

The Rodeo Belt Buckle

I began researching my grandfather's POW experience about two years ago. It all started with a letter written by a Major Oliver Orson to my grandmother in 1947 that I found buried in my parent's attic. The letter outlined Boder (Sport) Jordan's odyssey as an oil driller, a blockade-runner, and as a prisoner of war. Fortunately, the letter provided many dates and locations and provided an excellent template for me to begin my research.

I read every book I could find on the subject and quickly connected to research communities of sons and daughters on similar quests. Little by little, I was able to piece together my grandfather's story. He was an oil driller on the island of Cebu. When war came to the Philippines, he joined a Quartermaster unit and operated an inter-island supply ship called the Katipunan as a blockade-runner in Mindanao. He spent time in DAPECOL, Cabanatuan and eventually the Oryoku Maru. He died January 9th 1945 when the Enoura Maru was bombed in Takao Harbor.

In Major Orson's letter, he described a fancy silver belt buckle that my grandfather was able to keep hidden throughout the war. Major Orson said that when he reached Moji Japan, a Lt. Scott had the buckle and had intended to return it to the family. Unfortunately, our family had never received the buckle.

When I began to share my findings with my father, my curiosity shifted from the study of this mythical hero to the study of an ordinary man. I asked what he knew of Sport Jordan before the war. My father described the depression as some of the happiest years of his life. Yes, they were poor and ate only what they could hunt or grow, but they were rich in love. My father told me, "Dad was a dreamer and an optimist. He liked everyone and everyone liked him. He always had a song in his pocket ready to pull out when someone needed cheer. The family would meet other families at a park in Bakersfield, CA where all would share a communal dinner. We ate a lot of frogs, birds, crawdads and beans, but dad had an unexplainable magic about him. Unfortunately, the last time I would ever see him was Friday June 13, 1941. I was 12 when he left for the Philippines."

I asked my father about the silver belt buckle. He said that Sport had won it at a bronc riding contest in a rodeo shortly before leaving for the Philippines. "He was really proud of that buckle. I was there when he won it"

As I continued my research, the hole in my father's heart became ever apparent. As I would uncover more information, I would quickly call dad with an update.

One day, I received an e-mail from a fellow researcher.

Kurt,

I checked the rosters and narrowed the individual who had the belt buckle down to one man. It seems that it could only have been Lt. Walter Scott from Grand Rapids, MI.

Good luck.

My heart soared. I began to have this wild fantasy of returning the belt buckle to my Dad. I called every Walter Scott in Grand Rapids, MI. I knew my chances were slim, but I was determined to try. Maybe he had a son or a relative that could lead me to him. When I came up empty, I broadened my search to the entire state of Michigan.

After weeks of phone calls, I spoke to a Walter Scott who was a retired police detective. He was curious and asked, "Son what are you up to?" When I told him my story, he offered to help. After another three months, we finally located the family of the correct Walter Scott. And now I prepared for the big phone call, "Hello, you don't know me but my grandfather was a POW with your dad.....do you know anything about a silver belt buckle?"

The woman on the other end of the phone was Walter Scott's daughter. She was gentle and supportive of my efforts. I could feel her disappointment when she told me she knew nothing of the belt buckle. I explained that I knew my chances were slim. She explained that her father was so desperate from the chilling cold and was reduced to trading his wedding ring for some mats to keep he and his men warm. The Scott family sent me an audio tape that Walter Scott made at a conference before his death.

In the tape, Walter Scott described being captured at Corrigador. He was an artillery officer fiercely protective of his men. He was a chemist by training and had kitchen duties in Cabanatuan. He gives a colorful description of discovering a way to make doughnuts cooked in a light motor oil

He was in the same forward hold as my grandfather when the Encoura Maru took a direct hit. He describes being one of 79 survivors of the 400 men in that particular hold. "The men on the left and right of me were both killed in the bombing." He traded his wedding ring while enroute from Takao to Moji during the chilling cold. But Major Orson's letter is clear that when he saw Lt. Scott in Moji, he was still in the possession of the belt buckle.

When faced with a choice, did this fine man trade his wedding ring so that he could return a dead man's beloved artifact to an unknown family? When my father and I talked about the probable fate of the buckle, my father hoped that it could have eased the pain of suffering men.

When I finished my research, a story kept calling to me. I wrote a screenplay that I have recently finalized. In the story, I wrestled with the belt buckle. What really happened to it? The facts are that it was probably confiscated or eventually traded in desperation. But, the truth is that my father did receive the belt buckle.

The buckle represented the memory of his dad. He and I shared the memory of his dad much more profoundly than any hunk of silver could. The belt buckle is a metaphor for my grandfather's life. The search for the belt buckle told my grandfather's story and my fantasy came true when my father and I told it together.

Kurt Jordan
Atlanta, GA



I am on the right, back to camera holding a piece of rope.

This was taken in the mountains near San Jose, after the Japs left the airfield.



Marquez - rear with crew cu
Kronen - having a shot.
Calvin Hogg - back to camer
J. K. Jones - sweating his
Morris McGehee - with straw
Don't know who is laying do
Ye oide black jack game - c
ing lemonade spiked with al

Just threw this in



The Airfield
San Jose, Mindoro
Feb. 1942

Note drums blocking out runway
drum in the foreground is without