

The Best Meal - Ever

04-02-2012 by Harry Zirkelbach

It was late in a wintry March day 1946. Jack and I had been driving in a Jeep for half dozed hours, having left Kyoto en route to Nanao, western Japan. The normally rough unpaved roads in these Prefectures had been ignored these winter months by all except those who traveling them. They could do nothing but accept the discomfort, drive slowly, get out dig the vehicle from some roadway quagmire.

We were graduates of the Mine Disposal Schools in Washington D.C. Jack had graduated one class later, but had only met in January 1946, were now roommates when in the Kyoto Hotel, exclusively housing for Junior Officers of the United States Occupation armed forces.

On this journey conversation pieces were plentiful, harmonious, endless. The Jeep ride this day, bumpy, painful to the butt, but endless also. It was about three in the afternoon, when Jack suggested we rest, eat a bite.

Around the next curve, which meandered to the right along the edge of a slight rise that overlooked the Sea of Japan, the pair found a pull-off that was grassy, and parked the Jeep.

The Commissary Officer in Kyoto had furnished them with rations for the three weeks they would work together. This afternoon provisions were collected from the packs in the Jeep, carried to a sheltered spot near the sandy beach.

Jack collected dry driftwood, leaves and twigs, to begin a small fire. I opened a small trunk containing explosives. The piece sought was readily identifiable, one of many six sided 16 inch long, metal cylinder incendiaries American B-29s had dropped on Kobe Japan. I had removed several from a residential area a few days earlier, intending to dispose of them in a remote area.

This seemed just right; there had been no signs of habitation the last 15 miles.

Resting next to Jack's kindling, I pried open the side of one cluster, poured a generous portion of content, jellied gasoline, onto the largest piece of driftwood.

Jack lighted the fire. It burned gently in the light breeze of this secluded beach. Soon we were snug, able to unzip the windbreakers worn to protect the body against Japanese winter.

Jack opened two K-Ration boxes.
They featured SPAM and scrambled eggs.
I cleaned our Mess gear in sand and ocean, collected a tin of fresh canteen water.
Both were hung over our beautiful fire. Jack added half of each ration in each
Mess gear. We tried to imagine what our families might be doing tonight, until the
fragrance from the fire indicated our meal and coffee
had been burned enough.

As with all Rations, we ate everything. We hadn't spoken once we began eating.
Then almost the same time, compared, found we agreed,
this was an extraordinarily delicious meal, one seldom matched, ever.

The evening grew on this shore of the Sea of Japan,
the ocean's quiet murmur in the slight neap tide washing waves,
the moon just risen in daylight, the fire fed by napalm
the Jeep unstuck, and our Nanao small hotel still two hours away.

We gathered small talk for another thirty minutes as we watched the fire ebb,
planned tomorrow's tasks,
then ran sand through our hands to douse the fire, returned materials to the Jeep,
each taking a camera and mind photo of the scene, mounted the Jeep, continuing
north through this remote section of Central Western Japan where residents had
met few American Servicemen, shied from those they did see.

In States in later years, I never could prepare Spam with Scrambled eggs
that in my mind reached my lowest expectation of Jack's meal that day.