

## LETTERS FROM GRANDPA

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Dearest grandchild,

While it may be difficult to understand, there is a sense in which Jewish people were “**Held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed**” (Gal. 3:23). The Law of Moses was like a prison, but “**It is for freedom that Christ has set us free**” (Gal. 5:1). When some of the Galatians returned to the bondage of law it was so irrational that Paul accused them of being “bewitched” (Gal. 3:1). The Good News is that when Jesus sets you free you are free indeed! (Jn. 8:36). Sadly, some of those Jews were so addicted to the Law that they were afraid of freedom.

To illustrate this in our own day let us consider perhaps the most famous American prisoners of W.W. II. When MacArthur fled the Philippines in January 1942 the Japanese took 76,000 prisoners (66,000 Filipinos and 10,000 Americans). These prisoners were forced to march over 60 miles to prison camps. 20,000 died en route and this became known as the Bataan Death March. While the prisoners were sent to various POW camps we will focus our attention on the 100 acre prison camp called “Cabanatuan”. At it’s peak it held 8,000 prisoners. As the war was coming to an end the population of this prison had dwindled to only 500. The freedom of those surviving prisoners is the focus of this article.

On Dec. 14, 1944, just a few days before MacArthur returned to the Philippines, the Japanese killed all 150 POW’s at the Puerto Princess Prison Camp in Palaway, Phillipines. They didn’t want them to testify at a war crime trial. When the prisoners were ordered into a ditch Navy signalman C.C. Smith refused to go. Lieutenant Sato brought his sword down on the top of his head with such force that it cleaved his head in two, stopping mid way through his neck. The rest of the men were covered with gasoline and set on fire. Those who fled were gunned down. Remarkably, Eugene Nielsen survived. In spite of his burns and two bullet wounds, the emaciated hero swam several miles across the bay and was rescued by Filipino guerillas. Miraculously, four other Americans also survived and were able to verify that this horrible massacre had taken place.

Fear mounted that the prisoners at Cabanatuan would be next. Thus a daring plan was conceived to set them free. Hampton Sides, in his excellent book *Ghost Soldiers*, considers this as World War II’s most dramatic mission. Lieutenant Colonel Henry Mucci led the mission and demanded that no atheists participate. He knew that they could never achieve their goal without the help of God. The mission was so successful that all the prisoners were rescued, over 1,000 Japanese soldiers were killed, and only four Americans lost their lives. One Ranger was killed by a mortar, another by friendly fire, and two prisoners died en route to freedom from starvation and disease.

But now, let us consider the remarkable phenomenon of “fearing freedom”. The American attack on the prison camp came with such speed and precision that it was a total surprise to friend and foe alike. **Colonel Duckworth** was the American commander at Cabanatuan. The shocked commander refused to leave the camp. He got in the face of Ranger Alvie Robbins and demanded to know who he was. When Robbins said they were Americans who had come to set them free, Duckworth replied: “You can’t do this! You’re going to get us all killed. The Japanese told us no escapes! No one leaves here until I say they do”. When Duckworth reluctantly decided to leave he fell into a ditch and broke his arm. To the confused prisoners the scene didn’t make sense. Prisoner **Bert Bank** thought it was a trick. He thought the Japanese were using English to lure the Americans outside so they could more conveniently gun them down. **Dr. Ralph Hibbs** was another prisoner who needed some convincing. Three rangers approached him firing tommy guns from their hips. “What the ### is going on?”, he

demanded. At another part of the camp Ranger Lester Malone got tired of arguing with camp veterinarian **Herbert Ott**, pointed him at the gate and kicked him in the rear end. Prisoner **Bob Body** was also combative. He saw a huge form looming over him and shouted: “Who the #%%# do you think you are?” The reply was: “Never mind. We’re U.S. Army Rangers, get out of here”. Body responded: “What’s a Ranger?” (The Ranger unit was formed after these men were captured). Ranger Marvin Kinder was leading a prisoner by the arm to freedom when he tried to return to the squalid barracks to get some of his “possessions.” Strangest of all, however, is the story of **Edwin Rose**. He was sixty-five years old and deaf as a post. At the time of the rescue he was asleep in the outhouse. He heard nothing, not even the grenades and bazookas. Finally, he woke up, stumbled back to his barracks in the dark, and went to bed. Fortunately, some brave Filipino guerrillas returned and rescued him the next day.

Let us, however, be merciful to these heroes. Many were amputees without hair or teeth. They were starved, half naked, bare footed, dull eyed, and louse infested. In addition to the lesions and battle scars, many had tropical ulcers as big as dinner plates. After years of brain washing and torture, their reluctance and confusion was perhaps to be expected. But what about us? Jesus also came for us through much hardship and suffering. Neither could His liberation plan have been successful without the help of God. So Jesus beckons us to freedom with nail pierced hands. He promises that those who follow Him will escape from the devil and find true freedom. What will you do? Please do not refuse the freedom He offers. For as we have said, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed! (Jn. 8:36)

I love you,

Grandpa Boyce