnon Province, in north central Mindanao. Within a short time there were 1,100 American troops incarcerated at Casisang.

Smurthwaite commented in his diary, "Visayan-Mindanao Force surrendered to Imperial Japanese Army May 10, 1942, on Mother's Day. We had become Prisoners of war." (Visayas is the island group between Luzon and Mindanao, in other words, all Allied forces south of Luzon surrendered.)

Just before the surrender, Smurthwaite was at Valencia south of Camp Casisang. "The few days spent at Valencia, were worse than Del Monte bombings and strafings...very

strenuous upon the men, who were becoming more jittery as the days passed. My worst and closest escape was at Valencia....I can't tell you the horrible feeling I got watching the Japanese planes strafing up and down the little gully [where he was hiding behind a tree], watching the bullets hitting the small stream. Worse than that was watching the Japs cut their engines, diving upon the gully, to release their cargo and all I could do was wait and pray, hoping their bombs wouldn't hit too close. I never want to go through an ordeal such as that one was."

After arriving at Camp Casisang, Smurthwaite wrote tongue-in-cheek, "We are getting excellent treatment from the Japanese. Some of the work details are somewhat strenuous, but they are slacking down. The Japanese are kind, and very generous, especially to the Americans, there being about 1130 Americans, around 250 of them officers." POWs learned early on not to do anything that might anger their captors. Even the highest ranking American POWs had to either salute or bow to even the lowest ranking Japanese guard.

The day after the surrender of Corregidor, the military declared Hall and Smurthwaite missing in action (MIA). Their families had to wait a whole year before learning that the two men had survived the Japanese invasion of the Philippines and were prisoners of war (POWs). On June 10, 1943, an item appeared in the "Record-Courier" reporting that twenty-two-year-old Pvt. Willard Hall had been declared a POW after being listed as MIA for the past nineteen months. Two weeks later the "Record-Courier" reported that Gordon Smurthwaite was a POW in the Philippines after being reported MIA in May 1942.

Smurthwaite's younger brother, Doug Smurthwaite, who lives in Baker City, says the family received a couple of official Japanese prisoner postcards from his brother during his two and one-half years in captivity. The postcards said nothing about his life in prison camp. But at least the family knew he was alive. There cards had a line about the prisoner's health to fill out: "My health is – excellent; good; fair; poor." Smurthwaite underlined "excellent" on one card and "good" on another card. To underline one of the

other two choices, which would no doubt have been the truth, but would have risked antagonizing the Japanese. A small portion of the card was devoted to a personal message introduced by a printed "Please see that..." which Smurthwaite filled in, "Tell Cecille I'm still waiting for her." Doug says he did not know if Cecille planned to marry Gordon. "But she never married," Doug says.



*American survivors after their rescue from POW camp Cabanatuan in January 1945.
By the end of Willard Hall's captivity, he had lost half his 180 lb. original weight.*

The April 9, 1942, surrender of the forces on Bataan Peninsula left the Japanese in charge of 15,000 American and 60,000 Filipino prisoners, many more than anticipated. The prisoners, including Willard Hall, already in poor physical condition due to inadequate diet, meagre medical supplies, and suffering from tropical diseases during four months of fighting, were forced to march sixty miles north up the Bataan Peninsula in the hot Philippine climate with no food and little water. Prisoners who could not keep up were executed and left beside the road. About 650 Americans and 9,000 Filipinos died during what became known as the Bataan Death March, which lasted from six to ten days depending on where prisoners joined the march.

(In this article, I will not go into detail about the abuses suffered by American and Filipino POWs at the hands of their Japanese captors. For an extensive account, I refer the reader to "Prisoners of the Japanese" by Gavan Daws and to "The Dyess Story: The

Eye-Witness Account of the Death March from Bataan and the Narrative of Experiences in Japanese Prison Camps and of Eventual Escape,” by Lt. Col. William E. Dyess, 1944, available at this website:

http://archive.org/stream/dyessstory007009mbp/dyessstory007009mbp_djvu.txt

At the end of the Bataan Death March, Hall and other surviving prisoners were crammed into steaming hot cattle cars for a three-hour train ride to Capas, followed by a nine-mile march to POW Camp O'Donnell, a former military base. Dyess wrote, “When we had been at O'Donnell about a week, the daily death rate among the Americans was twenty a day. Filipinos were dying at a rate of 150 a day. In two weeks, fifty Americans were dying each day. The Filipino death toll had soared to 350 each twenty-four hours.”



American Cemetery and Memorial near Manila, Philippines.

Baker native Melvin G. Hutchins survived the Bataan Death March, but died shortly thereafter at infamous POW Camp O'Donnell.

Another Bakerite, Melvin G. Hutchins, Jr. (BHS '39), was on the Bataan Death March. His parents were Melvin G. Hutchins, fireman for Sumpter Valley Railway, and Florence Wickam Hutchins. The family home was at 1134 11th Street in Baker. When war with Japan broke out, PFC Hutchins was serving in the Philippines as a member of the 228th Signal Operations Company. Hutchins must have been in bad shape at the end of the march, for he died May 29, 1942, at the infamous POW Camp O'Donnell. He is buried in the beautiful American Cemetery and Memorial in the Philippines. Hutchins' name (also sometimes spelled Hutchens) is listed on the bronze plaque of WWII dead on the Veterans Memorial in front of the Baker County Courthouse, as is the name Jesse Gordon Smurthwaite.

Within three months at Camp O'Donnell, 1,500 Americans and 22,000 Filipinos died from brutal treatment, starvation, heat, exhaustion, and diseases, such as malaria, dengue fever, yellow jaundice, diphtheria, dysentery, and beriberi. "Men who had weighed two hundred pounds or so," wrote Dyess, "now weighed ninety or less. Every rib was visible. They were living skeletons, without buttocks or muscle."

After three months at Camp O'Donnell, most surviving American prisoners, including Hall and Dyess, were transferred thirty-six miles east to a complex of camps near Cabanatuan north of Manila. Cabanatuan became the largest POW facility in the Far East.

In January 1945, survivor Hall recounted some of his experiences as a POW in a speech to the Baker Lions Club. Baker County School Superintendent Myrtle Lee, who attended the speech, noted in the February edition of the newsletter she edited and sent to Baker County troops throughout the world, "He has no gray hair, has gained back much of the 90 pounds he lost, and is as poised and calm as though he had not survived a terrible ordeal." Asked about the Bataan Death March, Hall said that they traveled fourteen days for 120 miles often suffering intensely for lack of water, sometimes being compelled to sit in the sun during the hottest part of the day, being

allowed only such food as they could dig from roots or forage for themselves at stops. Once incarcerated, due to lack of vitamins in prison camp food—chiefly rice three times per day—Hall developed ulcers on his eyes that rendered him blind for about six months.

Although all American and Filipino forces were ordered to surrender, thousands did not. Of those who initially surrendered not knowing they would receive such inhumane treatment, several thousand escaped from their captors during the Bataan Death March, preferring to take their chances living off the land with assistance of Filipino citizens. Throughout the Philippine islands the escapees formed guerrilla bands, which harassed Japanese forces, thereby tying down many thousands of Japanese troops desperately needed elsewhere during Japan's invasion of much of the Far East. (For a list of American guerrillas and the units they led, visit this website: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_American_guerrillas_in_the_Philippines)

In October 1942, the Japanese transferred Smurthwaite, Bolitho, and other prisoners to the southern side of Mindanao Island. They were headed for the Davao Penal Colony, a civilian prison still housing mostly murderers, which the Japanese converted to a POW camp. Bolitho described the journey that his unit, which included Smurthwaite. "Camp Casisang was closed and all remaining Americans moved out on open flat bed trucks for Bugo," a port on the north side of Mindanao, where they arrived on the island a year ago. "We embarked on the Japanese Troop Ship #760. Our trip around the northern and eastern sides of Mindanao was rather pleasant considering the circumstances."

Circumstances were anything but pleasant once they disembarked at Davao Harbor on October 20, 1942. Bolitho wrote, "[We walked] 20 miles or so in the hot sun." Upon coming to "a slow-running spigot of water...the Japanese gave us [1,000 men] less than ten minutes to fill our canteens." Bolitho was not one of the lucky few who got water.

Hall and Dyess did not remain at Camp Cabanatuan. In late October 1942, they were among 1,000 relatively fit prisoners who volunteered to be transferred from Luzon, the

largest of the Philippine islands, to the Davao Penal Colony in southeastern Mindanao, the second-largest Philippine island, a little over one-third the size of Oregon. After an eleven-day trip aboard the Japanese ship "Erie Maru," the POWs from Cabanatuan, including Hall and Dyess, arrived at Davao at sunset on November 7, 1942. Right after debarking, the prisoners marched twenty miles north reaching the Davao Penal Colony at 2:00 a.m. Bolitho noted in his memoir, "These men had fought on Bataan and Corregidor and suffered with starvation and dietary diseases. They were walking skeletons."

In Hall's speech to the Baker Lions Club in January 1945, Myrtle Lee summarized what Hall had to say about food. "Their rations in prison camp were meager: a medium sardine can of cooked rice in the morning, leveled off, not heaping. The same at noon and night with one exception, a sort of spinach-like watery soup added. It was made from the kangkong plant, which grows in every swamp in the Phil[ippines], and evidently has vitamins, because on it they survived. The only meat scraps they saw were given on an occasion when they worked a water-carabou [water buffalo] to death in the fields."

In a private conversation after his return, Hall told Lee that he, like most other starving prisoners, had fantasies about food. His fantasy was to eat a whole apple pie followed by a quart of ice cream. But when he got back, he couldn't stand more than a couple of bites.



The Japanese turned a penal colony surrounded by jungle and still housing criminals into a POW camp near Davao, Mindanao, Philippines.

Bolitho described their work at Camp Davao. “The rice field operation was the largest and most important crop...and by far the hardest, dirtiest and most disagreeable work of any in the [Davao Penal] Colony.” Prisoners plowed with water buffalo, planted, weeded, and harvested the rice. Prisoners worked barefoot in rice paddies, continually suffering from tropical ulcers on feet and legs, which did not heal for lack of medical care. The men also worked in ramie fields. Ramie is a fibrous plant in the nettle family growing five feet tall used for making cloth. Snake bites from cobras in ramie fields, although not usually fatal, were not uncommon.

On November 26, 1942, Thanksgiving Day, Smurthwaite wrote in his diary, “We expect the Allies in here within 30 days and are hoping to spend this Christmas under ‘old

Glory'. I only hope and pray that such a thing happens. I'm tired of being in this unfortunate position, but I don't think we'll be this way very long." He would spend almost another two years at Davao.

On Mindanao it's not surprising that life as underfed, physically abused slave laborers fostered dreams of escape, even though the men were surrounded by a hostile jungle. Lt. Col. Dyess did more than dream. Finding like-minded men he could trust, they plotted an escape. On April 4, 1943, Dyess, nine other Americans, and two Filipino criminals successfully pulled off the largest escape from a POW camp in the Philippines during World War II. After arduous days wandering in the jungle, the twelve escapees ran into a band of Filipino guerrillas. The escapees joined Mindanao guerrilla units under command of Lt. Col. Wendell Fertig. (For a fascinating account of Fertig's three years organizing guerrilla bands on Mindanao, read the book "They Fought Alone" by John Keats.)

Dyess, secreted from Mindanao by submarine and taken to Australia, soon arrived in Washington, D.C., where he was the first person to disclose the atrocities the Japanese were committing against prisoners of war in the Philippines. Several months later Dyess tragically died in a military plane crash in Southern California. His memoir, "The Dyess Story," was not published until January 1944, a month after his death.

After the escape, Bolitho wrote that some prisoners were happy for the escapees but feared what would happen next. "We had already been put in 'death squads' of ten, but none of us knew who the other nine in the group were. [The Japanese threatened that] if one in your group escaped, the other nine would be executed." The Japanese secluded all men living in the same barracks as the escapees into a disciplinary compound, which included four barracks out of a total of eight. It's quite likely that Hall and/or Smurthwaite were held in the disciplinary compound, which had a triple barbed wire fence and eight guard towers. "It seemed like a nice vacation from work. But we were slowly starving to death on the small amount of rice they were giving us," reported

Bolitho. After several weeks the men were returned to the main compound, apparently without anyone having been executed as a result of the escape.

IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY

1. I am interned at—Philippine Military Prison Camp No. 2
2. My health is—excellent; good; fair; poor.
3. Message (50 words limit)

Dearest Folks: I hope I'll be able to come home before long. I feel pretty good. Hope all are well. Where are Don & Bob? Write or telegraph via International Red Cross. Tell Cecille I'm still waiting for her. Tell all "Hello" Jesse G. Smurthwaite
for me. All my love. Your son. Signature

SERVICE des PRISONNIERS de GUERRE
俘虜郵便

NAME Jesse G. Smurthwaite
NATIONALITY American
RANK Private
PHILIPPINE MILITARY PRISON CAMP NO. 2

検比島俘虜收容所
問務所

To: Mrs. J. A. Smurthwaite
345 Second Street
Baker, Oregon, U. S. A.

IMPERIAL JAPANESE ARMY

1. I am interned at Philippine Military Prison Camp #2
2. My health is — excellent; good; fair; poor.
3. I am — injured; sick in hospital; under treatment; not under treatment.
4. I am — improving; not improving; better; well.
5. Please see that Cecille knows about me; also her folks, tell Chaves, Berkleys, etc. _____ is taken care of.
6. (Re: Family) Hope all are well-I worry about Don & Bob. Dont worry about me-Write thru Red Cross-All my love.
7. Please give my best regards to Cecille, Zella, Grandmas, other

From: Name Jesse G. Smurthwaite
Jesse G. Smurthwaite

Nationality American

Rank Private

Camp Philippine Military Prison Camp #2

To: Mrs. Jesse A. Smurthwaite
345 Second Street
Baker, Oregon.
USA

俘虜郵便
比島俘虜收容所
検問所

さか便郵

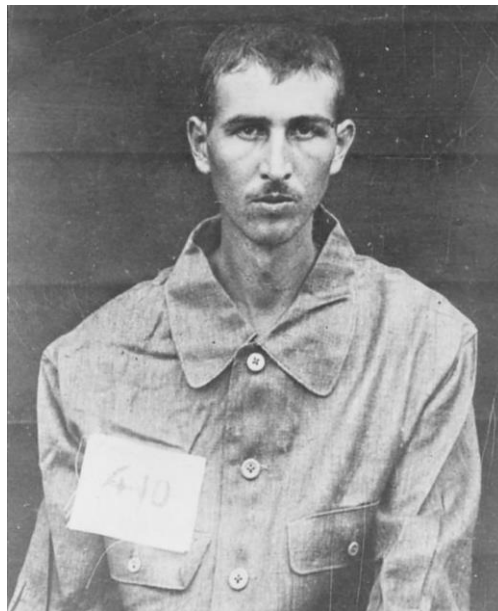
CENSORSHIP EXAMINED By 2337

During 2 ½ years captivity Smurthwaite was allowed to send home two cards. The undated fill-in-the-blanks cards were read by both Japanese and American censors.

In his Lions Club speech, Hall made only one reference to Smurthwaite, according to Myrtle Lee. “Gordon Smurthwaite and he were together a great deal and drew a map of the whole city of Baker, putting in every house, on each block as they remembered it, and who lived in many of them.” It’s probable that Hall joined Smurthwaite, a Mormon, in attending church services organized by a group of twenty-five Mormons, all from the western United States. The group called itself the Davao Penal Camp “Branch” of the LDS Church. A monograph in “BYU Studies,” vol.50(4), pp. 108-135 (Jan. 2011) describes in detail the Davao LDS Branch’s organization, activities, likely members,

including Smurthwaite and Sgt. Nels Hansen of Weiser, Idaho, and their fate: all twenty-five members died in the sinking of the “Shinyo Maru.”

The monograph points out that about half the group, including Smurthwaite, “were spared the horrors of the Bataan Death March and became prisoners on Mindanao,” where they were stationed “as part of the Fifth Airbase Group.” Following are some other details from the monograph pertinent to knowing what Hall and Smurthwaite experienced. “On March 2, 1944, 650 of the men at Davao were sent to a new camp near the village of Lasang, a few miles from their Davao camp. These were supposedly the healthiest men at Davao and were to be laborers building a new Japanese airfield. All of these men would eventually be sent on the fateful “Shinyo Maru.” On August 17, the Americans bombed the airfield, which delighted the prisoners, because it was the first indication they had that the Japanese were losing the war. (During the Davao POW camp’s existence from October 1942 to June 1944, only 805 survived out of an estimated 2,009 POWs held there.)



Frank Morrisette says that Gordon Smurthwaite saved his life at Camp Davao. Transferred to Japan toward the end of the war, emaciated Morrisette is shown here after liberation from a slave labor camp.

Frank M. Morrisette (1919-2003) of Walla Walla, Washington, was one of the 805 POWs who survived imprisonment at Davao. Morrisette and Smurthwaite were in the same Air Corps unit that shipped out to the Philippines from Fort Douglas, Utah, in the fall of 1941. In November 1946, Morrisette wrote to Smurthwaite's father, "Up until either March or April of '44 Gordon and I were never parted. We worked with each other and split everything 50-50. We were starving but even though we were down and out, I could always depend on a helping hand from Gordon. During our prison career, we made plans of going into business. We made out lists of clothing and things we wanted, expecting to purchase at our release. This we figured would only be six months at first. Our parting was due to the fact that I was in the sick ward and Gordon was still doing heavy duty work. He was very husky and took everything like a man."

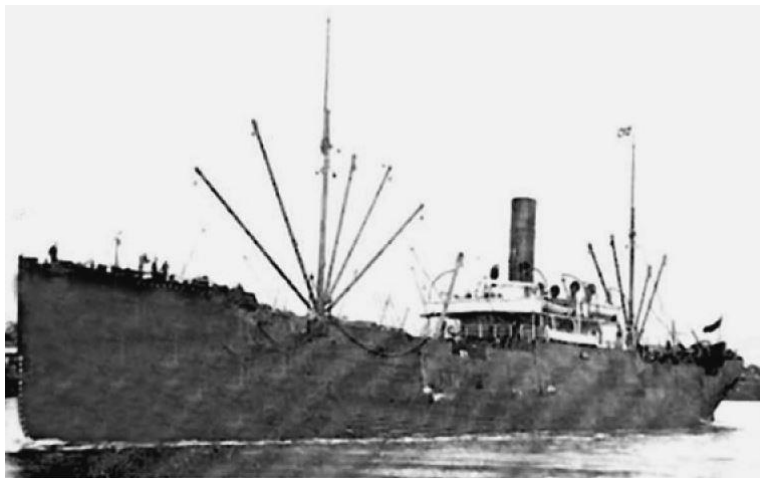
Morrisette, an enrolled member of the Walla Walla Indian Tribe, was born on the Umatilla Indian Reservation October 27, 1919. After return from captivity in the fall of 1945, he worked at the Washington State Prison at Walla Walla his whole career. About 1957, Doug Smurthwaite visited with Morrisette at his Walla Walla home. He told Doug that he "owed his life to Gordon," who helped care for him at the Davao camp. "Gordon out-foxed the Japanese by stealing medicine," which he gave to Morrisette and others in the camp hospital. He salvaged shoes from dead POWs and gave them to others in need. Morrisette told Doug that Gordon was "strong, tough, knew how to handle things. We depended on him."

Morrisette named his first son Wesley Gordon Morrisette, for his brother Wesley, who died at the Battle of the Bulge, and for Gordon. Morrisette said that Smurthwaite helped him board a hospital ship headed for Japan. "His last words to me were, 'Take it easy, Frank, and I'll see you as soon as the job is done.'" Morrisette was incarcerated at the Osaka camp in Japan until rescued after Japan capitulated on September 2, 1945.

Two weeks after Morrisette's departure, Smurthwaite himself was headed for Japan. At 3:30 a.m. on August 20, 650 prisoners were linked together by rope at their waists, then marched carrying their shoes to nearby Tabuaco pier on the Davao Gulf, where they

and another 100 prisoners were packed into two holds of the freighter “Tateichi Maru,” 400 in one hold and 350 in another. Bolitho wrote, “A guard was down there with his rifle and bayonet crowding us together.” The men took turns some standing and some sitting. The ship sailed the same day and arrived August 24 at Zamboanga on the southwest tip of Mindanao. “The POWs remained for ten days in the harbor, sweltering in the hot, filthy hold of the ship.... On two occasions the men were permitted on deck to run through a hose sprinkling ocean water, the first semibath in years for some of the men.”

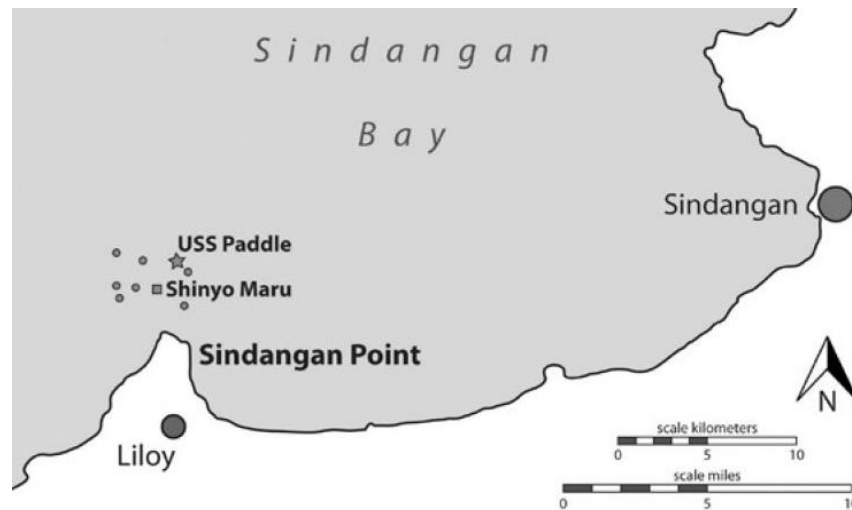
They desperately needed a bath, because the floor of the hold was soon covered with human waste and vomit for lack of sanitary facilities and many prisoners were suffering from dysentery and other diseases. After the bath on deck, the men returned to the same slimy, filthy hold, where the stench was overwhelming. During air raids the hatches were covered with tarps, which shut off the little fresh air that reached the men. Lack of air and dehydration in the tropical environment caused some men to faint and others to go crazy.



The Shinyo Maru, built in 1894 in Scotland, was captured by the Japanese at Shanghai in 1941 and turned into a “Hell Ship.”

“On September 4th, after being in the harbor for ten days, we were ordered in the middle of the night to move to another ship. The guards motioned us with their guns to

cross the gangplank to the ship alongside, named the 'Shinyo Maru.' Immediately it was into the holds again, 500 into the large central hold, down to the very bottom of the ship below the water level and apparently more crowded than ever. In the rear hold 250 of us were at the first level below the top deck. At night we could hear air raids on Zamboanga that meant the covering of the hatches and the miserable conditions that it brought on." (Bolitho)



Submarine USS "Paddle" spotted a convoy of eight Japanese ships off the NW coast of Mindanao Island, Philippines.

On September 5, the ship got underway in a convoy of eight ships headed north. Built as the "Clan MacKay" in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1894, it was pressed into Japanese service after its capture at Shanghai in 1941 and renamed "Shinyo Maru." Conjecture among the prisoners was that they were being moved to avoid falling into the hands of Americans during the anticipated invasion of Mindanao and that their destination was Japan, where they would again be used as slave laborers.



USS "Paddle"

On September 7, U.S. submarine "Paddle" was on its fifth patrol of the war just off the west coast of Mindanao, when it spotted a Japanese convoy. Bolitho described the attack on the "Shinyo Maru," which was not marked as carrying POWs. "About 4:15 p.m., the sudden sounds of a bugle and rifle fire on deck shattered the silence. Through the spaces, between the hatch covers, I could see the bugler and Jap soldiers running. Then I heard a loud explosion followed by another, and then everything was quiet."

"The first torpedo had entered the forward hold containing five hundred men. Since they were below the water line, the hold was instantly filled with water. The only ones that were able to get out were those in the center, as the water level floated them out. The second torpedo hit the stern, where two hundred fifty of us were crowded together. The steel decking above us was blown off and a large portion of the ship's side was folded back towards the bow. All men directly above, where the explosion occurred, were mangled beyond recognition. Those on either side, close to the explosion, were killed as well as most of those in the middle of the hold." (Bolitho)

Bolitho saw, "the Japanese were throwing hand grenades and firing guns into the hold." He managed to get out through the hole in the side of the ship torn open by the torpedo.

He popped up to the surface “like a cork,” where a wave immediately deposited him on deck. He walked to the railing and jumped into the water, where he and other POWs were targets for Japanese firing from the ship. A bullet struck Bolitho in the jaw.

During his Lions Club speech, Hall was asked how he escaped from the ship. Myrtle Lee recorded his answer. “As the hold filled with water, the Japs machine-gunned the fellows who climbed up out of the hatch. They threw grenades at those who escaped that fire. Willard was hit by shrapnel from one exploding near his knee. Fighting for one’s life kept him too busy to see what happened to the other fellows, but he managed to scramble out, and dove into the water.”

In his condition Hall knew he could not swim three miles to shore, so he swam to a floating box, according to Lee’s newsletter, “only to find a Jap on the other side of it, brandishing a bayonet. He got the bayonet away from him and during that fray held him under water a little too long, long enough to be able, afterward, to cut away half of his life belt with no resistance offered.” Someone asked Hall what he did with the bayonet, he said, ‘Gave it back to him, in an appropriate place.’”

In the water after jumping overboard, Hall was so jubilant at being free, even with bullets hitting the water around him, he was singing at the top of his voice. Perhaps the jolt of slamming into the water from a height of thirty feet had rung his bell, for he was unaware of his bizarre behavior, until informed of it on shore by a fellow survivor.

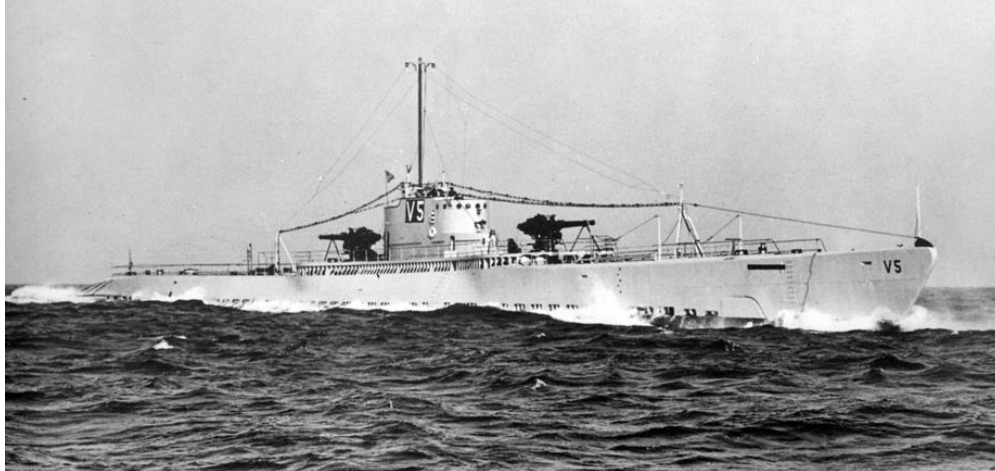
In spite of their weakened condition and injuries, Hall and Bolitho made it three miles to shore, as did eighty-one other survivors of the sinking ship, which they saw buckle and sink. Hall had taken shrapnel in his knee and had a broken eardrum when a depth charge meant for the submarine went off near him. Bolitho, besides a broken jaw that kept him from chewing for many weeks, discovered he had a broken arm, three broken ribs, and a bayonet wound from a tussle in the water with a Japanese whose life vest he unsuccessfully tried to take.

Marine Sgt. Onnie Clem of Texas described what happened when the torpedo hit. "I was flying, just twisting and turning...I couldn't see anything but these billowy forms like pillows. I thought I was dead...I was under water in the hold and these pillows were the bodies of other guys in there, some dead, some trying to get out." Clem managed to get to the hatch but "up on the bridge a machine gun was spraying the hatch. A burst of fire caught three of us and knocked us back down in the hold...I got plowed in the skull, another bullet chipped my chin." Clem stripped off his loin cloth and dived into the water where he was shot at by Japanese troops. But "all I could think of was getting to land and getting some water or coconut milk." During his swim he couldn't hear anything, because both eardrums had been perforated when the torpedo hit. Once on shore, he discovered he'd also been shot in the arm and shoulder.

The survivors were assisted by Filipino citizens, who cared for their wounds and kept them secreted from Japanese patrols for several weeks. As he lay wounded but no longer captive, Bolitho said his "mind was racing with excitement. Would we really be able to escape?"

Quickly their number was reduced to eighty-two, when a survivor named John J. McGee died the first day on shore. It's a wonder so many made it to shore, given their numerous injuries, which Bolitho tallied: "two compound fractures of the lower leg; eight other fractures, including a broken jaw, arms and ribs; eight bullet wounds; shrapnel wounds; twenty-eight broken eardrums, and numerous cuts and bruises."

According to Japanese figures, of the 50,000 POWs shipped as slave labor from the Philippines to Formosa, China, Japan and Korea, 10,800 died at sea aboard "Hell Ships," the term used to describe Japanese ships sunk by U.S. sea and air forces, because they had no markings indicating they were carrying POWs.



USS Narwhal SS167

Filipino guerrillas sent word via radio to General MacArthur's headquarters in Hollandia, New Guinea, about the plight of the eighty-two remaining survivors. The U.S. submarine "Narwhal," which for many months had sneaked ashore supplies for Mindanao's guerrillas, was dispatched to pick them up. In the evening of September 29, 1944, "Narwhal" dropped off cargo via its rubber boats and brought back four stretcher cases, which had top priority for rescue.

Survivors on shore did not know how many men "Narwhal" could take aboard, so each one had a randomly assigned number, which determined the order of transfer to the submarine. Sub Commander Jack A. Titus sent word, much to their relief, that he would find room for all eighty-one of the eighty-two survivors. One survivor, radioman Joseph P. Coe, Jr., had chosen to remain on Mindanao to serve as a radio operator for Lt. Col. Fertig's guerrillas. Coe survived the war.

After seven days on the submarine, the men debarked at a Navy PT boat base on New Guinea. From there they made hops via PT boats and airplanes to Aawi Island, to MacArthur's headquarters at Hollandia, to Darwin, ultimately arriving October 1 at Brisbane, Australia. During their time in the air, they flew over the huge flotilla of ships destined for the Allied invasion of the Philippines starting at Leyte Island.

Ten days later the rescued POWs boarded “USS Monterey” for the trip across the Pacific, arriving at San Francisco Bay November 6. In Washington, D.C., most of the men went through military debriefing, especially about their treatment by the Japanese. After about five days, they were given a ninety-day furlough home.

Hall must have impressed the military during his debriefing. Soon thereafter he was informed that he had been chosen from among the eighty-one returning survivors to make a tour of the U.S., along with soldiers who had been in German prison camps. The former POWs met with groups of next-of-kin of soldiers still in POW camps or still listed as MIA. On the tour Hall hobnobbed with celebrities and had his picture in “Newsweek” magazine.

After returning home from his two-month barnstorming tour of thirty-two cities in twenty-eight states, Myrtle Lee wrote in her July 1945 newsletter, “He has been swamped with letters, telegrams and phone calls from people whose sons were prisoners of war where he was. He has tried to answer them, but then gets more questions back. He should be staffed with a secretary to give what comfort he can to relatives.”

One of the cities on Hall’s tour was San Antonio, Texas. Also in town was Bakerite 1st Lt. Carl Kostol, back in the U.S. after baling out of his damaged B-25 bomber over Japanese-held territory in China, followed by a harrowing month-long trek back to his unit in southern China aided by Chinese guerrillas. Kostol attended “Willie’s” San Antonio talk, after which they got together and exchanged experiences since last seeing each other at Ft. Lewis in late 1940. They next saw each other after the war, when both were students at the University of Washington. They were on an intermural basketball team and played tennis together. Kostol says Hall worked part time in a clothing store and eventually dropped out of school, worked as a salesman in Vancouver, and became a professional bridge player.

On September 2, 1945, Japan officially surrendered during a ceremony on board the battleship “USS Missouri.” Myrtle Lee wrote in her newsletter dated September 6,

“Willard Hall & his aunt, Mrs. Ragsdale, happened to be with us at the time the siren blew Sunday evening. So we stepped out of our house [at 1604 Dewey] and tried to comprehend the world’s joy at the end of the war.” In spite of his experiences, Lee wrote, Hall’s attitude toward the Japanese was tolerant. And he praised the Japanese-Americans who fought in Europe.

Hall died at Portland Veterans Hospital of lung cancer on October 28, 1985, survived by two daughters and a son. His wife, nee Barbara Ann Norris, whom he married in 1947, died at age 34 in 1962. I have been unable to locate any of Hall’s children to find out more about Hall’s life. The common gravestone of Willard and Barbara Hall is located in Mount Hope Cemetery northeast of the Mausoleum several yards south of the east-west road.



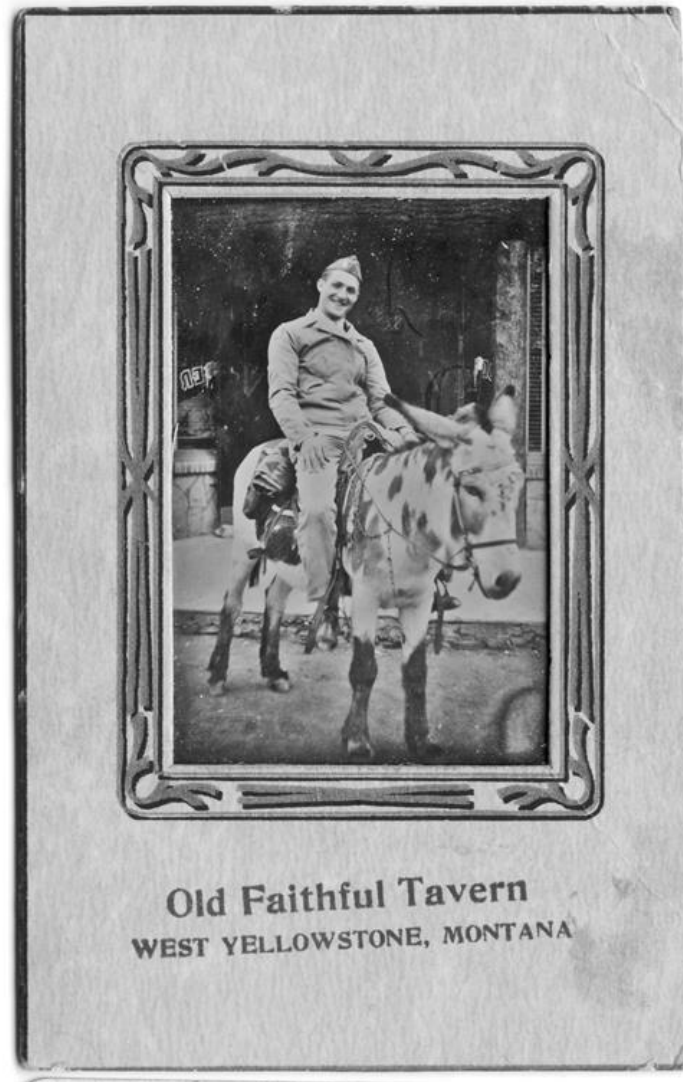
Hall gravestone at Mt. Hope Cemetery.

Below Willard’s name: “World War II Veteran”

The atrocities committed against POWs by their Japanese captors on the Bataan Death March have been estimated at one death every ten or fifteen paces over the one hundred miles between Bataan and Camp O’Donnell. The Japanese government estimates that of the 126,000 POWs transported in Hell Ships, 21,000 died, 19,000 due to Allied planes and submarines. By comparison, about 25,000 Marines died assaulting Pacific islands.

An American military tribunal tried Lieutenant General Masaharu Homma (1887-1946), commander of the Japanese invasion forces in the Philippines, for war crimes

committed by troops under his command. He was held responsible for the Bataan Death March and executed by firing squad on April 3, 1946.



Gordon Smurthwaite on leave from boot camp at Fort Douglas, Utah, 1941.

A fitting passage to close out this article comes from the last page of Smurthwaite's diary addressed to his mother, Zina Smurthwaite, almost two years before he died. It was dated Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1942. "Tomorrow will be my second birthday spent in the Islands. I'm confident of spending my next one at home. I'd love to be back home with you, my dear Mother. I know you are worrying about your sons, 3 in the service (I believe) but we are doing our best and I'll be back pretty

soon and what a time we'll have. I do hope that I'm the only one in the war & that Don and Bob got out of it, but I'll never know until I get home. God Bless You, Mother, and I wish you all the happiness in the world."

© Gary Dielman

June 13, 2015

Baker City, OR