

Episode #29 – Aldrich Brothers -- Transcript

[Note] *This episode contains graphic details of war crimes and killing that are not suitable for some listeners.*

[Narrator] Jack Aldrich, a 22-year-old New Mexican with blue eyes and sandy brown hair framing a round face that boasted prominent dimples on each cheek, jumped to the ground, an automatic reflex to the shell that hit the ammunition dump at the airstrip where he was stationed on Bataan.

[Soldier] “Jap artillery,”

[Narrator] An American serviceman lying next to Jack stated. Staring toward the now burning dump in the fading light of the April evening, Jack replied:

[Jack] “They’ll be here soon.”

[Narrator] An officer came by, barking urgent orders:

[Officer] “Gun batteries destroy your weapons!”

[Narrator] More explosions soon rocked the small dirt airstrip as the 200th Coast Artillery blew up their guns and equipment, so that the arriving Japanese forces could not use them.

Their weapons destroyed, Jack and several other men set out on foot into the nearby hills, shrapnel from the still-burning ammunition dump continued to fly in the air. They could hear the rumble and squeal of enemy tanks on the road below them and ducked deeper into the Bataan jungle.

They continued on for hours, as darkness fell and their path became obscured by night. When the exhausted men stopped for a 10-minute rest, a 7.6 magnitude earthquake rattled them, as if nature herself was telling them to continue moving. They did, stumbling through the dark jungle for hours.

Eventually clouds overhead parted and moonlight lit their way. They could see well enough now to make their way down to the busy, crowded road below. That, at least, was still in US hands.

But they didn’t know where they were. Was Cabcaben ahead or behind them? They stumbled down the road through the masses of southbound Americans and Filipinos, asking servicemen they came across:

[Soldier 1] “What outfit are you?”

[Narrator] At last someone answered,

[Soldier 4] “Two Hon’erd!”

[Narrator] Relieved, the exhausted men fell to the ground and slept.

They’d found their unit.

But it was anyone's guess what the morning would bring.

This is *Left Behind*.

Welcome to "Left Behind," a podcast about the people left behind when the US surrendered The Philippines in the early days of WW2.

I'm Anastasia Harman, and I tell you the stories of WW2 servicemen and women, civilians, guerillas, and others captured by Japanese forces in The Philippines. My great-grandfather Alma Salm was one of the POWs, and his memoir inspired me to tell stories of his fellow captives.

This is the 3rd of 4 episodes focusing on the Bataan Death March. And today we'll meet two brothers – Jack and Bobby Aldrich – who joined the same military unit, fought together on Bataan, and marched together on the Death March, only to be separated in Japan POW camps.

I had the pleasure of speaking with cousins Suzanne Delaware and Jean Gerry, who are the daughters of Jack Aldrich and Bobby Aldrich, respectively. You'll hear from both ladies throughout the episode, as they tell their fathers' stories. In fact, these delightful women shared so much fantastic information that I've had a difficult time picking and choosing what to include.

Let's jump in.

POW's Life Story

Before the War

[Narrator] Jack Aldrich was born in Alva, Oklahoma, in August 1920. Two years later, in July 1922, his brother Robert, or Bobby as he was called, joined the family.

Jack and Bobby were the only children of Ross and Grace Aldrich. Father Ross was a telegraph operator when his sons were born in the early 1920s, but by 1930, he'd relocated the family to Belen, New Mexico, a rural town about 30 miles south of Albuquerque, where he worked as a clerk for the railroad.

While living in Belen, the brothers found an interesting way to make money. Jack's daughter Suzanne Delaware told me:

[Suzanne] "When they lived there, the train station was really close. So they used to go down to the train station. And somehow, they borrowed a donkey. And they got up on the donkey, and they'd wear big sombreros. And the tourists would take pictures and give them money.

"And sometimes the tourists would egg them on to wrestle. So, they'd get down. They'd be wrestling. And again, the tourists would give them a little money.

“He just loved that story. I could just see him doing it, you know? I think they were pretty active little boys.”

[Narrator] Their father continued working for the railroad throughout the Great Depression. And during that time, the railroad moved the Aldrich family several times within New Mexico. They had settled in Clovis, which is 10 miles from New Mexico’s eastern boarder with Texas, by the late 1930s.

Jack was an active student during his high school years. Here’s Suzanne again:

[Suzanne] “He was on the swim team. During the summer he was the lifeguard. And he was on the gymnastics team. And when they would have parades, he would do somersaults and flips in the parade with some other gymnast.”

1940 was a year of big changes for the Aldrich brothers. That spring, 17-year-old Bobby graduated high school. Jack had been accepted to art school in St. Louis. But...well life went a different direction.

The brothers enlisted in the New Mexico National Guard 200th Coast Artillery, likely in late spring or early summer 1940 – just after Bobby graduated. Bobby lied about his age to join the Army because, as his daughter Jean Gerry told me, he couldn’t let his older brother go and do something without him. By August 1940, the brothers were in training at Ft. Bliss in El Paso, Texas.

Here’s Jean then read from a letter that their mother Grace wrote to family members:

[Jean] “The boys were in the national guard. And they were inducted into the regular army before going to Fort Bliss, Texas. You see the 200 was an entirely new outfit. It had been a Calvary unit. But it was converted into coast artillery.”

[Narrator] Their mother was surprised by their decision to join. Here’s Jean again:

[Jean] “Uncle Jack said to her. ‘Mother, you know how cold it gets here in Clovis? Well, our uncle has invited us to spend the winter with him in El Paso.’ And so that's kind of how he told her that he was gone.

“And then my dad said to her: Mother, when you hear the ice plant whistle one long and three shorts, I won’t be home for lunch. And she said, ‘What in the world would does a blowing whistle have to do with you being hungry?’ And he said that they have a mobilization. ‘Bobby, what are you trying to tell me?’ ‘I have joined the national guard.’ You see, he really wasn't old enough, but thought a few weeks would matter. So, when he really was 18, he was officially 19. Little did he know all this meant.”

The 200th Coastal Artillery was, by January 1941, considered one of the premier anti-aircraft regiments in the Army and was called into active duty. A former member of the unit recalled:

[Serviceman] “We were a cross section of New Mexico...professors, students, miners, lumberjacks, cowboys, rodeo performers, sheepherders, farmers, bus drivers. We had Navajos, Pueblos, Apache’s, and Zunis. And everyone performed 120 percent.”

[Narrator] Jack, an incredible typist, became the battery clerk. Bobby eventually became a Staff Sergeant of Communications in the 200th.

In August 1941, a little over a year after joining the Coastal Artillery, the Aldrich brothers and the 200th Coast Artillery headed west to San Francisco. They didn't know where they were headed. Bobby's daughter, Jean, shared:

[Jean] "My dad and his mom worked out a code. Because he was in charge of communications and stuff, he knew that letters would be censored, so to speak. Because they couldn't say where they were going. So, they worked out a code. By using these words in his letter, she would know where he was. And if he ever mentioned "sand," that was the Wake Islands. "Beads" meant, Guam and "Wooden Bowl," The Philippines.

"So, he wrote a letter to her talking to her about a Wooden Bowl. She knew he was going to the Philippines based on that."

[Narrator] The 200th was indeed going to The Philippines. They were stationed at Clark Field when Japan attacked on December 8, 1941, and the men of the 200th were the first to fire on the Japanese that day. It was the first time 21-year-old Jack felt true fear. He recalled:

[Jack] "You get a strange metallic taste in your mouth. I didn't know what fear was until that day."

During the War

[Narrator] Jack, Bobby, and the 200th withdrew to Bataan with the rest of American and Filipino forces in early January 1942. They were ordered to protect the Bataan and Cabcaben airstrips, both on the south eastern part of Bataan.

Jack was stationed near the Bataan airstrip, about 3 miles north of Cabcaben airstrip, when the Japanese launched their final assault on April 3, 1942. The enemy quickly broke through the American-Filipino lines and moved south as Allied servicemen and women and civilians fled before them.

Jack recalled:

[Jack] "We were still at Bataan Field waiting for orders, when a shell hit our ammo dump, and we knew the Jap artillery would be there soon.

"The gun batteries started destroying their weapons and we loaded the regimental records and our barracks bags onto a truck, which took off at top speed. We never saw it again.

"We followed on foot along the mountain top. Shrapnel from the dump was still flying, and we could hear the clank and squeal of Jap tanks on the road right below us, and sporadic small-arms fire. We took cover in the rainforest, moving fast and stopping briefly to discuss our situation in whispers.

"About dusk a loud blast ahead, and an explosion behind, made us hit the dirt. A '75' mounted on a half-track was firing over us. 'Don't shoot, were Americans!' we yelled. They told us to shut

up, waved us on, and continued firing. At a cross trail an MP told us to keep moving—the Japs were right behind.

“In the night we stopped for a 10-minute rest. That’s when the quake hit. Then we went on. We had to join the regiment by sunrise. Later the clouds broke and the moonlight enabled us to angle down the mountain toward the bay.

“The road was jammed, and at one stream the vehicles were mired in deep ruts, and we got caught in a vehicle-pushing detail for two hours.

“Finally they let us go on. We didn’t know where we were, or where the regiment was, and we kept yelling in the dark, ‘What outfit are you?’ At last someone answered, ‘Two Hon’erd!’ We dropped on the ground and fell asleep.”

[Narrator] Jack Aldrich had reached Cabcaban Airfield. He was among the last of the 200th to get there.

The next morning, April 9, rumors started spreading: Gen. Ed King was surrendering Bataan. A Jeep trailing a white flag and carrying two of Gen King’s surrender emissaries had passed by Jack Aldrich around sunrise as he awoke at the airfield. (Episode 25 covers the details of Gen. King’s surrender.)

Although the men had seen it coming, surrender was a shock. American servicemen couldn’t believe that the Stars and Stripes wouldn’t prevail. Battle-hardened men openly cried in humiliation. Some, including Jack Aldrich, still wanted to fight:

[Jack] “We were prepared to sell ourselves dearly that day. The Japs didn’t know how lucky they were when King surrendered! And we were sure that even if they did surrender us, it would only be a month at most before the Yanks would be in there.”

[Narrator] But surrender had happened and now Jack, Bobby, and the rest of the 200th Coastal Artillery were Prisoners of War.

The scene at Cabcaban airfield soon became chaotic, as hundreds, even thousands, of American and Filipino servicemen continued to pour out of the jungles. Japanese tanks, trucks, and soldiers soon arrived. The Japanese lined up the American and Filipino soldiers, and one POW remembered:

[POW] “They had pistols ready, and I expected to be shot. But they started with stealing jewelry, watches, cigarettes -- anything of value.”

[Narrator] Another shared that a Japanese soldier

[POW2] “made me open my mouth and looked at my teeth. He held a pair of pliers. I saw him pulling the teeth of several American soldiers. The pliers had blood all over them.”

[Narrator] The Japanese soldier was looking for gold fillings – but this POW’s were probably too small to be worth anything, and the soldier didn’t take the man’s teeth, instead kicking him and shoving him aside to continue the gold-tooth quest.

After looting the POWs, the Japanese herded the American prisoners into a field for the night – with no food and no water.

[Narrator] During surrender negotiations, the Japanese leaders promised that the POWs would be treated humanely.

[Nakayama] “We’re not barbarians,”

[Narrator] Japanese Colonel Nakayama had told Gen. Ed King at surrender. Earlier propaganda leaflets dropped over Bataan had promised the POWs would be treated in accordance with the Geneva Convention.

But, from the beginning, that wouldn’t be the case.

A horse-mounted Japanese cavalry unit chased a couple of American POWs and “ran them down with their horses—just for fun.”

Another POW recounted watching a wounded Filipino soldier in an upper body cast and brace trying to climb into a truck, but the Japanese guards hit him off with clubs. Then a guard jerked the body cast off the man and blood started spurting everywhere. When the Filipino again tried to get on the truck, the guard shot him with a rifle at pointblank range. His body fell into the road. The witnessing POW said:

[POW] “I saw seven heavy trucks, driven by Japanese, drive over his body. For 15 or 20 minutes, I heard an almost constant stream of trucks run over his body. When the Japanese herded us down the road, all that was left of this body was a pile of plaster of Paris, bones, and hair in a pool of blood.”

[Narrator] And that was day 2 of captivity.

The next day, the prisoners from Mariveles arrived. Some 35,000 POWs left the southernmost town on Bataan, about 9 miles west of Cabcaben Field, on April 10. Historians Michael and Elizabeth Norman wrote:

[Norman] “During the first few days of walking there were so many men on the road, one bunch following closely behind another, they appeared a procession without end, prisoners as far as the eye could see, mile after mile of tired, filthy, bedraggled men, heads bowed, feet dragging, through the ankle-deep dust.”

[Narrator] The Aldrich brothers started their march from Cabcaben airfield, thereby missing the first 9 or so miles and ultimately having a slightly shorter march than the men who set out from Mariveles. All along the route, groups of Filipino and American prisoners, caught in the jungle and other areas on Bataan, joined the march.

From Cabcaban airfield, the main National Road went north, following the eastern Bataan coast.

They marched in groups, 3-4 columns per group, 100-200 men per column. Guards with 15-inch bayonets attached to their rifles accompanied each group, urging stragglers forward with jabs in their back or butt. Jack Aldrich recalled:

- [Jack] “We were denied food and water, and made to march at a gait that kept the Japs with us at a dogtrot. When they were replaced by guards on bicycles, we were pushed faster. And that was when the hot sun and the lack of water and food began to take its toll, and guys already weakened by disease and hunger [from the Bataan campaign], began to fall by the side of the road.”
- [Narrator] Fallen men were bayoneted and left for dead. One marcher witnessed a fellow prisoner fall to the ground. A guard kicked him and ordered him to stand, but, when the young man got only to his knees before collapsing again, the guard kicked him harder, then placed his bayonet to the fallen man’s throat, pushed it in, then jerked the blade free. The young prisoner lay still, bleeding out in the dirt.
- Such scenes played out hundreds of times as the march continued. Another POW recalled:
- [POW 2] “I remember one boy who was ill and stopped on the march. He was ordered back into line by a guard. The boy tried to explain to the guard by pointing at his stomach. The guard shot him in the stomach.”
- [Narrator] A few men, however, escaped such treatment:
- [POW] “I got to the side of the road and fell, holding my stomach. Here came a Jap with his bayonet. I moved quick. That bayonet slashed down. I got up and ran, stomach or not, and he came after me hollering. I ran till I got in the middle of that column.”
- [Narrator] Soldiers in Japanese truck-and-troop convoys coming the opposite direction from the marchers would hit the prisoners with rifle butts or bamboo sticks. A survivor later recalled to a newspaper:
- [Newspaper] “A guard came down the line vindictively striking prisoners with a rifle butt. The man directly in front of [me] was severely beaten because he was still wearing his helmet while most of the marchers were bare headed.”
- [Narrator] History has asked, since this horrific war crime came to light, why the Japanese were so cruel to the prisoners, especially the American POWs. I explained a few thoughts and reasons in the last episode (number 28) about Ray Hunt – including that the guards were young men trying to show their worth and indoctrinated with the idea that a man who surrendered was worth nothing. Lower than animals.
- To these, we can add two more reasons: Retaliation and Racism.
- First, retaliation:

Japanese forces suffered heavy casualties during the Battle of Bataan. One Japan regiment entered the Bataan campaign with nearly 3,000 men; by the end it numbered fewer than 650 men. That's a loss of more than 80% of that regiment. Japanese units fought to complete annihilation rather than surrender. Thus the Japanese suffered extremely high casualties, especially when compared with the American and Filipino forces they were fighting.

Capturing The Philippines took the Japanese much longer than originally expected due to the strong Filipino and American defense. Japan had to send reinforcements of soldiers and equipment to The Philippines – reinforcements that were intended other Pacific invasions. The Allied defense of Bataan ultimately prevented Japanese invasion of Australia. And Japanese leadership wasn't happy about that.

So both of these factors played into a retaliation mentality.

Furthermore, Japanese soldiers seemed to go out of their way to humiliate American prisoners in front of Filipinos. This was, likely, an attempt to show the Filipinos that the Americans were weak and nothing. And this brings us to the subject of racism – which is an interesting and complex topic.

Here's a bit of oversimplified Japanese history: In the late 1800s, an industrializing Japan sought to join the world's imperialistic powers – namely the US and Britain. But, by the early 1930s, those western powers deliberately sought to restrict Japan's rise. These actions confirmed to Japan that the west was trying to push Japan down because its people were Asian.

Japan itself already had its own notions of where Japanese people fit in the social order – at the top, as the most superior people on the earth. This belief permeated to all of Japan's enemies – from the Chinese to the white Americans and British. Historian Mark Felton wrote:

[Felton] “From Day 1 of basic training, Japanese military officers taught that the Chinese were blood enemies and an inferior race, and that Japanese would one day rule the world.

“As Caucasians had dominated Asia before 1941, it was they, according to Japanese thinking, who had tried to subordinate the Japanese and who had refused to recognize Japan's legitimate right to be a great power. Thus, from the Japanese point of view, World War II was literally a race war. When Tokyo's initial victories in 1941 put the boot on the other foot, Japanese troops were quick to use it to stamp on the white man's face. The widespread barbarity and cruelty practiced by Japanese forces were clearly indicative of that hatred and loathing —and perhaps a deep-seated inferiority complex—many Japanese soldiers harbored toward their white foes.”

[Narrator] Gavan Dawes, an American historian, wrote in 1994:

[Dawes] “By 1941, the Japanese were ready to take on the white world in war, and they truly did not care anymore what the white man thought of them. They had torn the Geneva Convention to pieces. White men could go to hell, and the Japanese would be the ones to send them there.”

[Narrator] So Japan indoctrinated their military personnel with ideology that Japan was the “master race” who would rule over all Asian countries and cultures -- and perhaps the world. Add in the fact that the Japanese captured so many thousands of American prisoners on Bataan – well that just proved their point that they were in fact a superior race.

Well, from Cabcaben airfield, Jack and Bobby Aldrich would have marched nearly 30 miles north to the top of Bataan Peninsula. They then followed a roughly northeastern direction along roads that took them to the town of San Fernando. (I’ve put a map of the Bataan Death March route on the Left Behind Facebook and Instagram profiles.)

They stopped at the town’s train station, where their captors shoved them into hot, airless, 200-square-foot boxcars, packed tight with a hundred men standing shoulder to shoulder.

[Narrator] Here’s Jack Aldrich’s daughter, Suzanne:

[Suzanne] “He told me they just watched men die right there because there's no air. They were packed in there so tightly, that they had the doors open so they could get air. And all of a sudden something kept hitting him. ‘Ow! Ow! What is that? Ow!’ Well, the Filipino people had lined the trains and were throwing fruit into them.”

[Narrator] The train took them north where they entered Camp O’Donnell, a former Filipino training camp that was in no condition to accept 75,000 prisoners. Disease ran rampant at the camp, and death march survivors died at staggering numbers.

After about 6 weeks at O’Donnell, Jack and Bobby Aldrich were transferred to the Cabanatuan POW camps in June 1942. The first months at Cabanatuan were disease filled and grueling. Jack recalled:

[Jack] “There were so many people dead and dying [in camp] I felt I had to get out of there. Work details were the best, so I volunteered for that.”

[Narrator] Work details were out-of-camp assignments to work on various projects – like road or airstrip building. Jack’s work detail built a runway in Las Pinas, about 13 miles/22 km south of Manila. Jack recalled:

[Jack] “Sharp objects in the gooey mud made foot injuries common as we built runways over rice paddies. When we failed to meet our quota, the Jap honcho jumped on our crew chief, and broke his watch with his stick. The next day he broke his arm.

“We screwed up every way we could. Surveying crews gave wrong readings. We threw loose dirt in the depressions, with no stable base. The runways were never even. We left diesel equipment in the rain.”

[Narrator] About a year after arriving at Cabanatuan, Bobby Aldrich was part of a POW group transferred to the Omuta POW camp on Japan’s Kyushu Island. Bobby and his fellow POWs were the first

group to arrive at the newly opened camp. Over the next 2 years, more than 1,200 additional POWs, including British, Dutch, and Korean men, arrived.

The POWs at this camp worked a mine that was owned by the Mitsui Mining Company. The POWs were paid a pittance, if they received wages at all.

Bobby's daughter, Jean, recalls a couple of camp experiences that he later shared with her:

[Jean] "He talked about being down in the mines and there was telephones down there that the guards would use periodically to call up and find out how much longer they had to work. I think they worked like 10 days straight and one day off or something like that.

"So he and a buddy, when the guards weren't around, they'd go to the telephone and call up. They learned the Japanese words, and they would call up to find out how much more time they had. And they were caught. They were taken to camp superiors. And they looked at the other guy and they said, 'Are you trying to learn Japanese?' And the guy said, 'Yes.' And they killed him. And then they looked at my dad and they said, 'Are you trying to learn Japanese?' And he said, 'No, I'm just trying to understand it.'" So he wasn't killed. For whatever reason he was spared.

"One time he was near an ocean or something and a little Japanese child was struggling in the water, drowning. And he broke whatever he was in and went in and rescued the child. He was given a care package from home because he did that."

[Narrator] The mine work was exhausting and back breaking. A newspaper article later reported:

[Newspaper] "From August 9, 1943, to August 24, 1945, Aldrich swung a pick thousands of feet below the ground. He and other prisoners were rustled out of husk-stuffed mattresses at 4 am. They worked rotating shifts, each 12 hours long, and worked 9 of 10 days. Aldrich subsisted on a diet of rice and mullet. He figures it was about 900 calories a day."

[Narrator] Such work and harsh treatment nearly broke Bobby's spirit. Jean shared:

[Jean] "One time being in the prison camp and almost being at his wits end, and he just started praying and he said, 'I just. I don't know if I can do this. I don't know if I can continue on this way.' And he said as he was praying, a butterfly, a light blue butterfly, came and landed on his shoulder. And he said at that point he knew he was going to survive. And so that just kind of sheared him up again, strengthened him, to continue going towards survival."

[Narrator] On August 6, 1945, Bobby Aldrich witnessed the flash from the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki, about 40 miles/64 km away from his camp. It gave him scar tissue in his eyes.

Not long afterward, the 23-year-old was liberated from the POW camp. On August 24, he began the journey home, leaving the city of Nagasaki by train. A poignant photograph captured the moment, showing him with fellow GIs at the train yard. Pointing to a skinny figure on a stretcher, Bobby told a reporter,

[Bobby] "See the skinny guy on the stretcher? The one with the coffee mug? That's me."

[Narrator] I've tried to find that picture, but I haven't been able to do so. But while he was holding that coffee mug, a female reporter came into camp. Jean continued:

[Jean] "When the war was over and the first person that walked into one of the prison camps was a reporter. And the first time he saw a woman he's holding a cup of coffee between the two palms of his hand and a donut on each finger. And that's the first time he saw a woman in three and a half years. And he said, 'I didn't know what I wanted more--the donuts or the woman. 'He just always added a little bit of sappiness to kind of make you chuckle.'"

Jack Aldrich remained at Cabanatuan for about a year after his brother left. He was transferred to Japan as part of a ship convoy, which I believe included the hell ship Hokusen Maru. Departing from Manila on October 3rd, 1944, the convoy carried 1,100 prisoners.

Their journey was far from smooth. While anchored in Hong Kong for 10 days (without the POWs disembarking), the convoy was attacked by American planes. The remaining convoy continued to Taiwan, and the exhausted men disembarked on November 8th—more than a month after they'd been loaded on to the ship in Manila.

Life on board the ship was a nightmare. Food was scarce, and water was a luxury some days. Jack recalled,

[Jack] "We were packed so close together that we couldn't sit down. ... It was unbearably hot. The toilet facilities were a 5-gallon bucket for over 100 men. They only had two of those buckets. When the bucket was full when they would toss it overboard...and then they would fill it up with water. Guys were drinking this sewer water. They cut their wrists and drank their blood and attacked each other. These hell ships were worse than the Death March."

[Narrator] Jack's brother Bobby had also spent time on a hell ship and later told his daughter Jean:

[Jean] "He said, 'During that time we drank own urine cause we were so thirsty,' but urine is phosphorus. So in the darkness of the bow of the ship, somebody would burp and there'd be a flash of light because urine is phosphorous."

[Narrator] Jean said that was another example of her father adding in lighthearted detail about the awful things he went through. And, honestly, I'm not certain whether to laugh or be disgusted.

Well, back onboard the Hokusen Maru, Jack found a spot in the corner of the ship.

[Jack] "The saving factor to me was there was a crack in the steel plate on the ship, and I could look out and see the stars and a cool breeze would come in every once in a while. I wouldn't have changed that spot for anything in the world."

[Narrator] For 10 months, Jack was held at the Kosaka POW Camp in the northern area of Japan's main island, about 400 miles/645 km north of Tokyo. POW's at this camp mined and smelted copper. Life in the camp followed a harsh routine, with a break allowed only once every 47 days. On these rare days off, the men who had clothing washed the few items they possessed.

As the war's end neared, the sight of American bombers over the camp brought relief, suggesting that deliverance was near at hand. News of Japan's September 2, 1945, surrender reached the camp when a Navy bomber dropped a colored streamer with a note that read: "The war is over. Japan has surrendered."

Finally, on September 11, 1945, Jack and his fellow prisoners were liberated. When asked what he looked forward to doing when he got home, Jack answered:

[Jack] "I just want to go home and die on clean sheets."

[Narrator] He later reflected:

[Jack] "I'm happy to have cheated the Japanese out of my additional years of life."

But liberation came with a heavy responsibility. Many prisoners had made a promise to those who did not survive: to tell the world about the horrors they endured. Jack recalled,

[Jack] "I heard so many guys die and dying say in their last breath, 'If you make it home, tell them like it was. Let them know what happened.'"

[Narrator] But, post-war silence was a hallmark among veterans, and Jack, at least in the first years after the war, seems to have been no exception. He remarked,

[Jack] "We kind of let the families know we did without some food and lost some weight, and we worked hard and that type of thing, but we didn't really start the conversations. It was many years, as a matter of fact, before even my children realized I had been a POW."

[Narrator] When Jack arrived in the US, he convalesced at a military hospital in Santa Fe, New Mexico. A young nurse named Mildred Harrell caught his eye. Their daughter Suzanne told me:

[Suzanne] "My mother had just finished nursing school in Memphis, Tennessee. And the day that she graduated, she was inducted into the Army as a second Lieutenant nurse. Then they sent her to Santa Fe. Well, I guess, Santa Fe was quite the place to be -- all these young men -- home, thankful the war's over, and happy and celebrating. And I guess the town was just very upbeat at that time. And he didn't have to stay in bed, he could go out as long as he came back to sleep there.

"So, mom and dad, they would go out and close down the nightlife, and he would go back to the hospital, go to bed. She'd go to her apartment with other nurses. But she had to be back at work. So, they closed the bars or two, and she'd be back at six and he'd be sound asleep, cozy, and in his bed. Which she never let him forget."

In May 1946, Jack and Mildred married, and he was discharged from the U.S. Army later that year. The couple settled in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where they raised three children. Jack became an accountant, and Mildred continued working as a nurse.

Their daughter Suzanne told me:

[Suzanne] “He was a handsome man and he loved his family. Upbeat and positive. He liked to make us laugh with silly little lines and things. He was very well-respected in his own circles and he was a great public speaker. People just loved him. I believe he was instrumental in starting the Bataan Veterans Organization. And that was a big part of my parents' lives. My father would go to conventions all over the United States.”

Jack was indeed active in the POW organizations during the 1950s and 60s, and beyond. And he started sharing more about his war experiences. He expressed,

[Jack] "It's been my experience that most don't know what's happened because World War II in modern-day history books is a page or two. I think they should know what their families went through."

[Narrator] He took on leadership roles in veterans' organizations. In 1953, he became the commander of the State Bataan Veterans Organization.

Jack's children came to realize the significance of their father's POW history through his work with POW organizations.

Suzanne also remembers a time in high school:

[Suzanne] “I wanted to get an A in my high school history class. So, I went to my teacher and I said, ‘My father was a prisoner war, would you like to have him come speak. She's, ‘Oh, that would be very good.’ So, I asked him, and he said, ‘Sure, I'll do down.’ So we went in and the principal greeted us and he said, ‘Oh, there's going to be change in plan. We need you to go to the gymnasium.’

“So, we did. Of course, the whole school was there. And my father shared his experience. And of course, he got a standing ovation from my whole high school.”

In 1985, Jack's beloved wife, Mildred, passed due to a brain tumor. It was devastating for Jack, and Suzanne recalled:

[Suzanne] “But my father, he retired early when it all occurred to take care of her. And he did everything. It was very hard time. But she was able to host his retirement party, which was so nice. By this time she had trouble speaking and every complications that come with that. But he loved her, very, very much. And she adored him. So it was a good marriage.”

[Narrator] In 1991, he married Dorothy Cave. They met while Dorothy was researching her book "Beyond Courage" – about the 200th Coastal Artillery's experiences during the WW2.

93-year-old Jack Aldrich passed away on April 1, 2014, in Roswell, New Mexico. He was laid to rest at the Santa Fe National Cemetery with his wife Mildred.

After his death, Jack's children donated many of his wartime items to the New Mexico Military Museum in Santa Fe. In April 2023, Suzanne was invited to a Bataan Death March memorial ceremony and the museum's collections manager:

[Suzanne] "Surprised me by saying, 'I want you to come into this government building.' And it's the Bataan building, and I think they do veteran's services. So, we walk in; she had done a complete exhibit on my father. You look in and you see his helmet there, his canteen. His pictures, pictures of Uncle Bobby, and my mom.

"I just almost started crying. I was so touched"

[Narrator] That exhibit is currently on display at the Bataan Veterans Building in downtown Santa Fe until Spring 2023. So if you find yourself in Santa Fe, stop by and visit. If you're lucky, maybe Suzanne will be there, too.

[Narrator] Back in 1945, while Jack was recuperating at Bruns Hospital in Santa Fe (on those clean sheets he hoped for), something happened that would change his life. His son, Jack Aldrich, Jr., told me:

[Jack Jr] "There were many instances of loud noises, yelling, shouting, dishes thrown across the room and general hysteria coming from the ward next to Dad's room. It became so disruptive that Dad asked his nurse (Mom) to find out who that so-and-so was who was making all the racket and shouting. My mother went to the adjacent ward to find out who was making the noise and why. When she returned to update Dad she said "You are never going to believe who that person is who is making all the noise - it's your brother Bobby!"

"Once back in the U.S. Uncle Bobby vowed he would never eat rice again and whenever it was served to him in any form he would throw this plate or bowl against the wall. This was a bit problematic as in New Mexico, Mexican food is usually served with rice and beans.

"This event is quite significant as both Dad and Uncle Bobby believed individually that their brothers were dead. No one told them that they both had survived the impossible. In typical military fashion they were assigned rooms in alpha order which explains why they were in adjacent rooms but different wards."

[Narrator] Post-war life for Bobby Aldrich was marked by profound challenges. A newspaper report poignantly stated,

[Newspaper] "[He] left the [POW] camp at 23 on a stretcher. He didn't walk out of U.S. hospitals until he was 28. Tuberculosis and the beatings with fence-post-sized sticks carried by guards, kept him flat on his back for years."

[Narrator] His daughter Jean shared with me:

[Jean] "I think he was 96 pounds when he was came out of the camps. He used to say he could reach in his stomach and bend over and touch his spine. He was in the hospital. They took bone out of

his right shin and put it crisscross in his knee. They fused his knee and they fused his lower spine. When they fused his knee, they said, 'When we fuse this, you can either have it bent. Or you can have it straight. If it's bent, you're going to be in the wheelchair for the rest of your life. If it's straight, you probably could walk.'

"They didn't give him much hope after the war. They're like, 'You're never going to have kids. Just don't get your hopes up for a normal life.'

"He wanted his legs straight so he could walk. So, he walked with a limp."

[Narrator] Keep in mind, Bobby was just 23 years old when he was being told all this.

Despite his ordeal, Bobby channeled his experiences into productive avenues.

In June 1950, he married Lenore Fox, who he met while studying English at the University of New Mexico. The couple had a son together, before divorcing.

[Narrator] Bobby later met a woman named Frances. Their daughter Jean shared:

[Jean] "Interestingly enough, my mom worked on the schematics of the atomic bomb in New Mexico. They weren't married; they didn't even know each other. So the joke was always that her clearance in the military was higher than his clearance.

"When you think about working on something like that and you don't even know that it's going to actually free your future husband. It's just kind of mind boggling to me.

"They met when he was probably 38, and she would've been about 33 or 34. They met in a bar in New Mexico in Albuquerque.

"They met on a Monday. He proposed Tuesday and they got married Friday of the same week. So, then it lasted 28 years until he died."

[Jean] "He was my world. He was very special. He had a great sense of humor. He loved people. My friends in high school would come over. They called them the general. And he just commanded respect, but he was never tough. He was just a great guy. I think if you talked to anybody that ever met him or been around him, you would get that story."

[Narrator] In August 1987, Bobby, who at the age of 65 could no longer straighten to his full height and relied on a cane to walk, filed a lawsuit against Mitsui & Co., the "international descendant of Mitsui Industries, the coal company Aldrich says used his work as slave labor." The lawsuit aimed to secure back pay for approximately 4,000 former POWs, including Bobby, who had endured similar conditions.

The lawsuit was part of a broader context where countries were reckoning with their wartime actions and making restitution to war victims. Germany had reached a settlement with former POW workers, and the U.S. Senate had approved settlements for the Japanese-Americans interned during the war.

Bobby told a newspaper:

[Bobby] "My God, ... what about us?"

"I want [Mitsui] to say they were wrong. I don't know how I wound up in their camp, but I worked slave labor for two years and have never been paid. That's wrong. And if I can prove my case, that'll open the door for a lot of guys less fortunate than me."

[Narrator] In February 1988, a federal district judge ruled against the lawsuit, citing treaty limitations. The 1952 peace treaty included an agreement for no damage claims against Japan—in other words, POWs couldn't sue for the bad treatment suffered at the hands of Japanese guards. However, Bobby's lawyer argued that his client sought compensation for his labor, not damages. Bobby appealed the case to a Circuit Court in Atlanta and expected the hearing to be held in July 1988.

Tragically, Bobby's pursuit of justice ended before then.

On June 30, 1988, he passed away in St. John, Florida. He was 66 years old. Here's his daughter Jean again:

[Jean] "He died exactly a month after he walked me down the aisle. When he walked me down the aisle for my wedding, he told somebody that afternoon, he said that 'It is the longest walk I ever took,'" which was poignant for a Death March survivor. So I know it meant a lot to him.

"So my kids never knew their grandpa. When my son got married seven years ago, he wore the purple heart on the inside of his vest to honor his grandpa. And it just made me cry."

Today he rests at the Santa Fe National Cemetery in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where Jack is also interred. Two amazing brothers – united in military service and war and together again in rest.

Bobby's legal quest for labor compensation, while unresolved in his lifetime, stands as a testament to the enduring impact of his wartime experience.

Beyond that, Jean says of her father's legacy:

[Jean] "I know that my children understand that they can face anything because in their blood runs of blood a survivor. Just to know that you have that in your blood -- the strength and the stamina.

"When I was young, kids would tell me, 'You know, it's his own fault because he joined the army.' I would look at them and think 'You have the freedom to say that because he fought for your freedom to think that.' So just having that inner strength, I guess, is what it is. That everything is survivable, you can overcome it."

[Narrator] Jack's daughter Suzanne shared similar thoughts about her father, Jack:

[Suzanne] "He didn't look upon himself as a hero or any sort of thing like that at all. It's just a person doing his duty for his country. That he did it with his brother is very special to us."

[Narrator] Two stalwart, brave men that their families have every right to be extremely proud of.

[Narrator] While Bobby and Jack were beginning the long march up Bataan, other Allied soldiers continued to be captured in other parts of the peninsula. Among them were 400 officers of the Philippine Army.

But, these men didn't even make it to the march – instead Japanese leaders ordered that they all be executed.

More on that next time.

This is *Left Behind*.

Outro

Thanks for listening! You can find pictures, maps, and sources about Jack and Bobby Aldrich on the Left Behind website and Facebook page and on Instagram @LeftBehindPodcast. The links are in the show description. If you'd like to know more about the 200th Coastal Artillery, I suggest the book "Beyond Courage: One Regiment Against Japan, by Jack's second wife Dorothy Cave.

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Left Behind is researched, written, and produced by me, Anastasia Harman.

- Voice overs by: Mike Davis, Jake Harrenberg, Tyler Harman, and Paul Sutherland
- Special thanks to: Jean Gerry, Suzanne Delaware, and Jack Aldrich, Jr., for sharing their time, memories, and pictures of their fathers.
- Dramatizations are based on historical research, although some creative liberty is taken with dialogue.

I'll be back next time with the tragic massacre of Filipino officers by Japanese forces.

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