

Permission to post this article has been granted by the Petaluma Argus-Courier by John Burns, publisher of the Petaluma Argus-Courier.

# Honoring Lyle Howdyshell, a true American hero

By **BILL SOBERANES**  
Columnist-Peopleologist

I've said it before, and I'll say it again — those who portray heroes on the movie screens become better known and often bigger heroes than the real deed doers.

Lyle Howdyshell just died at age 75, and there was no big story about this American hero, who was captured by the Japanese at the fall of Bataan in the Philippines in World War II. Howdyshell spent 42½ months as a prisoner of war. He suffered starvation and by the time he was released his 6-foot 2-inch body weighed 92 pounds. He suffered brutality, torture and was even transported on what was called the Ghost Ship and Death Ship in a hole where water was rationed to a few drops a day and food, when they got it, was a handful of rice.

Howdyshell became a good friend of mine, and I treasure the picture he gave me with this inscription, "To my friend Bill Soberanes." This picture shows him after he was released as a prisoner.

Howdyshell came back a quiet type of hero, who seldom talked about his years as a prisoner and never complained about those almost unbearable days.

During his days in Petaluma, Howdyshell also got together with Bob Matthias, another Petaluman who was captured by the Japanese in the Philippines. Unlike Howdyshell, Matthias came back a roaring lion.

I remember the time a big, rough-looking guy questioned Howdyshell about his experiences as a prisoner of war, and after hearing some of the story he shouted in a rough manner, "I don't want to hear anymore about it!" Being a quiet and reserved guy, Howdyshell stopped talking, but Matthias didn't. Matthias told the guy to step outside. The fellow then said, "Don't fool with me, I'm tough." Matthias then beat the daylights out of him.

It was Gen. MacArthur who said that the defenders of Bataan like Howdyshell were great heroes, who gave every inch of strength they had for their country and whose courage was never surpassed.

Howdyshell never talked about being a hero, and he seldom talked about spending almost four years as a prisoner of war, under conditions that would make the criminals in the United States' prisons look like a Sunday school camp.

Howdyshell also took part in forced marches where some of the American soldiers dropped dead from exhaustion and the lack of food and water. The sanitary conditions aboard the Ghost Ship caused sickness and even death to the prisoners.

Howdyshell didn't come back a bitter man. He went to work, and even operated a restaurant in Petaluma. In later years he owned a small ranch in Northern California.

The ranks of those great Americans, who were captured with the fall of Bataan in the Philippine Islands, is growing slim, and the number of those who survived being transported on the Ghost and Death Ship are even slimmer.

Howdyshell belongs alongside such great American heroes as Pappy Boyington, the colorful air ace in World War II and Sgt. York of World War I fame, and those thousands who suffered and in

**My Fascinating  
World of People**

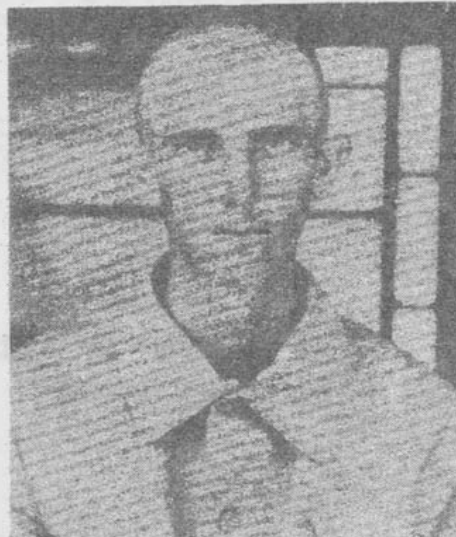
many cases gave their lives for the United States of America.

Today many people have forgotten what people like Howdyshell did, and we shouldn't because they came to rescue our country in a time when the American kind of life that politicians often brag about was in grave danger.

Like Iwo Jima, Bataan will go down as one of the most historic events in which brave Americans took part. Although he was abused to an extent most people could not live through, Howdyshell never held a grudge against the then-

enemy he fought. As I said before he was a quiet, unassuming man, whose heroics should be a well-documented chapter in the history of the United States.

When we sing "God Bless America," we should stop and remember there might not be an America if it were not for people like Lyle Howdyshell.



As a prisoner of war, Howdyshell dwindled down to 92 pounds. He stood 6 feet 2 inches tall.