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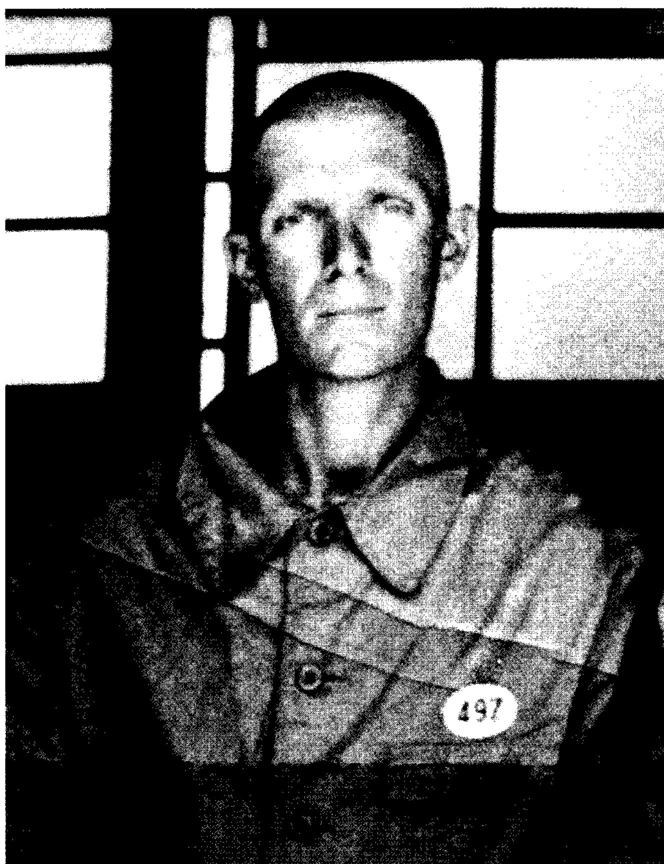
Unexpected kindness and a comrade's efforts saved the life of an American POW in the Philippines.

By Michael Richman

Today, when victims of Japanese atrocities during World War II speak out, it is frequently to demand that Japan's government issue a long-overdue apology for heinous war crimes. Irvin Scott, Jr., a U.S. Marine, was imprisoned by the Japanese for 3½ years and suffered torture, starvation and neglect. He condemns the Japanese government for being slow to acknowledge its barbarous wartime acts, but he refuses to hate the entire Japanese people or to hold a vendetta against them, because one Japanese guard showed him humanity and became the key to saving his life.

While Scott was held captive in the summer of 1942 in Tayabas on the southern end of Luzon in the Philippines, the guard secretly left half his own ration of quinine to help the malaria-stricken Scott, who was near death. The Marine gradually regained some strength and survived until he was liberated at war's end.



MICHAEL RICHMAN

Irvin Scott, Jr., as a prisoner in Japan in 1944. Scott, a U.S. Marine, was imprisoned for 3½ years and suffered torture, starvation and neglect, but he survived due to the efforts of a guard and a fellow prisoner.

"The guard had much to do with me looking at the Japanese people differently," Scott, now 76, said from his home in Richmond, Va. "I see no reason to hate a race of people. Hate is the most debilitating emotion you can have. The person you hate is not affected by it, you are. It eats your insides out."

Nevertheless, Scott said his hatred of the individual Japanese guards, some of whom treated prisoners like slaves, helped him live through the ordeal. But it was a hatred he could not perpetuate after the war. "You can't live with hate," he said. "That's what you have to get rid of."

Scott volunteered for service in August 1940 and became a U.S. Marine Corps private. Shortly after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Scott found himself with a special radar unit on the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines, trying to detect incoming Japanese planes.

On April 9, 1942, Scott and about 10,000 other American servicemen surrendered to the Japanese military. They were then subjected to the infamous eight-day Bataan Death March. Scott witnessed tanks and trucks running over his comrades, men getting their heads chopped off and others crucified, with bayonets driven through their hands and rib cages. "We walked over men who were a few inches thick," Scott remembered painfully.

Hundreds of U.S. troops died on the Bataan Death March. The survivors ended up in Camp O'Donnell, where nearly twice as many Americans died in the first two months as had perished on the march. Prisoners like Scott buried men in mass graves.

Scott stayed in Camp O'Donnell for about one month before joining some 200 other U.S. prisoners sent to Tayabas and ordered to finish building a road the Americans had originally started. Tayabas is located in the jungle, where heat, rain and mosquitoes combined to make it a prime area of malarial infestation during the war. Many prisoners who contracted malaria lay out on the rocks in driving rain and died from pneumonia. More than 100 men were buried in about 2½ months, the duration of Scott's stay in Tayabas. Of those who stayed alive, few were able to work.

Scott eventually came down with malaria, but he remained strong enough to work. One day, while sitting alone on a road bank humming his mother's favorite aria, "Un Bel Di," from the popular opera *Madame Butterfly*, he was approached from behind by a Japanese guard, who said in broken English, "I know that song." The guard said that while in school in Japan he had worked for an American couple that played "Un Bel Di" on a phonograph.

Scott never turned around, but the compassionate guard left part of his lunch, a banana leaf wrapped around rice and a banana. The guard, on duty every other day, didn't speak to Scott again, but kept dropping food covered by a banana leaf at his side. "The guards could not fraternize with American soldiers," Scott remembered. "It would probably be equivalent to getting the death sentence."

Several weeks later, Scott, malnourished and weak from malaria, passed out on the road they were constructing. Later, in an act of heroism, Bill White, another American prisoner whom Scott did not know, carried him back to the camp. White bathed Scott in a cold creek to treat his chills and fever, which recurred every few hours.

White tried to force-feed Scott *lugua*, a watery rice mixture the prisoners made in a wheelbarrow. When on duty, the Japanese guard also continued to leave food, as well as half (two tablets) his ration of quinine. White, who had a milder case of malaria, gave all the quinine to Scott and continued to tend to him.

When White told Scott he was being given quinine, Scott did not believe him. "[White] would give me the quinine, and I didn't even know I was getting it," Scott remembered. "I said to him, 'You're out of your mind!'" One afternoon, White told Scott to keep an eye on the guard.

Scott recalled: "This Japanese guard came walking across the rocks. All the prisoners were lying out on the rocks, dying or barely able to move with malaria and dysentery. As the guard passed by, he dropped a banana leaf. He kept walking, didn't say anything. Bill unwrapped [the leaf], and in it was some rice with some other stuff. I don't know what it was. Sometimes there would be a banana in there. Bill pulled out a little piece of paper that was wrapped around two tablets of quinine."

The guard continued to leave the quinine for about three weeks. Scott took it and eventually regained some strength. All these years later, he can only speculate as to why the guard left the quinine. "Who knows why he did it," Scott said. "I don't know to this day. He had compassion, and he had to know something was wrong with what was happening, and I was the one that he could help. I can only think that I struck a chord because he heard me humming the melody 'Un Bel Di.'" If the guard had not left the quinine, the care White administered to his malaria-stricken comrade probably would not have been enough to save his life.

Scott never spoke to the guard while he left the food and quinine, and did not try to locate him after the war. "I don't know how you would trace his whereabouts," he said. "It was difficult enough to trace Americans, much less Japanese."

Scott does not understand why White refused to take the quinine. After the Japanese guard left the substance, White "continually harassed me" to take it, Scott remembered. At that point, "There was nothing left to live for, and I was ready to die," Scott said. "I kept saying, 'Just leave me alone, let me die.' [White] wouldn't do it. He'd drag me down and hold me in the water and wash me off. I was having chills and fever every three or four hours. They were coming fast."

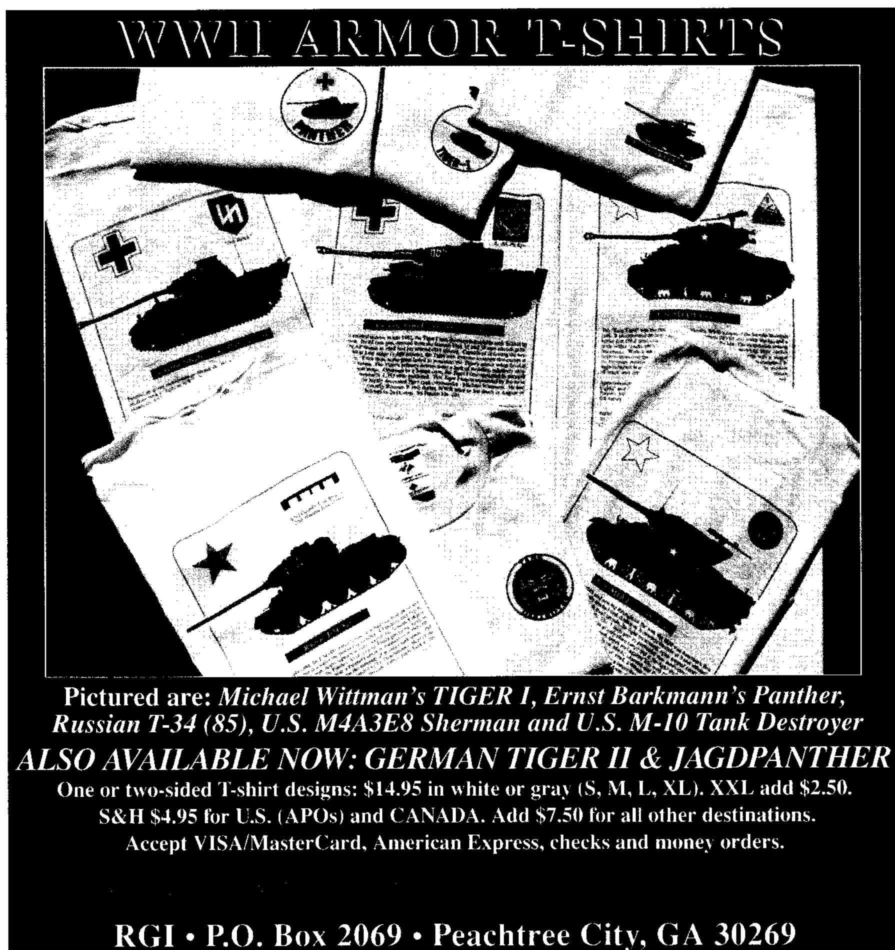
The two men's noble actions to help Scott also puzzled him. He said, "It is difficult to understand, in a place where unbelievable cruelty, misery and hardships were occurring, why such acts would take place on the guard's part and Bill White's part. There was humanity and compassion to them in a place where there shouldn't have been any."

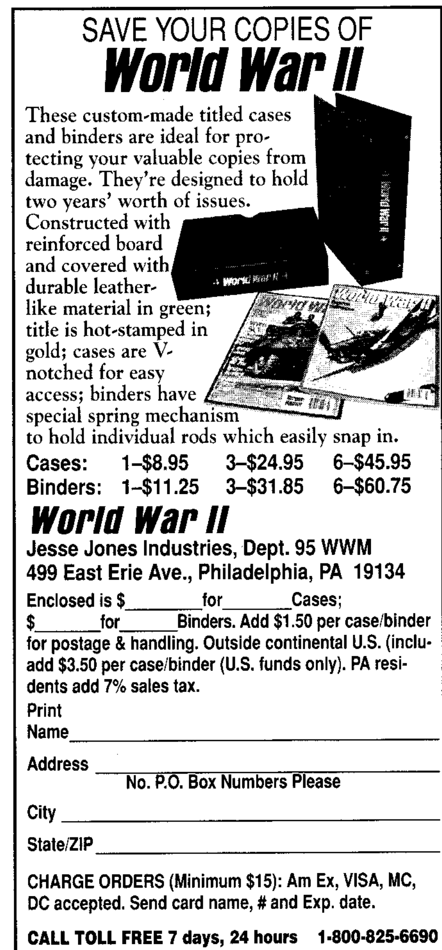
Scott remained in Tayabas until August 1942, when Japan's empire, which stretched from the Netherlands East Indies to parts of the Aleutian Islands, was at its peak. He had been held captive for four months, was weak and weighed 130 pounds, about 35 pounds below his weight shortly after enlisting in the service. He still had malaria and would experience chills and fever long after the war.

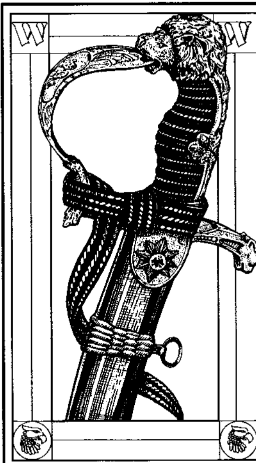
After they left Tayabas, Scott and White, a U.S. Army soldier in the 112th Coast Artillery, became friends. They were intered at Nielson Field—a Japanese-captured American Army base about 10 miles outside of Manila—for about two years, working to extend the runways over rice paddies so that Japanese planes could land. While there, Scott lost his direct vision because of a severe vitamin A deficiency. "If someone walked up to me, I could see only a dark shadow," he said. Today, he uses magnifying glasses to read.

Scott and White parted company in August 1944, when they sailed to Japan aboard different Japanese "hell ships." Scott's ship landed on Honshu, the largest of the four main Japanese islands, but White's ship was sunk by torpedoes fired by an American submarine that stalked the unmarked ships, never realizing they carried American prisoners.

After Scott's ship landed, he entered a POW camp in the mountains about 60 miles west of Hiroshima and worked 12 hours daily in a coal mine. Allied forces were then recapturing islands in the Pacific and moving closer to Japan, while American bombers were hitting cities on the







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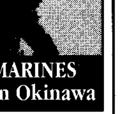

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Japanese mainland. "There was a constant hum as the flights went over, so we knew [the Americans] were bombing all over the place," he said. "At night, Navy planes would fly over, then often in the morning the fighter planes from the ships would get into dogfights. Things were happening, and we knew the Americans were close."

Early on August 6, 1945, Scott heard a loud rumble from shock waves that were hitting the mountains and bouncing back and forth. He thought the Americans had possibly dropped huge blockbuster bombs. Instead, the first atomic bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima. Three days later, a second atomic bomb destroyed Nagasaki. A little more than a week later, the Japanese forces surrendered, and Scott was a free man.

Scott was 23, weighed 98 pounds and stood 5 feet 11 inches, one inch shorter than when he had volunteered for the Marines in 1940. "When you're malnourished and lose a lot of weight, you shrink," he said. Scott and other former prisoners recuperated aboard a hospital ship that landed in Okinawa. From there, he was flown to Guam before sailing to San Francisco.

Did Scott agree with President Harry Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb? "It was no different from the Japanese bombing of cities and civilian populations all over Asia," he said. "Also, the Japanese had orders to kill all Allied prisoners the minute a landing was attempted on mainland Japan. So the atomic bomb saved my life."

A few years after the war, Scott graduated from the University of Oklahoma with a bachelors degree in geology. He worked in the geophysical and uranium fields for various companies before settling with Reynolds Metals Co. in Richmond in 1959. He stayed with Reynolds until retiring in 1985.

Scott remained mostly silent about his wartime experiences until the late 1950s, when a friend from Baltimore, Frank Evans, asked him to tell the story of his life as a prisoner. The men then collaborated to write a play that recounted Scott's imprisonment in Tayabas and near Hiroshima toward the war's end.

Despite the hardships he endured, Scott says he accepts the Japanese people as good human beings. Unlike a friend from the Bataan Death March who despised anything Japanese, Scott is comfortable driving a Honda Accord, tagged paradoxically with the license plate "P.O.W."

Scott knew of other U.S. military veterans who would not let go of their hatred for the Japanese; one referred to all World War II Japanese soldiers as "pigs" despite knowing that one helped save Scott's life. "That comment is probably from a man who will likely go to his death hating the Japanese," Scott surmised. "I don't understand why he wouldn't realize the compassion the individual Japanese guard showed to a prisoner. It was a very personal thing. It was one person reaching out to another." □