

Lead Japanese Pilot at Pearl Harbor visited Oak Ridge in 1962 – Part 2

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on April 10, 2007)

Last week we left the story of Mituso Fuchida, leader of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, just after he had met Jacob DeShazer, a bombardier with Doolittle's raid on Tokyo who was captured and tortured but learned through study of the Bible to forgive his tormentors. The two of them were scheduled to speak at an evangelistic rally in Osaka.

At this rally, Fuchida rose with pride to tell of his conversion. He told his personal history including his early naval career and being chosen to lead the attack on Pearl Harbor. He said that four years after that attack Japan was defeated and he hated the United States as Japan's former enemy. However, I learned about a beautiful story about an American nurse named Peggy Covell. After relating the story of Peggy's help toward his friend while a prisoner of war, he said, "Revenge has always been a major motif in Japanese thought, but I am here to say to you that forgiveness is a far greater moral than revenge."

He then told them of his conversion and appealed to them to seek peace, personal peace as well and world peace. He concluded by saying, "real peace comes only through Jesus Christ."

This first occasion of the two of them speaking at the same rally was hugely successful. DeShazer realized he had hit upon the key to reaching the Japanese, they would listen to their war hero who had led the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The second rally was scheduled in Kyoto, but Fuchida decided to first hold a rally in his hometown of Kashiwara. One unusual aspect of this choice was that Kashiwara occupied the unique position of having two major shrines, Shinto and Buddhist. The Shinto shrine was placed there by Japan's first emperor, Jimmu Tenno and the Buddhist shrine came many years later when Crown Prince Shotokutaishi brought Buddhism to Japan and built its first shrine in Kashiwara. This rally was well attended but produced few conversions. Fuchida was the victim of the "prophet-in-his-own-country" syndrome.

However, this rally did result in widespread knowledge of his conversion. He was approached by many people ranging from the communist to the various church denominations and a Catholic Bishop. All contacts trying to get him to become affiliated with their particular version of the Christian faith or in the case of the communist trying to get him to identify with Lenin-Marxism. He politely refused them all.

Fuchida continued to speak to audiences throughout Japan. He was well received wherever he spoke. The Japanese revered their "war hero" and were anxious to hear him speak. The missionary he traveled with, Glenn Wagner of the Pocket Testament League, was intent on evangelizing all of Japan. Fuchida had never even attended a church. When he saw his first church assembly he saw there was something special about the fellowship with Christians. He desired that. He was still struggling with what his life was about now that the war was over and he no longer had a high military position. He decided to quit the missionary traveling rallies and identify with a local congregation of Christians near his home of Kashiwara.

An interesting note regarding the conversion of Fuchida is that even as he was speaking across Japan proclaiming the glory of serving Christ, he maintained a relationship with a woman not his wife. He had a son with Kimi. As he considered his Christian responsibilities, he realized that he must give up this relationship. He also stopped drinking hard liquor but not wine as he considered that drink a food. He also gave up smoking. Eventually his wife, Haruko and their two children Yoshiya and Miyako converted to Christianity.

Fuchida continued to travel and speak when requested to tell his story to anyone who desired him as a speaker, yet his income was limited. His farm provided food, but no income. He was offered a position in the military position in the Self Defense Air Force but turned it down as he felt his calling to speak about his conversion to Christianity was his true vocation.

He did write two books about World War II and several articles for magazines. One of his books, *Task Force* told the story of Midway to the end of World War II. He was criticized by other Japanese military leaders who participated in the war effort as he was most critical of them and he brought out the mistakes he thought they had made.

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As Fuchida's missionary efforts expanded in Japan, transportation became a problem. He decided a helicopter would be best suited to his needs. But how to obtain one?

When the Korean war broke out, the occupation policy that prevented Japanese pilots from flying was abandoned and Japanese pilots once again took to the air. That suited Fuchida's plans and he thought if an airplane or helicopter came available he could fly it legally.

The phrase "Wings for Christ" came to his mind and he wrote an article for a newspaper using that phrase. He stated that airplanes had been used for warfare but now they could be used to bring Christ to the masses.

Elmer B. Sachs headed the Worldwide Christian Missionary Army of Sky Pilots in California and desperately wanted to establish a presence in Japan. When he learned of Fuchida's impact on Japan he thought for sure he had found the answer to his prayers.

Sachs wrote a letter to Fuchida compelling him to come to the United States to raise the money for an airplane to be used in Japan to teach about Christ. In October of 1952, Fuchida first came to California.

Before leaving Japan Fuchida wrote for the Osaka newspaper, "Eleven years ago this November 1952 I headed east across the Pacific aboard *Akagi* to bomb Pearl Harbor. At that time I was a brilliant soldier of the Emperor, and I was very uneasy because of all the responsibilities on my shoulders. Now I am again going east across the Pacific to the United States. This time too I am a soldier, but a soldier of Christ. This time I have a calm, easy and relaxed feeling and the desire to be a good-will ambassador for Christ.

However, when he actually sailed into the San Francisco harbor he had to admit some anxiety about, "The Attacker of Pearl Harbor" landing on the shores of the home of his former enemy. Seeing the Golden Gate bridge caused him to vow that he would not be the source of any discord with this great country.

The *New York Times* noted his landing in California with an article that stated, "Captain Mitsuo Fuchida, the slight 50-year-old pilot, said his heart was filled with revenge when he led the December 7, 1941, air strike against the United States Navy, but 'Christianity has opened my eyes' and I hope through Christ to help the young people of Japan learn a great love for America.

Billy Graham asked Fuchida to appear on his program "Hour of Decision" that was broadcast on December 7, 1952. He took an instant liking to Graham and admired his ability to talk to the camera as if he were talking to a huge crowd of people even though no one was actually there as they taped the show ahead of the broadcast.

Sachs had arranged for Fuchida to speak at a large church in Los Angeles where he made an appeal for funds to purchase a helicopter. This made Fuchida a bit nervous as he was uncomfortable with this abrupt approach. Fuchida was told to stand at the rear of the building as the crowd passed out. One elderly lady asked him to accept an envelope from a young boy with her. Fuchida did so and thanked the boy. When Fuchida opened the envelope later he found a \$25 check and a letter explaining that the young boy's father had been killed during the attack on Pearl Harbor. His mother had given birth to him about a week later and had died as she had neither the strength or will to live. The woman was the young boy's grandmother and she said in the letter that they prayed for Fuchida and his ministry. She expressed joy that the leader of the Pearl Harbor attackers had found Christ.

From this first experience in 1952 Fuchida continued throughout the next several years to frequently spend time in the United States. He even thought about applying for citizenship.

A note of interest is that David Hobson e-mailed me after reading last week's *Historically Speaking* column saying he recalled Fuchida speaking in Oak Ridge at the Chapel on the Hill and he thought it was in the 1950's. So, while it seems likely that Fuchida visited Oak Ridge more than once, the visit of which I have evidence is the next part of his amazing story.

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In April of 1962 while on yet another visit to the United States he came and spoke in Oak Ridge. He was 59 years old at the time and was well known as the leader of the Pearl Harbor attack who had become a dedicated Christian evangelist intent on teaching the Japanese about Christ.

At the visit to the First Baptist Church in Oak Ridge, the cover of their bulletin, *The Churchman*, proclaimed, "From Captain of the Japanese Armada to Christian Evangelist, Hear Mitsuo Fuchida Sunday Evening, April 29, in our Chapel at 7:30 p.m."

On the inside of the bulletin was the story titled, "'Father Forgive Them' is the Japanese Pilot's Sermon." The story was copied from *Baptist & Reflector* and gave an overview of Fuchida's life story.

In his sermon he said, "As an evangelist, I have traveled across Japan and the Orient introducing others to the One...who changed my life. I believe with all my heart that those who will direct Japan – and all other nations – in the decades to come, must not ignore the message of Jesus Christ. And youth must realize that he is the only hope for this troubled world.

"Though my country has the highest literacy rate in the world, education has not brought our salvation. Peace and freedom – both national and personal – come only through a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

"I would give anything to retract my destructive actions at Pearl Harbor. But that is not possible. Instead, I now work toward striking the death-blow to the basic hatred that infests the human heart and causes such tragedies. A hatred cannot be uprooted without assistance from Jesus Christ.

"He is the only One who was powerful enough to change my life...and inspire my life with His thoughts. He was the only answer to Jake DeShazer's tormented life. And He is the only answer for our young people today. – Mitsuo Fuchida

Fuchida continued his evangelism in Japan and visits to the United States until his health forced him to return to his farm in Kashiwara where he and Haruko spent the last years of his life. He died of diabetes on May 30, 1976, at 73 years of age. He was given a funeral in the Gokoku Shinto shrine in Osaka with many of his old navy friends in attendance.

I hope you enjoyed this story of the Pearl Harbor attacker turned Christian evangelist and his unusual visit to Oak Ridge. The very place where the uranium was obtained for the atomic bomb, Little Boy, dropped on Hiroshima, the place he was called away from the day before the bomb was dropped. He was the only person on the team who went into Hiroshima while radioactive fallout was highest and lived. This most unique story was given me by Bob Farnham. Thanks Bob!

I also used the book, *God's Samurai, Lead Pilot at Pearl Harbor* by Gordon W. Prange with Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon, for much of the detailed account of Fuchida's life. Bob Farnham also provided me a copy of Chuck Colson's radio program. If you have stories you would like to see included in *Historically Speaking*, please send an e-mail to draysmith@comcast.net or call 482-4224.

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Mitsuo Fuchida as he appeared when he visited Oak Ridge April 29, 1962