

Describe Democracy
01-28-2013 by Harry Zirkelbach

Replying to every quiz requires that the one tested, have an understanding encompassing all the facts suggested by the question. In every contact of parent and child, teacher to pupil, wife to husband, some piece of the providers total font of human knowledge is being poured from that larger into the lesser vessel. Both are expected to be prepared for this transfer to function.

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In the early months of 1946, I was assigned to remove explosives from a Japanese transport that had been sunk in the harbor of Nanao, a western Japan city of 25,000. I would be involved for weeks, weather and sea cold.

Workers were recruited, a schedule set. I was introduced to the authorities of Nanao, joining them for safety assurances, and timetable for the completion. Acquaintance was made with Police, harbor, administrative, publishing personnel to share my confidence with them; this was a safe procedure -- requiring a month, employing many Japanese.

In an early courtesy call, it was suggested I address Nanao's School children. This was arranged.

With the children and their Principal as audience, my Japanese Interpreter Tommy Yamada began relayed my thoughts on comparative American climates, ports, children. I was from a small city, western Pa. port All went well enough.

Then someone suggested we discuss democracy. Not only is the concept of democracy difficult to begin to describe, but Tommy found even my simple statements too complex. This led to a dialogue between Tommy and me, little information to others. Soon we returned to other children's interests.

Later, when munitions removal was nearly finished I, had to go to the Kanazawa, the nearest American military office, 100 miles away. I needed food and fuel for my Jeep. In casual hours spent there, we discussed their work.

Then I was asked, "Had I met another American in Nanao". "No".

Then I was told, "The Nanao Shimbun newspaper reports an American there is giving speeches to the Japanese. Any talks to the Japanese on Democracy, or any subject, must have written prior approval approved by MacArthur, no exception".

It was in these few words that I realized this small Military Government detachment knew who the miscreant was, were being gentle in admonition.

I confessed I had done just that, the Nanao press in attendance. Of course I promised to desist.

I had believed that I had added nothing to Nanao's understanding of democracy, for I had taught Tommy Yamada little either.

Yet, in that briefing, this hint, something has been transmitted. Those halting words on Democracy were welcomed by those who had never lived it.

Further I became aware, that voting for FDR in 1944 from Michigan had simply introduced me into the workings of Democracy. And this realization, my understanding of democracy remained crude.

Taken for granted.
Hadn't I been born in America?

That would never be enough.
I was not prepared to transmit to others basic facts on democracy.

At the onset, there was the review of the ship, the Takakura San Maru, which sank eight months earlier when it activated an American B-29 laid mine in the extensive, shallow estuary that led east into an arm of the Sea of Japan. When the ship activated the mine, the Captain, aware the ship would sink, navigated toward the shore, the ship striking ground and settling, superstructure fully visible. No visible damage. The Japanese had determined the ship's underwater seams could be sealed. Once empty, the ship would help renew their destroyed merchant marine.

Once the hull was water tight, the ship was moored to an anchorage where the water was expelled from the ship and its contents. The munitions once below water were inspected, each explosive identified, declared safe, I then instructed stevedore crews in loading of munitions onto barges, then dumping at sea.

Once the first step was taken, there had been no glitch in the schedule for any reason. Captain Ishi assumed command, late April 1946. It was now his work.