

Cpl. Baumgarten and a Peace Park in Japan

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

As related in a previous article, Baraboo's Otto Baumgarten Jr. parachuted out of his doomed B29 onto Japanese home territory, only to be captured. He may have been brutally treated and tortured before being executed. In only a few weeks the atomic bombs in nearby Hiroshima and Nagasaki would end the war in the Pacific. His remains were never found.

This is not the end of the story of Otto Baumgarten, however. In a scholarly investigative effort, Mike Berg of Eleva, WI has carefully documented an unusual sequel. In short, Baumgartner shares recognition, along with his crew members in a large memorial at the site of the B29 crash on the side of Mount Hachiman in (Oita Province), a southernmost island of Japan.

Early Memorials

Remarkably, the first modest memorial was conceived by Japanese villagers living near the site of the crash. They were also largely responsible for the development of the area into a mountainside Peace Park. Although the park is remote, Berg's book contains a detailed eyewitness description of the area.

Besides the 11 man crew of the Empire Express, two other men are memorialized in the Park. The B29 was sent hurtling to the ground following a nearly head-on crash with a Japanese fighter plane piloted by Tsutomu Murata and his co-pilot, Shigeu Kato. Both badly damaged planes then crashed, carrying 8 American and two Japanese to their deaths. Only Baumgarten and two comrades were able to parachute out of the stricken aircraft, but they were subsequently executed

It appears that a villager or farmer first erected a post on the site with a sign which, when translated, read "Here Lie American Soldiers". Berg writes "Later, after the bodies were exhumed, a large stone was erected at the site which read, in both Japanese and English 'in Memory of B29 crash victims.'" Both American Occupation officials and local Japanese participated in this dedication.

Later Developments

"Somewhat later a larger memorial and museum was envisioned by the villagers of Sanko-Mura, which is located about three miles from the site" writes Berg, on land donated by a local farmer. Both nearby American occupation forces and Japanese citizens participated in the effort, with some construction done by local workers.

Engraved on a large 4 x 6 foot granite slab is a Unites States map, with home states of the crew physically highlighted, including of course Wisconsin. Flanking the slab are granite blocks three feet high engraved with flowers, one block for each Japanese pilot. Nearby is another stone

There is a flagpole for each Airman's State, and a map showing each of the states.



An engraved stone marker lists each airman's name. Otto's is lower right.

slab describing in Japanese the collision of the two planes, and again listing the names of the crew, including Otto Baumgarten of course. Several other monuments are on the grounds of the Peace Park.

Inscribed in the handwriting of Col. Hewitt E. Lovelace is an inscription: "Each stone embedded in the face of this monument represents a life expended in the search for world peace. May this monument stand as a perpetual reminder of the futility of war". Berg writes that the dedication was made to a crowd of 1000 persons, on May 7, 1971 at 10:30 A.M., exactly 26 years after the crash of the planes. It featured flags and anthems of both nations, followed by a 21 gun salute, rare for lower ranking servicemen.

Other Features

There is more to the Peace Park. There are flagpoles for each crewman's state, including of course Wisconsin. There is even a small building housing a museum. It features plane artifacts and also a newspaper clipping regarding Otto from this newspaper. There are more flags of the home states of crewmen, and letters from the Governors of those states. Everywhere there were statements regarding the futility of war and a call for world Peace

Now Mike Berg has never been to Sanko-Mura and the Peace Park, so how does he know all of this? Mike sent personal representatives, his daughter Susan and husband Douglas Williams, already stationed in Japan. Susan wrote and recorded a long and detailed description of their search and their discoveries at the Peace Park. All of her detailed report and photos is printed in Mike's book "The Crew of the Empire Express". Berg will have a book signing on Thursday July 18 from 1 to 3 P.M. at the Booksmith.

Otto's body was never located in the execution area, and perhaps was cremated by his captors along with his two crewmates who also parachuted out of the stricken plane. Other crewmen's bodies from the crash site were exhumed and removed, so no Americans remains are interred at the Peace Park.

Otto's generation, along with fellow youths from a dozen allied countries, prevailed over the tyranny and brutality of the German and Japanese "leaders". As victors, the United States provided guided recovery and financial aid rather than oppression and recrimination. Now both Germany and Japan are allies. The Peace Park is in a way symbolic of the possibility of a better world, a peaceful world.