

Finding forgiveness: Former Doolittle Raider, POW shares experiences



PHI Don Dinsmore photo

Former Doolittle Raider and prisoner of war Jacob DeShazer greets Dick Hamada and his wife Irene outside the Pearl Harbor Memorial Chapel at Naval Station Pearl Harbor on May 18.

By JOSN Geraldine Hawkins
PACIFIC FLEET JOINT
INFORMATION BUREAU

Cpl. Jacob DeShazer, United States Army Air Corps, was a bombardier on the historic mission April 18, 1942 in which Gen. Jimmy Doolittle and his crew attacked Tokyo and turned the tide of the Pacific war. For the next three years, he paid a heavy price for his bravery as the Japanese beat, tortured and starved him as a "war criminal."

Why then did DeShazer, who spoke at Pearl Harbor Memorial Chapel May 18, spend the next 30 years of

his life as a Methodist missionary in Japan?

The courage of Gen. Doolittle and his Raiders -- who did not expect to survive the bombing raid over Japan -- is vividly depicted in the motion picture "Pearl Harbor," which premiered May 21 on the flight deck of the USS John C. Stennis (CVN 74). DeShazer, 88, and his wife Florence were in Pearl Harbor for the premiere and to share how that "Date of Infamy" led to a chain of events that changed their lives.

DeShazer was subjected to unbelievable cruelty, including being forced to watch helplessly while one of his friends died of slow

starvation. "My hatred for the enemy nearly drove me crazy," he said. "My thoughts turned toward what I had heard about Christianity changing hatred between human beings into real brotherly love. I begged my captors to get me a Bible, and when the emperor of Japan told them to treat us better, I got one."

The sentence that changed DeShazer's world was "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

"I realized that these people did not know anything about my Savior and that if Christ is not in a heart, it is natural to be cruel," says DeShazer.

DeShazer was liberated in August 1944 by the 442nd Regiment Combat Team when they parachuted into China. One of his liberators, Dick Hamada, joined DeShazer at the chapel service.

"They were emaciated," recalled Hamada, now 79. "The Japanese didn't even consider them prisoners of war. They were 'war criminals.'"

DeShazer returned to the United States where Gen. Hap Arnold promoted him to staff sergeant. "General Arnold said I became a sergeant the moment the wheels left the deck [before the raid]," DeShazer re-

called.

His experiences as a prisoner of war influenced him to go to Japan as a missionary.

"When I was a prisoner, I was afraid I was going to die and I told God 'I don't want to go up there with empty hands; I want to do something for Jesus.' He attend-

from anything the officer had ever heard. All of his dreams had been shattered, and he was ready to consider the claims of Christ.

In one of the strangest and most inspiring stories to come out of World War II, Fuchida, the Japanese pilot who bombed Pearl Harbor, and DeShazer, the Doolittle

mitted suicide when the emperor told them he was just another human being. They had been brought up to believe the emperor was a divine person. When we told them about the Lord, they said 'We never heard anything like this before!'"

Hamada recalled the first time he and DeShazer met since the rescue over half a century ago. Hamada wanted to find out what became of the men he rescued.

"My daughter got on the internet and found Jacob DeShazer of the Free Methodist Church in Salem, Oregon. I called, told Mrs. DeShazer who I was, and she shouted 'Jacob! Jacob!'"

Hamada and DeShazer saw each other again after 55 years at a reunion of the Doolittle Raiders in Fresno, Calif., three weeks before the movie premiere. They had corresponded, but never expected to meet. The chapel service marked only the second time the two men have met since 1944.

While the movie "Pearl Harbor" introduces a new generation to the events that led America on a journey from defeat to victory, DeShazer's message focuses on a personal journey from hatred to love and how that experience turned him from an agent of revenge into an ambassador of reconciliation.

"I begged my captors to get me a Bible, and when the emperor of Japan told them to treat us better, I got one."

Jacob DeShazer
Doolittle Raider, POW

ed college, then seminary to prepare for his new mission as an ambassador for Christ.

Before he arrived in Japan, DeShazer wrote a tract entitled "I Was a Prisoner of Japan," that was widely distributed throughout Japan. One person who read this tract was an embittered Japanese ex-pilot, Capt. Mitsuo Fuchida, who led the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. The message was completely different

Raider who bombed Tokyo, became close friends. Fuchida became a Christian in 1950 and, like DeShazer, spent the rest of his life as a missionary in Asia.

When DeShazer and his wife Florence went to Japan in 1948, they found a fertile field for missionary work. "MacArthur told them [Japanese] that they ought to be Christians," DeShazer recalled. "They wanted to find out what was right. A lot of the young people com-