

Think with Your Heart

Imagine yourself assigned to guarding the prisoners in a World War II POW camp. As a dedicated Christian in the midst of war, how would you show compassion, and yet fulfill your duty? How can we infuse Christ-like compassion in our own challenges — and in our day-to-day lives?



George C. Woodard, Jr. had a choice when he served as a military police officer (MP) in a 1944 New Guinea Prisoner of War camp. He could have carried out his duties with little regard for the prisoners he guarded.

If he were any other kind of person, he could have been unkind or even cruel to these prisoners. But because George considered his faith the most important part of his life, he chose compassion. In the line of duty and at home in his day-to-day life, longtime FUMC member George Woodard was a living lesson of carrying Christ-like compassion into every situation we encounter.

Recently, as the team of volunteers in the church's archive were cataloging several collections donated to the archive by church members or their families, they discovered evidence of George's POW camp choice tucked quietly into Woodard's donated collection. A hand-painted flag, in pristine condition, inscribed and given to him by the prisoners he guarded in the New Guinea POW camp, told a story of compassion far beyond the brief description provided.

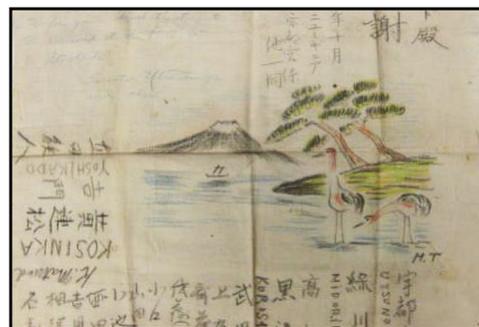
Mikako Imai Daniel of the Fort Worth Japanese Society describes the flags imagery: "The pictures drawn on the flag depict Mount Fuji, pine trees on a tiny island, cranes, and a little boat sailing on the ocean," she explained. "It's typical Japanese scenery." Then she translated the note, written in Japanese, inscribed on the flag:

"Dear Mr. Woodard, With sincere gratitude. October, 1944 At New Guinea Tamotsu Utsunomiya et al. (from right bottom; clockwise)- Utsunomiya, Midorikawa, Takayama, Kurosawa, Takeda, Kamino, Saito, Daito, Oguchi, Yamada, Koike, Nishida, Yoshimi, Aizawa, Ishige, K. Matsuda (written in English), Kosinka (written in English), Ko Renmatsu, Yoshikado, and Tateda Masato"

"My brother never talked about his time in New Guinea," said Leland Woodard. "He hinted that the conditions were horrible. He was completely committed to trying to do what he thought was right; that is why it is no surprise that he treated the POWs with respect and kindness. He lived like he talked and his church was the biggest thing in his life."

As a long-time member of our church, George was passionate about reaching out to serve people. He volunteered regularly at the mission, was dedicated to his Sunday school class and Bible study group, and, in addition to his time, he faithfully supported the church with financial gifts. He, in his own unique way, approached every aspect of his life with a "Christ-like" compassion for everyone he met.

The prisoners of the P.O.W. camp signed the flag they gave to George Woodard.



"George was so dedicated and loyal to the Mission," said Sandy Smith, former Director of the First Street Methodist Mission. "I could always count on him to give his all and go the second mile. He lived the motto, 'Think With Your Heart,' we had at the Mission."

On his own time, George loved photography and giving photo calendars he called "snapshots of God's creation" as gifts. While these calendars were always beautiful, the best part of his gift, his recipients agreed, was his commentary on the photos and the complete history he enthusiastically shared behind each location.

"George was gentle, kind and loyal as the day is long," sister-in-law, Gloria Woodard said. Although George passed away in the fall of 2001, his approach to living life with compassion for all God's creation lives on in all the lives he touched. Even in the midst of war, this gentle spirit and Christ-like compassion prevailed, a shining example for approaching life's challenges with a spirit of giving that earns the "sincere gratitude" of those we serve.

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