Berdine Adams WWII Soldier - POW

*Final Tribute: The late Berdine Adams, former POW and survivor of the Bataan Death March, will receive his military honors today. Article:*

Berdine Adams was regarded by family and friends as an incredible individual.

A World War II veteran, Adams maintained a positive disposition throughout his life, despite unspeakable atrocities he faced as a prisoner of war during the Bataan Death March and the war years that followed.

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"My dad came back (from the service) and led what I believe to be a truly exemplary life," said his son, Frank. "He did not let his experiences (as a POW) rule over his own life." Today, following the 10 a.m. Memorial Day ceremony at the courthouse, Adams will be given the military honors that were unexpectedly absent from his April funeral. Frank, who will be speaking briefly prior to the military honors, said his father often shared his POW experiences because he wanted people to know what the prisoners went through.

In 1984, Adams sat down with Dr. Bobby Johnson, SFA history professor emeritus, and recounted his life and experiences as a POW in the Philippines and Japan. The interview was recorded as an oral history and transcribed through the East Texas Research Center. Johnson said what impressed him the most during his conversation with Adams was how, after all Adams had been through as a POW, he did not appear bitter.

Adams, a native of Nacogdoches County, entered the Army on Dec. 21, 1937. He was stationed with the 12th Calvary at Fort Ringold in Rio Grand City for roughly a year before he entered the 15th Field Artillary at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio. The next year he took a short furlough, returning to active service a few months later, in order to make his way to Manila, Philippines as a member of the 75th Ordinance Company, where he would remain until Christmas Eve 1941.

About that time, the Army began to recruit men for the 31st Infantry Regiment. Adams — who had had the kind of training the regiment needed during his service in the 12th Calvary — joined, and as one of his first assignments, oversaw a convoy of 100 trucks filled with supplies as it traveled from Manila to the Bataan Peninsula. As he would later find out, his convoy would be the last to make it out of Manila before supply lines were cut off by the Japanese.

While at the Bataan depots, Adams often witnessed nightly flares — a signal Japanese sympathizers made to the Japanese, so they would know where to bomb when daylight came. "We was hemmed up and held about 10 miles square there for a long time," Adams said during the interview. "We were fighting a retreating war, and we would set up whenever the line would get broke ... It was finally evacuated back to Bataan — that was the last line of defenses for the American and Filipino forces."

As the Japanese advanced, supplies began to run short. Much of the ammunition the Army had sent did not match the artillery mortars the infantry was using, and food rations were often limited to rice, and on some occasions, nothing at all. Malaria — known by many of the soldiers as "dinky fever" — also became a predominant problem.
While medical supplies were few and far between, Army doctors prescribed Quinine to those who came down with the infectious disease. But relief came only in small doses, because the malnutrition of the soldiers' rice diet combined with the drug could cause blood stream complications. Adams said doctors and nurses were stretched thin, as more and more wounded soldiers lined the street that lead to hospital, sometimes two or more miles down the road.
Adams told Johnson that because food was in such short supply, he knew it was inevitable that Bataan would fall to the Japanese.

On the day of his capture — April 10, 1942 — Adams came in contact with a group of Japanese soldiers who motioned him down a trail. Still carrying his weapons — for which he had no ammunition — Adams followed their direction and was met by another group of soldiers who motioned him to turn back the way he came. With the soldiers closely following, he turned down an adjoining trail, which eventually led to a small clearing filled with Americans who were surrounded by Japanese soldiers. As he approached, Adams dropped his pistol and threw his rifle into the vines. "... There wasn't no fear in my heart," he explained to Johnson during their 1984 interview. "I knew that we was in for a rough situation, but a man gets to where he just lives from minute to minute ... You can't think of the worst — you only want to think of the best."

Adams marched out from that location into what would later be accounted as one of the most horrific war crimes — the Bataan Death March. Adams estimated the march was about 80 miles and said that the distance was not what made the march bad, but rather the conditions under which they had to march. "... What made it so bad was making the march without water," he said. "And then there (were) a lot of people being sick. And if a man got sick and he had to fall out and couldn't make it, the Japanese soldiers would bayonet him."

The prisoners marched from the small clearing to San Fernando, where Japanese soldiers crammed 100 men into each railroad car. They rode by train toward a town near Tarlac, where they were then marched to Camp O'Donnell, a Filipino army camp the Japanese had captured. Adams said he stayed in the camp for roughly a month and a half, before going to Cabanatuan, another large prison camp in the Philippines. He said there were many POWs who attempted to escape. But when they were caught, not only were they killed but, typically, nine others from their same squad.

In April 1943, Adams was shipped to Japan and transported to prison camp No. 17 on the Kyushu Island, where he remained in captivity until the end of the war in 1945.

Adams said Japanese soldiers were often cruel, whipping prisoners and yanking out handfuls of body hair — using any means of torture they could think of. Meals were often limited to rice and seaweed, but became better after arriving in Japan. Clothing for many of the prisoners — who included some civilians — was reduced to nothing short of a G-string, but Adams managed to create a somewhat larger ensemble from a barracks bag.  "... That was the only thing I had, a barracks bag, and I cut two holes in it and I'd roll it down around my waist in the daytime and at night I'd pull it up around my shoulders," he said.  Like many of the other prisoners, he was issued a set of clothing while in route to Japan, and a couple more during his two years at the Japanese prison camp.  "  ... After we went (to Japan) things weren't so terribly bad to begin with, but as the war went on the people there kept getting rougher and rougher and rougher," he said.

Life changed for the prisoners following the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Sometime near Aug. 16, 1945 — approximately a month after the bombing — Adams awoke to find the Japanese guards gone. In response, Adams and several other POWs busted into nearby buildings to get clothes and ammunition."... We started pulling guard to keep the Japanese out of there," Adams said.

In the following days, American B-29 planes began to parachute food into the camp, most of which became damaged from breaking loose from the parachutes, but it would be another month before American occupation troops progressed onto the island.
"Sept. 13 we boarded English aircraft at Nagasaki ... we went from there to Okinawa, flew from Okinawa to the Philippines ... another fellow and myself hitched a ride down to Manila," Adams said.

Adams found people he had known from his previous time in Manila, who directed him to the 29th Replacement Depot.
He stayed at the depot for 15 days, then boarding a ship to Seattle, Wash. He remained in the Army until his discharge in 1946.

While Adams maintained that his experiences as a POW caused him to not want to have any further dealings with the Japanese, he did note that he believed in his duty as an American soldier.

"I believe the war was fought for a very worthy cause," Adams said. "And if I had to, I'd do it all over again."

Credit: Michelle Marcotte, Sentinel Staff, May 26, 2008



**Bernie’s Obituary**

Bernard “Bernie” Adams, Sr., 87, passed away Thursday, Feb. 23, 2012, at the Good Samaritan Home in Alliance. Interment will be held at Oregon Trail Memorial Cemetery.

Bernard was born Feb. 16, 1925, in Rising City, Neb., to Orsie and Mable (McDonald) Adams. He attended and graduated from Bellwood High School. After graduation in 1943, Bernie enlisted into the US Army and served 3 years with the 346th infantry, 87th division 3rd Army. He always told the story about marching across Europe in the winter of 1944. Bernard was a Platoon Sergeant and was involved in the Battle of the Bulge and the liberation of France. His medals were numerous and well deserved. He met Hazel Ann McKinnis after WWII and they were married April 17, 1948, in Columbus.

After his honorable discharge, he came back to Nebraska and worked for 36 years as a plant supervisor for Lyman-Richey Sand and Gravel. He was always there for the community including helping farmers and ranchers during severe weather. Bernard was involved in the planning and development of many roads in the state of Nebraska from Omaha to the Wyoming line, including the missile silos in the 60s around the panhandle to the golden Link of I-80 at Kimball. As a supervisor he never turned away a veteran that needed a job.

His hobbies after retirement were his family, his loving sense of humor, watching Andy Griffith re-runs and his garden. He was actively involved in the VFW and Legion, and was a past member of the Masonic Lodge, Eagles and the Elks.

Survivors include his wife Hazel of Bridgeport; children, Vickie (Larry) VanDrunen of Argyle, Texas, Diane (John) Jensen of Omaha, Wayne (Deb) Adams of Colorado Springs, Colo. and Terri (Terry) Green of Bridgeport; 10 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren.

His parents, brother Orsie Jr., and two great grandchildren preceded him in death.