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SGT. NORMAN BERG AT HOME JAP PRISONER SINCE DEC. 1941

Staff Sgt. Norman Berg, son of Mr. and Mrs. J. J. Berg, Prosser, Wn., is back home from a Japanese prison camp. The Berg family formerly lived at Genesee, and the following taken from the Prosser Record-Bulletin will be of interest to many here:

September 2, 1945, will rank henceforth with July 4th in the life of Staff Sgt. Norman Berg, for that was the glorious day when he was released from a Japanese prison camp where he had languished for more than three years.

Sgt. Berg arrived home last Saturday (Sept. 29) having been flown back post haste to America as soon as he was able to make the trip. He was taken prisoner December 8, 1941 and at that time was a Marine radio operator stationed at Peiping, China. As a result of Jap treatment his weight dropped from 199 pounds to 150 but he has already regained 40 pounds and looks as though nothing had happened.

“It was not so bad in the Japanese prison in China but when we were shifted to Japan it really became tough,” Berg stated. “The Japs suffer from a pronounced inferiority complex and they take it out in cruelty to their victims. Life means nothing to them and they are as cruel to their own people as they were to us. We were fed two bowls of barley and millet and two buns for dinner and some watery soup for breakfast and supper. There was absolutely no seasoning, not even salt. They put all of us at hard work who were at all able to work and one of these jobs was to fill box cars with rocks, haul them off a ways and dump them out. Then we would haul them back again. At times we worked in factories but as the bombing progressed there were fewer and fewer factories to work in. Of 1335 prisoners in that camp, 157 died, mostly from malnutrition.

“I shall never cease to marvel at what the human body can stand. Our bones just stuck out. The most important thing is to keep up one’s morale. The minute you let down mentally you are sunk. I think we were kept alive by hate. We developed a will to live just to show those bastards that we could take it. All of us got beat with clubs, sticks, bamboo canes, and the flat sides of swords and anything handy.

“Resistance would have cost us our lives. I saw one fellow sock a Jap and knock him into the middle of next week. They nearly beat him to death.

“Once the Japs decided that the Marines were too proud, they did not bow low enough and display proper humility. To fix that they picked out ten men for a beating and did they get it. The victims made a sporting event of it and kidded each other about the red welts they were getting. After 54 minutes of that they were simply raw beef – but they took it and lived. I don’t know how. I was beaten a few times myself by both soldier guards and civilians. The proper technique is to keep them from getting mad. After a couple of blows they may stop but if they get mad they pour it on until they get tired.

“The Red Cross sent packages, and in the three and a half years I was a prisoner I got about two and a half packages. The Japs ate the rest. Some packages were available shortly before we were liberated. During all the time I was there no representative of a neutral foreign country ever visited our camp.”

When asked if there was any hope to change the Japs and humanize them, Sgt. Berg said that free speech and free press might work wonders. “What they need is a radio in every home with someone broadcasting the truth for once. The people have been repressed and suppressed and abused and taught lies so long that they are what they are: and that is the lowest scum on earth.”

“Have you become accustomed once again to good food and decent living and liberty?” he was asked.

“No, I haven’t,” he replied. “I keep thinking this is a swell dream but soon I will wake up with the Japs prodding me.”

Sgt. Berg is 29 years old and has been in the Marines 10 years. He is to report to the hospital in Seattle in 45 days.
