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SURVIVAL OF WILLIE

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FORWARD

INTRODUCTION

This book should have been written ⁵⁰forty-five years ago but I guess I was too busy living the present to write of the past. I feel a compelling urge to write now or never.

It is not a story about the horrors of being a prisoner of war. Many terrible things did take place but I will not dwell on them. Rather this is a story of how one person managed to survive a very difficult four years of his life. Names, dates and locations may not be too accurate but the events and experiences are real and true. As humorous as they may sound now, ~~they~~^{THEY} were dead serious at the time.

I sincerely dedicate this Book to all Americans of all wars who managed to survive as prisoners of war of a foreign nation.

CHAPTER 1

To understand the driving force that kept "Willie" going we have to start the story before he was a POW. In fact before there was a war. Shortly after Willie enlisted in the Army Air Force he was asked by his superiors what he liked most about the Army. His answer was: "The ~~six~~ good meals a day they served." They politely told him he was not to eat every time they served a meal. Just three times daily.

Later in his Army career, just before going overseas, Willie was really riding high as a Staff Sgt. on full flight pay, a new car, a beautiful girl friend and

unlimited credit. Incidentally when he visited his girl friend he didn't take her flowers or gifts. He usually brought all the fixings for a good dinner. Then all this came to a screeching halt when Willie learned he was to replace another Sgt. in the Philippines - of all places. Before he realized it, he was on board a converted luxury liner moving out of the San Francisco Harbor and slowly losing sight of the Golden Gate Bridge. Then the Ocean started to get real rough and it was time for the first meal to be served. Most of the guys couldn't stand the mention of food they were so seasick but not Willie. It took more than a rough ocean to destroy his appetite. The first meal out was some sort of stew and it looked just like the stuff the guys were throwing up but that didn't faze Willie, he was enjoying his food as he usually did.

Willie was looking forward to seeing Hawaii but was told the ship would not stop there but would stop at Guam. Guam was sure no substitute for Hawaii. Willie did manage to get a steak sandwich which must have been from a Water Buffalo because it was so tough he could hardly chew it but managed to swallow it. *Somehow.*
~~The~~ there was unlimited access to coconuts which intrigued Willie and he almost missed boarding the ship while gathering an ample supply.

Later when the ship docked in Manila, Willie took one look at the city of Manila and he was ready to return to the good old United States but that was not possible for him or the Sgt he was sent to replace. The Sgt had no orders to return so we were both caught in an Army blunder and had to remain in the Philippines.

To make matters worse Willies' service record had been lost so that meant he couldn't get any pay which practically confined him to the Base.

Willie had a tough time getting used to the Base Routine. First of all his

shoes and clothes disappeared and he was concerned but was assured his clothes were being laundered and his shoes shined. Then Willie wondered why in the middle of the day all the Americans were in their bunks under mosquito netting and the Filipinos were out working on the planes. He was told they needed the training and experience and that he should follow suit and get under the mosquito netting. That was just about six weeks before the War started.

The day the War started Willie was across the street from one of the large hangars at Clark Field in a "gun pit" which had been dug a few days earlier, but didn't have one sand bag in it. It did have a World War I Lewis machine gun in it which was as good as having a handful of rocks to throw at the Jap Bombers. The last thing Willie remembers in that gun pit as the bombs exploded was large pieces of the hangar going up in the air. After the bombers had gone Willie looked over the edge of his gun pit and was as scared as one human being could be. There was a hole just about the size of his gun pit only it had been made by a bomb.

From then on it was general pandemonium as guys rushed in every direction. Then the strafing planes came over and things became a bloody mess. As we were abandoning Clark Field, Willie met an Army Captain and asked him "What do we do now Sir"? He replied "It's every man for himself now" and that's the last that was seen of him.

Willie never was much of a leader in anything, more like a follower but it was becoming more and more difficult to find someone to follow. We had many good pilots with lots of guts and few planes to fly, but they were not leaders. After leaving Clark Field we took refuge in an adjacent pig farm. We just moved the pigs

out and moved in. Then one day one of our planes cleared its guns over our head and we thought we were being strafed again. Everyone was running for cover but they said Willie's feet were going ninety miles an hour but not going any place until he got traction and slid about ten feet on his ass in the pig crap. After we left the pig farm and retreated from one place to another, we finally arrived at Bataan Peninsula. Willie stayed with the Air Force detachment even though they were down to just four planes. The Japs were bombing the Field regularly but the first time sticks in Willie's memory. Our camp was on the edge of the landing field and our evening meal was just being prepared as the bombers struck. When it was all clear, Willie was astonished and mad as hell because the food had been blown all over the trees. Seemed like the safest place was the center of the runway not the edge. As time progressed our food supply got shorter. A central food supply area was set up by the Quartermaster Corps. The same Quartermaster Corps that had left most of the food at the docks in Manila when they retreated to Bataan. A detail of men would go out at night to get rations. Willie usually went on these details even if he wasn't supposed to because while some guys were drawing the rations he would be prowling around in the dark trying to secure what ever extra he could pick up. One night he got hold of a very heavy case of what he thought surely was canned goods but when he opened it up in the light of day it was a case of cartons of assorted Life Savers. Our food supply was a constant problem. A few cans of salmon and some bread would feed about 50 men. We agreed to eat just two meals a day so our pilots could have three. We figured they needed it more than we did. Every time they took off they were hopelessly outnumbered by Japanese planes.

We also had some horse meat now and then and it tasted pretty good after you haven't had beef for awhile. The only thing that irked Willie was that the guy sitting across from him kept mentioning horse after every mouthful. Finally, Willie couldn't take it anymore and told him if he said "Horse" one more time he was going to shove it in his face. He didn't say horse again so that ended that. Willie didn't" have the stomach to kill a monkey because if you wounded them, they cried like a baby; but one of his friends killed one and gave it to Willie. Willie boiled it for three days but still couldn't eat it because it was so tough.

Then came the night before the Surrender. The thought of surrendering never entered Willie's mind. He thought we were all falling back to a central point to make a "last stand" and he wasn't going to be without ammunition. He was so loaded down with ammunition he looked like Poncho Villa and could hardly walk. Then in the daylight we were told about the surrender. The first thing Willie did was get rid of the ammunition. He happened to see a truck load of rations go by so he promptly replaced the ammunition with canned food.

Then came the Death March which was a forced march of about 65 miles in five days on just two meals of rice. It was then that Willie found out that you could go longer without food than you could without water. For about half the March there was no water at all. Then there was access to water quite frequently and many of the guys drank too much which made it difficult for them to continue. When you were unable to continue that usually meant Death. Willie was almost at that point once, when he threw away his one remaining possession , his Mess kit. He hastily retrieved it after a friend of his was Bayoneted for being unable to continue.

On one short stretch of the March we were herded into closed box cars of a narrow gauge railroad and tho we road for aways, it was no treat because we were stacked in those cars so tight that if you passed out (and many of us did) you couldn't fall to the floor.

The March ended at Camp Odonnell where Americans were dying at 40 to 50 a day and Filipinos at 200 a day. Sanitary conditions were very bad and food and water scarce. Once Willie waited in line for water with his and his friends canteens all day, only to have the spigot turned off when he reached the front of the line. That meant no water till the next day. Willie decided he had to get out of this Camp or he would surely die. He was lucky enough to get on a work detail which took him back to an area at Clark Field, almost the same building he had stayed in before the War only ~~they were~~^{IT WAS} enclosed in barb wire now. Sanitary conditions were very good and the work not too difficult. The greatest plus for Willie here was that he could work occasionally at a Japanese kitchen which served their troops and this meant he could secure or steal food. Of course, when he got caught stealing food it usually meant a few slaps in the face. Willie thought it was well worth it if they let him keep the food but a lousy deal if they took it from him. Once when Willie was working at the Jap kitchen, they sat him down to peel a big pile of onions. Willie hadn't seen an onion for over a year and so he started eating several just like apples. The Japanese guard looked on in disbelief and was so astonished he didn't even try to stop Willie.

The Japanese had taken over one of our cold storage plants which had quite a supply of frozen meats so when Willie worked at the kitchen he usually tried

to help them cut up the meat because he would get his share of it back to camp by putting it in his shoes. Once they had Corn Beef and were somewhat perplexed by the salty flavor and all the fat. They didn't seem to realize that the meat was between the layers of fat so they were wasting quite a bit of it. Willie took a large piece of corn beef and put it under his jungle helmet for the walk back to Camp which was about four or five blocks away. We usually had to be counted in when we returned to camp and when they got to Willie his helmet was sitting high on his head and the juice from the corn beef was streaking down his face, but the guards never

questioned what he had under his helmet. Another time at the kitchen they kind of got wise to Willie racing over to the meat counter to cut meat and they took him by the ear and put him peeling vegetables, ^{WILLIE} and tied his pants at the bottom. ~~Everything~~ ^{AND LOADED WITH THEM VEGETABLE}

^{EVERYTHING} went fine on the walk back to camp but when they got to Willie on the count off -

the pant legs came loose and all the vegetables rolled out on the ground. Well, they slapped Willie a few times but they let him keep the vegetables so he figured it was a fair exchange.

Then there was the time when the Japs brought a dead hog into camp destined for our soup but our galley crew was a bit leery of using the head and the skin and decided to discard them. Willy watched where they were disposed of and recovered them to make cracklins out of the skin and the head he cooked in a pot. The only thing that bothered Willie was he had the feeling the hogs head was smiling at him as he ate it. Once some wrinkled up and rancid hams were brought into camp. They looked like they might have been a hundred years old. Most of the guys couldn't stand the smell of them let alone eat them but not Willie. He found out if

you mixed the ham with green papaya and then discarded the papaya they didn't taste so rancid, just old.

At this camp Willie finally found an American Officer he could truly respect. He was a young Artillery Captain. The Japanese Officer in charge told him that he and all his men would have to bow to all Japanese officers and soldiers. The Captain said "My men will bow to no one. It is not our custom to bow but we will salute all your men." I think the Japanese officer was really surprised by his stand but respected him for it. From then on we saluted all their men and officers.

Seems like every afternoon we worked it would rain and we would get soaked and then come back to camp with no dry clothes to change into. Willie got tired of this. He got hold of a pink piece of cloth and made a G-string of it. He would wear this to work in and then he had dry clothes to change into back in Camp. In his G-string with a complete tan, Willie truly looked like a native. Even the Japanese were amused by his garb.

Willie was always scrounging for extra food. Once some Mexican guys in Camp told him about a weed that grew on the airfield called Pig Weed. When cooked it was like spinach. Willie started bringing it in bales to camp. It didn't taste too good but it was filling. Then there was the time Willie managed to trade with the Phillipines^s for some extra rice. He ground the rice with a bottle into flour, got some bananas and then soda from a first aid kit. Mixed them all together and baked a cake. The cake came out beautiful but it was so heavy it must have weighed a pound to the inch. It felt like a lead ball in his stomach when Willie ate it. Willie also made pancakes in a similar manner. They turned out like rubber mats but they

were very filling.

One job they had us on was moving 50 gallon drums of gasoline from one building to another. They had a soldier with a Japanese hand calculator keeping count of the drums. When they came across an empty drum they would transfer some gas into another drum to keep their count straight. Everytime they got their count straight they would come across another empty drum. What they didn't know was that when we were handling the drums, we would let them drop hard and they would spring a leak. Finally the Japanese soldier got so excited he threw the calculator as far as he could and that was the last we saw of him.

One night as we were having a talent show and most of the guards were watching, one of our guys escaped over the barbed wire. The Japanese were furious. They cut our food rations and sat our American Captain, Captain Kirk (We referred to him as Capt. Jerk), out in the sun for 4 days. We had absolutely no sympathy for him because he truly was a jerk. One night about midnight they woke us up and herded us into a formation in front of our barracks. Machine guns were trained on us and we could hear the clicking of bolts as they armed them for use. We thought they were going to shoot us all down like cattle but what they did was question us individually as to what we knew about the escape. As Willie was being herded by a guard he relieved himself by letting go with a loud fart. The guard called sharply "No Speak."

They didn't get any information about the escape from us because none of us knew it had been planned. Needless to say that was the first and last talent show we ever had.

The Japanese knew how competitive Americans are so they divided us up into crews of 50 men for a project of building a rock base for a plane taxiway. Crews of 5 men to a screen would shovel dirt onto the screen to get the rock. The rock was then stacked in a pile that could be measured. The first crew that could screen 20 meters of rock would get the rest of the day off. Well we worked so hard that one crew would get their 20 meters of rock by 10 or 11 A.M. The Japanese kept increasing the amount of meters of rock we had to screen but they couldn't outsmart us as we stacked the rock with move voids and so a crew would still get off early.

Willie stayed at Clark Field almost two years and that was good because while there he could almost always scrounge for extra food. Then the Japanese decided to take him to Cabanatuan, the main camp in the Philippines for prisoners of war. There the POWS maintained a large vegetable farm as coolie laborers. One job Willie liked was picking the bugs off the cucumber plants. He always got to eat his fill of cucumbers while removing the bugs.

Willie only stayed here a few months. Then he was taken to Old Bilibid prison ⁱⁿ Manila. Bilibid prison was where they would take prisoners prior to being sent to Japan so within a short time Willie was taken aboard an old cargo vessel and his journey began to Japan. Little did Willie realize the trip would take 62 days. Most of these days would be spent down in the hold of the ship with brief periods at night top side for a breath of fresh air. On this trip we got only two canteen cups of water a day and 2 cups of rice with a small amount of vegetables. SANitary conditions were terrible as little as we were fed you can't put your bowel movement on a timetable. As time proceeded we all got so lousy with lice and smelled so bad

even the guards didn't want to get close to us. Only one American died on this trip and his body buried at sea. The rest of us felt more dead than alive when we reached Japan. One bright spot before then was a stop in Taiwan where the Japanese took on a load of salt. They also took us off the ship and turned a fire hose on us which was a welcome relief. We also got a small amount of fresh fruit.

When we reached Japan we were taken off the ship at a seaport city on the Island of Honshu. Prior to being taken off the ship they checked us out for Cholera by shoving a glass tube up our rectum. Luckily they didn't find any of us to have Cholera. There were about 200 of us and we were paraded down the streets while Japanese civilians shouted at us and kids threw rocks at us. Then we were put on a train and taken to our camp which was located in a coal mining area on the southern part of the Island of Honshu. There were about 200 English prisoners already there. We had to undergo 2 weeks of Japanese recruit drill so we could learn their commands. Sometimes we felt we could understand the Japanese better than we could the Cockney English. They did have one advantage. Their highest ranking officer was a Major and our American officers two Captains who both together wouldn't have made a good Boy Scout leader. Oh yes! We had an American Doctor who was a Captain. He was an Obstetrician and we needed an Obstetrician like we needed two assholes. He turned out to be a pretty good Doctor in spite of his specialty.

Our work in the coal mines was the lowest type of coolie labor. Ten to twelve hours a day for 10 days then one days work in camp and then 10 days on night shift. There was about a mile walk from our camp to the mines. All along side the road were vegetable gardens. The first night the Americans worked in the coal mines, the trail in the morning looked like a hoard of locusts had hit. The roadside gardens were stripped clean. Willie had the misfortune of getting Garlic which when

picked green has an extra strong odor and all the Japanese guards were sniffing but didn't find it on Willie. Always when situations seemed the worst Willie managed to have some divine force from above taking care of him. On our day off in Camp we usually did clean up work such as emptying the outside toilets. This was a very unpleasant job for Willie because his partner on the other end of a pole carrying two five gallon buckets of sewage invariably was a very short person and Willie being tall meant the buckets would swish back and forth spilling the contents all over Willie but that didn't faze him, he could have eaten dinner right in the middle of it if he had a dinner.

Willie was always on the lookout for a better type of work because he disliked working in the coal mines. One pretty good job that he got was to keep the bath water hot for Japanese officers and men. In order for you to understand I have to explain their procedure for heating bath water. They had cement tubs on a concrete slab floor. Underneath the floor they have several pipes and a place hollowed out underneath the pipes for a wood fire to heat them. The only problem was that Willie built such a roaring fire that the pipes got red hot and the water so hot in the tubs they couldn't get near them for hours. As a consequence Willie was fired from this job for being too efficient so it was back to the mines for Willie.

Working in the coal mines was a damp, cold, dirty and sometimes hazardous job for Willie especially since he was tall and the mind shaft overhead low. He was continually bumping his head. The one thought that kept him going was the thought of having a hot bath at the end of the day even if it was with forty or fifty other guys and the water was black with coal dust.

Then came a turn of events which made our work in the mines more difficult. They changed our diet. Rice was becoming scarce so they started feeding us Bean flakes which was a product of soy beans after all the food value was extracted. We were mostly getting roughage from our diet and consequently diarrhea. The guards were furious because every place they stepped they stepped in our crap.

Then one day a beautiful sight appeared for us. Hundreds of American B-29 Bombers flew over our Camp and we knew the end of the war was near. Our country hadn't forgotten us. The planes dropped leaflets telling us not to overeat or over medicate. Then they dropped food and medicine. Of course we didn't pay attention to their warning. We ate anything and everything. Willie was going thru the rations which included candy bars and eating the candy so fast he was halfway thru a bar of soap because he discovered it wasn't candy. We wondered why the B-29s kept dropping so much food at our camp every three days. Later we found out that most camps in our area were already evacuated by the American Army. If we had waited for the Army to evacuate us we might still be waiting. We finally evacuated ourselves by getting on a Japanese train which took us to a seaport where a Navy hospital ship evacuated us to Okinawa. From Okinawa we were flown to the Philippines.

Then there was a problem for Willie. They wanted to take him home the rest of the trip by ship which would take about three weeks. Willie decided that was too long a time. After all he had waited almost four years so Willy decided to see what he could do about securing a flight home by air. After being shuffled from one office to another Willie was getting a little hot under the collar and very angry. Finally one clerk told him he might get some satisfaction if he went to see the Sgt. Major. Then he got the shock of his life. There sitting before him was the Sgt. Major, the largest woman in uniform Willie had ever seen. In fact, the only woman he had ever seen in Uniform. She told him to calm down and asked what she could do for him. Willie said he wanted to get on a flight back to the States. The Sgt. Major told him if he was willing to wait ten days she would see that he was on a flight home. In ten days Willy was on a flight home to the good old USA. The plane Willie was on made a few hours stop over at Hawaii but as much as Willie wanted to see Hawaii, he didn't dare leave his seat on the plane because he could have been ranked out of his seat.

There were quite a few people waiting for a flight back to the U.S. It was almost 4 years to the day that Willie arrived back in San Francisco. There he was taken to Letterman Army Hospital for observation and treatment but being confined any place was not for Willie. Although he didn't have any clothes - in his pajamas he hailed a cab. He got as far as the Main Gate where the guard informed him he had to have clothes on to leave the Hospital. Willie was determine to see San Francisco so he managed to borrow some clothes and make it into the city. Willie was confused in the city, he didn't know what to do first. He went to a music store and had them play all the records he hadn't heard. The he went to a Special Waffle Shop that made all different kinds of Waffles. He ate his fill and then proceeded back to the Hospital where much to his surprise his girl friend who had waited four years for him to return was waiting to greet him. It was a wonderful reunion and Willie was as happy as one person could be. Shortly after that in 1945, Willies' girl friend became his wife and has been ever since.

It hasn't been easy for her married to Willie because of Willies utter disregard of material things and his almost God like lust for good food. Willie found out in his four years overseas how little a person really needed to exist on: faith in God, hope for the future and the will to survive. Many men could not grasp these things so they did not survive. Survival of the fittest doesn't just mean the body. It really means the MInd. The Japanese could do anything they wanted to Willies body but they couldn't control ~~Willies~~ ^{His} mind.

That was Willies alone. No one could control his thoughts or ever will.

INSERT
This is my story, Willie Hunns story. Never brave, never a Hero but truly a Survivor.