

Lead Japanese Pilot at Pearl Harbor visited Oak Ridge in 1962 – Part 1

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column on April 3, 2007)

Chuck Colson, on December 7, 2006, introduced his radio program "BreakPoint" with the following statement, "Sixty-five years ago today, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor—an action that dramatically altered the course of history. Jacob DeShazer was on KP duty in California when he first heard the news. Furious at what the Japanese had done, he resolved to retaliate personally. And in April 1942, he got his chance—as a B-25 bombardier when Doolittle's Raiders attacked Tokyo.

In 2004, Donald M. Goldstein and Katherine V. Dillon published Gordon W. Prange's unfinished manuscript entitled, *God's Samurai – Lead Pilot at Pearl Harbor*. This is the story of Mitsuo Fuchida, the Commander leading the attack on Pearl Harbor who converted from Shintoism to Christianity when he read Jacob DeShazer's story.

Jacob DeShazer, a bombardier on the historic Jimmy Doolittle mission to bomb Tokyo that ultimately proved to be the turning point for the war in the Pacific, spent the next three years after that successful raid as a Japanese "war criminal." As you may know, Doolittle's raid, while successful in its attack on Tokyo, failed to get any of the B-25 bombers back safely. All of the crews were forced to bail out except one that landed in Russia. Most of them bailed out over China, but eight were captured by the Japanese. One of these eight was Jacob DeShazer.

He was tortured and forced to watch helplessly while one of his friends died of slow starvation. Three other friends were executed. His hatred for the Japanese grew to be unbearable. He begged for a Bible because he had heard that Christianity changed hatred between human beings into real brotherly love. He was searching for any thread of hope for something to help him with the immense hatred he felt for his captors. It was literally driving him insane.

When the emperor of Japan told his captors to treat the prisoners better, he finally got the Bible he had been asking for. He read it with fascination, re-reading some parts six or more times. What he concluded was that if Christ is not in a person's heart then cruelty is natural. His bitter hatred for his Japanese captors turned to loving pity as he remembered Christ's words from the cross, "Father, forgive them." He too forgave his captors.

In August 1945, DeShazer was freed from his prison cell by paratroopers. After the war, a chaplain on General MacArthur's staff was looking for something to help heal the animosity between the United States and Japan. He sought help from Don Falkenberg of Bible Literature International. Falkenberg had read DeShazer's testimony about the change he had experienced. A booklet called, "I Was a Prisoner of Japan" was being circulated.

This booklet had a profound effect on Japanese Navy pilot Mitsuo Fuchida, Chief Commander of the historic December 7, 1941 raid on Pearl Harbor. On that fateful day, Fuchida led 360 pilots and their airplanes on a devastating raid that signaled Japan's formal entry in the World War II and soon compelled the United States to respond in kind and then some. Years after the raid on Pearl Harbor and after the war had been ended by the use of atomic bombs, he was given a copy of the booklet telling DeShazer's story upon stepping off a train in Tokyo and it changed his life. He would never be the same again and he would soon dedicate his life to evangelism. His was an amazing change in his basic belief.

Intrigued by DeShazer's booklet, he began reading the Bible. And despite his Shinto heritage, he converted to Christianity. Eventually DeShazer and Fuchida traveled together across Japan and saw tens of thousands of Japanese converted to Christianity.

How did this come about? Strange things happened in the lives of these two individuals. Let's examine a few unusual events.

Mitsuo Fuchida logged more than ten thousand combat hours in his career. He was in Hiroshima the day before Little Boy was dropped. However, because he was called to come to the Japanese Military Headquarters in Tokyo for a conference the day before the bomb was dropped, his life was spared.

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When the news of the attack on Hiroshima reached the Japanese Military Headquarters in Tokyo, Fuchida and eleven other military leaders flew to Hiroshima to inspect and report on the damage. The team spent two weeks learning the full extent of the damage to the city and the people. None of them had any idea of the danger of the deadly radioactive fallout blanketing the city. All of the military leaders except Fuchida died because of radiation sickness. Fuchida said he suffered no ill effects from the radiation exposure.

Fuchida was called as a witness in the war crime trials for Japanese torture of Americans prisoners of war. He became very bitter against the Americans who would punish Japanese for war crimes. He felt certain he could uncover much the same thing in American prisoner of war camps. His old friend, Shohei Kanegasaki, was imprisoned in a hospital in Utah along with about 20 other badly injured Japanese prisoners. When he returned to Japan, Fuchida met his boat and asked him how he was treated by the Americans.

Much to his surprise, rather than stories of torture he learned of a young girl of 18 years named Margaret Covell, called "Peggy" by the prisoners, who had been kind to the lieutenant while he was in the hospital. She was the daughter of missionary parents who had been killed by Japanese in the Philippines. At first she was filled with hate for the Japanese because of the death of her parents, but when she learned how they prayed for 30 minutes before being executed, she began to better understand. Soon her heart was going out to the Japanese prisoners.

This was something that Fuchida could not understand. "What did they pray?," he wondered. And what could cause an American young lady to care for the Japanese prisoners with kindness when she knew the Japanese had killed her parents. It was very confusing to Fuchida.

On his return from seeing his friend back home, he met a missionary who gave him a tract to read. Timothy Pietsch gave Fuchida the tract that told about Jacob DeShazer, who had hated the Japanese since the December 7, 1941 raid on Pearl Harbor. Fuchida learned of DeShazer's torture by the Japanese and how he had changed completely when he read of God's love. He also read that DeShazer intended to return to Japan after the war as a missionary.

Fuchida thought that maybe he too could learn about this love of God that caused people to act so differently. He thought if an American could find God in the Bible, he could too. He purchased a Bible and began to read it every day. He came to Luke 23 and was reminded of Margaret Covell's parents and how they had prayed before their execution. He understood. Fuchida decided to turn his life over to God. This was in September, 1949.

He found the address of Timothy Pietsch on the cover of the DeShazer tract and wrote a letter to him explaining that he had read the tract, purchased a Bible and was reading it. Pietsch replied asking Fuchida to come to Osaka to talk with him. Glenn Wagner was with Pietsch when they met with Fuchida.

One thing Pietsch stressed to Fuchida was the responsibility he had to testify of his Christian faith to others. This troubled Fuchida at first as he was hesitate to let his Shinto friends know of his conversion. Yet, with more discussion Wagner was able to convince Fuchida that he should witness for Christ.

That very day, Pietsch, Wagner and Fuchida proceeded to preach and to distribute pocket-sized New Testaments printed in Japanese. They had parked their two sound trucks at the foot of a bridge over the Yodogawa River in Osaka. Wagner preached first and the Japanese showed little interest. The pedestrians would stop momentarily and then just move on. Not many people stayed very long.

After about an hour of this discouraging response, Fuchida was asked to speak to the people. He went to the microphone and said, "I am Mitsuo Fuchida, a former navy captain who commanded the air attacking forces against Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. But now I'm a Christian, and I want to let you know how I became one. All Japanese want peace, I'm sure of that. No one wants war again, no one less than I who engaged in war as a naval officer for almost four years. I know the brutality and the cruelties of war better than many people. Now I want to work for peace. But how can mankind achieve a lasting peace? True peace of heart, mind, and soul can only come through Jesus Christ."

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As he spoke, the crowd began to grow and continued until it blocked the street to the bridge and also the adjacent street. Special policemen, who came to the scene to direct traffic, stopped their task and listened to Fuchida. This first success gave him an emotional lift and convinced him that he was pleasing God through giving his testimony. This was his first sermon and he was well pleased with the result.

He asked to meet DeShazer and was taken to the Japanese house where he and his family were staying in Osaka, Japan in May 1950. The Pearl Harbor commander shook hands with the Doolittle Raider. Fuchida was eager to see the man who had had such a significant influence on his thinking. What he found was a gaunt and haggard DeShazer who was on a 40 day fast. He had grown frustrated with his inability to reach the Japanese and convinced that a miracle was required to win the Japanese to Christ.

Fuchida described DeShazer face as thin with "something wild" about it and having keen blue eyes that looked directly into the eyes of Fuchida in a piercing manner. Fuchida made a most insightful observation about DeShazer's decision to fast. He admired DeShazer's faith, but did not know what to make of the fasting. It struck him as totally unnecessary. Fuchida said, "Christ made the complete atonement for mankind on the cross, so there was no room for us to make an effort like DeShazer's, which was like the Buddhist way. We should do only one thing – fully rely on Christ. That's all."

DeShazer saw Fuchida's conversion as the answer to his prayers for Japan. They talked and prayed together and decided to both speak at the upcoming Osaka rally.

Next week we will conclude the story of Mitsuo Fuchida and will include his visit to Oak Ridge.



Mitsuo Fuchida when he commanded the attack on Pearl Harbor