

Investigation

 **Copyrighted**

Robert Lentz Japanese POW

Since I have gotten over my fungal infection and am in a new church, God has opened the door for me to be part of the Veteran's Home ministry that the young people in our church have started. They go on Sunday mornings and have a service. They usually sing and then one of the young men preaches a message. I just show up! Every so often they let me preach. I have made some dear friends at this home. There are veterans there that have served the country during and since World War II! They are now mostly ill and waiting to die. For some of them, even their children don't come to see them. I show up and pray for them, take an interest in them, try to win the lost to Christ, and basically try to encourage them!

I met an interesting man at the VA home. His name is Robert Lents. I saw him sitting outside by the Memorial and went up to him. He had a hat on that said, "*WWII Veteran.*" It also said, "*Submarine.*" I asked him what he did on the sub and he said he was a forward torpedo gunner. Then he told me this amazing story.

The Japanese had torpedoed his sub and it sank. They were able to get it to surface again, but when they got to the surface, the Japanese navy were all around them. They decided to re-sink the sub and they all put on life vests and got out and let it sink. He said that he spent about an hour in the water and then was picked up by the Japanese. He was a prisoner of war for three and a half years! The Japanese did not tell the Red Cross that they had these prisoners. To the allies they were missing in action. It wasn't until the end of the war that they found out about them.

He said it was horrible. He told me that he couldn't talk about it for years because he didn't think anyone would believe him. He said he was beaten with rods many times. His tail bone was broken often. He said if one of the prisoners did something the guards didn't like they would beat him mercilessly. They would then beat the other prisoners. He was never given any clothes and he wore the uniform he was rescued in until it completely wore out.

I asked him how in the world did he handle it! He told me that God helped him and that they became good thieves! I couldn't condemn him for turning to stealing. I don't think God did either. The Bible says in

Proverbs 6:30 “Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry;”

He said that when his uniform wore out, they broke into a Dutch

warehouse and retrieved some uniforms, which he wore. He told me that he worked outside the prison camp on work parties. In one place he worked, was a cemetery. The Japanese would make rice cakes and place them on the graves as an offering. He told me that he would look for a chance to grab them and eat them. He was hungry all the time. They just fed them once a day and when they were sick they gave them half rations!

When they would return from work parties, the guards would frisk them. They always stopped at the knees and so they sewed pockets in the legs of their pants calf high.

When one brought things back to the prison they shared it with the others. One time he had gotten beriberi. That is a disease caused by a vitamin deficiency. One of the thieves had stolen some Japanese vitamins and gave him a handful. He asked how many he should take and was told to take 2 or 3 a day until he got better. He couldn't bend his arm enough to reach his mouth. He had no place to store the vitamins so he eventually got them in his mouth. He swallowed the whole handful! He said that he peed constantly for 3 days, but he eventually got better.

One time when he was sick, they took him to another part of the prison where the sick were kept. They were kept there because they couldn't work but they didn't give them any treatment or medicine. He said the rats were horrible. You could hear them scurrying around. They could smell death and would go to the weakest individual and start eating on them before they were dead. He said the screams of the tormented person were terrible!

One time he was on a work detail, and they were harvesting bamboo. He reached his hand up and was grappling for a piece of bamboo. A cobra shot out of the bamboo thicket and hit him on the hand and then fell to the ground. The prisoner next to him, although barefoot, stomped the cobra to death! He thinks that the cobra was going for his face and didn't have his mouth open all the way, so he wasn't bitten. He wasn't trying to block the cobra, but he did. He told me that this was just one of the things that let him know God was watching out for him.

Robert survived. At the end of the war, they took him to an army hospital in India. They gave him a boiled egg and a glass of water. They then told him that they were not going to give him anything else until he drank a case of beer! They had learned by experience that the prisoners' stomachs could not handle good food, and some had died when they started eating¹ The beer prepared their stomachs for really good food!

When Robert came back to his hometown, he became the Postmaster. He eventually retired and now lives with his wife of seventy-one years at the VA home. He is ninety- five!

When I went back to see him and read to him what I had written about him, he gave me some more details. He said that one time, one of the prisoners had some eggs he had stolen in his pants and a couple of them fell out on the floor in front of the guards. They took that man and started beating him with the rods that they carried. The usual procedure was to beat the man until he fell down and then to start kicking him. This

man refused to fall down! Finally, after 100 hard licks, one of the officers told him to *“Get on the ground and that it was an order.”* He went down. Robert said that they carried him off and he never saw him again. He said that one man had found a coconut and picked it up. One of the guards hit him in the head with the butt of his rifle. Robert said that he was carried off and he never saw him again either.

He liked what I had written about him but corrected me on the *“handful of vitamins.”* He said although it was a handful, it was only about 7 or 8. He also told me that after he had gotten the vitamins, they took him to another part of the camp. One of the things that he regrets is that he never got to see the man that gave him the vitamins again so that he could thank him! He told me that when he had the "beriberi" that his testicles were the *“this big.”* He used his hands and indicated the size of a bowling ball! I asked him if it was hard to walk. He said, *“definitely.”* He also told me that one thing that he could never understand was why God would let those prisoners suffer like they did and did nothing about it. Of course, the answer is that even though God allowed it, by not intervening, it was the heart of men that were so depraved that caused his suffering and not God and that Jesus paid for all sins on the cross and he would be rewarded in heaven for what he went through for God. I understand this. What troubles me is that he has back problems now and sometimes is in intense pain. He went through so much as a prisoner, you would think his suffering would be over. I do know that in heaven these things like that will mean something!

He told me several other things. He said that one time some of them

were separated from the others by a fence and a gap so that they couldn't get close to each other. He said that every so often, one of the egg thieves would throw him a boiled egg over the fence and shout, "*Hey Bob, here comes the ball!*" Sometime he would catch it and sometimes it would hit the ground and break into pieces. He still ate the pieces.

He said that they were basically starved to death, but when a man got sick they would put him on half rations. It is amazing that any lived. He said that only 5 of the men from the submarine died in the camp. He said that there was a Destroyer crew in prison with them and that at least 30 of them died. I asked him why that was? I thought that there was no place on the sub to exercise. He said it was the food. The submariners had the best food in the Navy! He also told me something that I have believed and practiced for a while. He thinks that the main reason that they survived was because they didn't spend all of their time thinking about themselves. When they stole something, it was so that they could share it with the others! They looked for things to steal that would help someone in the camp that needed help. They got to needing others and thinking about others. I believe that the main purpose that we are here is to help others. True happiness is found in serving others to help them to serve God!

Toward the end of the war, they took a bunch of the prisoners to Java. He said they went on a train and went from one side of the island to the other. It was only supposed to take a few hours, but they kept having to stop the train because the U. S. was bombing the island! It took them two days. Again, it was a miracle that they didn't get bombed!

One day the guards opened the cells and let them out into the yard. They noticed that there was only one guard on duty and that the Japanese flag was at half-mast. They went to find out what was going on and the front gates were open and they walked out! They went into town and on the way ran into an Indonesian islander. The islander told them that the Americans could go into town but that the Dutch prisoners had better go back to camp because the island had been controlled by the Dutch before the war and there was still resentment toward them. They all went back to camp.

Over the next few days, the guards left and the prisoners had all the guns. Soon the Marines showed up to help them. They told the Marines that they could take care of themselves and sent them on down the road where a bunch of women prisoners might need their help. A few days later the U. S. plane arrived, and he was taken to the hospital in India. The last time I had visited him, there was a younger girl in the room just sitting there. He introduced me and said that she was a watcher. Apparently, since his back was hurting, when he saw the doctor, he told him that it hurt so badly that he wished that a truck would run over him. They had him on suicide watch! I am no psychiatrist or psychologist but of all the people I have ever met, he didn't seem like someone who would commit suicide. He had spent three and a half years in a Japanese prison camp and had lived to be 95! This last time I was visiting, I asked him where his watcher was. He said that they sent him to a psychiatrist and that after a couple of minutes talking to him the man told him to go back to his room that there was nothing wrong with him.

After making sure he no longer had nightmares about the time he spent in the concentration camp, I let him borrow my CD book of Louis Zamparini, called "Unbroken". Louis was also a Japanese prisoner of war in WWII. His only comment was about the time Louis spent on the raft that it was amazing that he survived that.

I met Robert and others by just showing up and talking to people.



Copyrighted

All writings, podcasts, and videos are copyrighted. Please develop your own ideas in your own words. While the material is copyrighted, the ideas presented here may be freely used to bring glory to God and make yourself and others successful! Please learn from what God has taught me! You are permitted to read and learn from this material. You may print, teach, and distributed it to others. Just don't take credit for it!