

# Alumni in the News

## They Fought to Live

The gruesome details of thousands of O. U. and other state men of prison life under the Japs has been told over and over, but this a historical series of incidents of a group of twenty-three Oklahomans who lived through it and now can tell the story.

They lived through it in spite of the Bataan Death March, starvation rations at the hands of their Japanese captors, incredible cruelty and numerous reasons which ordinarily make men die.

Now those back home, that is the twenty-three who lived, can sit at home, can visit with friends, can enjoy these good United States, and talk and eat and sleep. They can carry forward now with their plans for the completion of a national charter for this grim band of "Zentsujians" of which the Oklahomans' chapter was the first branch. Their little "dreamed-up" organization now promises to become national overnight. For those who survived it meant life, this prison-made organization of theirs—indeed, it finally meant freedom from Jap prisons.

Hundreds died around the Oklahomans every day in their prison camps as they moved from one to another. Then the Oklahomans in little bunches talked, desperately and quietly.

On the O. U. Sooner list the major who, though desperately weak and ill with life nearly gone at times, planned and dreamed was Major Clifford C. Hines of Norman. When they were finally shipped to the Zentsujian camp in the mountains it was Clif Hines who on his improvised bundle of straw (a Jap prison camp "Beautyrest")—confined to his bundle of straw by beri-beri and unable to be of much personal assistance to himself because of the scourge of disease and malnutrition—first mumbled out the words that called the meeting of the "Oklahoma Club." In whispered undertones the message spread among the 300 officers and thirty enlisted men who were still survivors at that time in the mountain prison camp.

Then the fight to live began. Weak and half-starved, these Sooners lived because they stood together. They secretly declared they would stand together and form a "survivors' club." Dysentery, malaria, and disease of every kind swept the camp; men nearly lost their minds in the wake of it. But not an Oklahoman died after they originated the Oklahoma Club.

When one man was going under with the strain and torture, extra bits of food mysteriously began coming his way, because among starving men it's hard to give away even a bite of rice.

The winter before, Red Cross boxes had given them strength to survive, but now those were gone. Their captors refused to release new Red Cross supplies.

When the Jap captors informed them they must go to work clearing a mountainside so that they could grow food for "themselves," the situation seemed hopeless. Starved men couldn't do such work.

Starved? Yes, more than starved. The incident, is now related by these O. U. Sooners, who survived as the handful of twenty-three, of their clearing this mountainside groping on hands and knees and eagerly toasting snakes, frogs, and other live reptiles that they could push into the smoldering bon fires they were permitted to build to take away a little of the chill. As one Sooner survivor puts it "You knew me when I was a kid in school. You knew of the hardships that my widowed mother had in providing food while trying to educate her children. You have seen me when I thought I was hungry; but until hunger goes into your elbow and you can feel its pangs to the tips of your fingers, one never knows what hunger means."

The prison life continued. It was August 17, 1945, that the Americans were given the order: "No more work." Something was in the air—the Oklahomans knew it. But the Japs refused to talk.

On August 22 the Jap second lieutenant came to

the camp to see the American colonel.

"You are now the guests of the emperor," he said through an interpreter. "We can now give you more food, and some clothing."

All the Oklahomans could think of was: "No winter here again without heat or clothing." (They had been captured in light khakis and in shorts.) Then the Oklahomans ran for cover with the other Zentsujians.

American B-29's were coming over—low because the camp sat in a narrow valley between the mountains. They dropped tons of food in big metal drums.

The men gathered up the shattered food and supplies, Major Hines recalls, and existed hopefully until the big day, September 2.

About 20 Jap guards and officers surrendered to the prisoners. One of the Americans had slipped an American flag in his bedding. If the Japs had found this, it would have meant instant death.

But this was the day of surrender. The Americans demanded a bugle from the Japs and got it. Then they erected a flag pole.

Some sobbed, some cheered, some stood silently, too full of emotion to speak as their flag was raised.

Major Hines says he kept thinking through the ceremony of the days and nights they were crowded into box cars, jammed together too tightly to lie down.

The prison camp ceremony was finished. Days later they saw an American truck wending its way around the mountain road.

Americans! Even two American nurses. An American sergeant was running toward them. Suddenly he stopped and stared. He seemed to think it incredible any human beings could look so emaciated.

The prisoners stared back.

"Why in the world don't you guys say something?" he yelled finally. Then Americans met Americans.



Reading left to right are E. E. Duncan, secretary of the Oklahoma Retail Druggist Service Center, Joe R. Davis, '32ph.c, chief pharmacist mate just released and going on a job and J. H. Childs who just has slipped into his civvies and is going to enroll in a College of Pharmacy the second semester of this year.