

I was recently contacted by a volunteer for a group that, 67 years after WWII ended, is still searching for the remains of American fighting men who never returned home. He was hoping I could put him in touch with the family of Seldon T. White who grew up in this area. Seldon has a marker in the Holdenville Cemetery beside his mother Sarah E. "Sallie" White. He is also listed on a memorial in the American cemetery in Manila, in the Philippines. His remains are not located in either place. Seldon was executed after escaping from a prisoner of war camp and being recaptured. His execution was done in private, away from the camp, along with another prisoner that had escaped with him. They were buried by their executioners on the spot they were forced to kneel, and subsequently shot in the back of the head on July 7, 1943. This volunteer was good enough to provide me with the affidavit of a Japanese soldier that was present on Seldon's last day of life.

Seldon was born to Allen C. "Acey" and Sarah E. "Sallie" White on January 5th, 1922. He would only have been 21 years old at the time of his death. He attended High School at Spaulding and was a member of the Missionary Baptist Church. In searching the US Census records I have found that he had five siblings: Della J. (abt 1912), Nora L. (abt 1913), Oklahoma (abt 1915), Preston Arthur (1917-1998), and James B. White (abt 1925).

Seldon enlisted in the US Marine Corp on January 10, 1940 and by July 1941 was assigned to Headquarters Company (Company "H") 4th Marines Regiment in Shanghai, China, where he was performing his duties as a radio operator. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941 the Marines were evacuated from China to the Philippines where they fought with the US Army and Philippine units during the epic siege of Bataan and Corregidor. They courageously endured six months of hunger, wounds and hardship before the last of the U.S. forces surrendered in May 1942. Thereafter, one kind of hell was traded for another, when the 4th Marines endured 3 1/2 years of torment as POWs.

The affidavit provided by Ushitaro Hamano, a Superior Private in the Japanese Army assigned to Toshigoshi Platoon, 111th Land Duty Company on Palawan Island of the Philippines where the prisoners of war were kept gives the following details.

"I was on watch duty on that day as a guard to watch over around the place of labor for the construction of the airfield. When calling the roll before starting the work in the afternoon after lunch, we found that two of the prisoners of war were missing. So we stopped to work, and sent the rest of the prisoners back to the camp for the moment, and our unit immediately started in search of the missing prisoners of war. I was sent to Tagburos area."

He estimated that it was about a week before he was recalled to the camp because the prisoners had been recaptured. He returned to his regular duties until he was called one day to be part of an escort for the two prisoners. They were loaded in the back of a truck. The guard recalled that he noticed three shovels in the back of the truck and suspected what was about to happen. He recalled the drive through the country, with his Commander looking for a suitable location. When they stopped, they were ordered to get out of the truck with the prisoners and "the shovels, too." He estimated that they walked about 20 metres from the truck to a space of ground covered with sand and ordered his men to dig a hole about 5 feet square. The following is his account of the execution:

"When they dug up a hole, the Commander spoke to Sergeant Suzukawa, who told us "to keep watch at a proper position not to allow the natives living in the neighborhood come near." I immediately went into a bush on the right side to keep watch. As there seemed no native inhabitants around, I looked toward the prisoners now and then. Just when I looked that way, the prisoners were kneeling down in front of the hole. As I looked from behind them, they were hanging their heads down and I could not see their faces well. Two men were standing behind the prisoners with guns in their hands. At this sight, I thought, "Why did they run away? Were things so hard for them that they had to run away?" I had no courage to look at the prisoners and turned my eyes to the coconut plantation, where the truck was placed in the direction of the way back, looking ready to take us back.

All was quiet there. The sound of the waves was heard from the shore nearby and the sea breeze came rustling over the coconut leaves.

All of a sudden the silence was broken by the report of the gun. I was surprised and nearly dropped my gun.

Turning toward the prisoners, I saw them fallen on the edge of the hole. The commander, Sergeant Suzukawa, and the interpreter were looking down at the dead bodies. Relieved of duty to watch, we also went to the spot.

He goes on to describe the horrendous wounds to the heads of Seldon and the other soldier.

I saw all this from a distance, but noticed everyone looked pale. When the prisoners were buried, the Commander said "Do not talk to anyone of the prisoners of war we shot to death."

Hamano went on to name the Officer and the other 4 soldiers who were present at the execution.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the people who volunteer their time and efforts to repatriating the remains of American soldiers still lost overseas. If anyone has information about any close relatives of Seldon who might want to thank this man for his time and effort spent in trying to bring Seldon home. I will gladly put them in touch with him. I am planning to donate a copy of the affidavit to the Holdenville Historical Museum, where it will be available to read.

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