

1945 October 22-28

A Real Survivor Returns

Story Of Hardships During 3½ Years In Jap Prison Camps Told By Britt On Return Home

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 October 28, page 3)



Captain Chester Britt with his son, Chester Jr.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1945 October 21, page 1)

The word "survivor" has become commonplace; lots of people are survivors of cancer, sexual abuse, and many other things. These people really have survived mental and physical challenges in their lives. The television series *Survivor*, on the other hand, places a diverse group of people in a situation that is mentally and physically challenging, and then it rewards a person with a bunch of money at the end. But in the end, it is a mentally and physically challenging game show.

Being a prisoner of the Japanese during World War II was far from a game. It was an existential threat to the survival of every individual who experienced it.

Several men and women from La Crosse County endured this experience during World War II, but this week the focus is on one serviceman who survived this hell on earth to return to his family in La Crosse.

Chester K. Britt was born on June 13, 1915, at Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin.¹ His parents were Archibald Ray Britt and Hazel Henrietta (Kieser) Britt, and Chester's middle name was also Kieser.² He was the oldest child in a family that would eventually include four more boys and two girls.³

By the time Chester was four years old, his family was living at 1426 Gillette Street in La Crosse. In June 1919, he was the victim of an accident near his home that could have taken his life.⁴

On the evening of June 19, 1919, a storm caused a telephone wire at the corner of Gillette and Loomis streets to sag to the sidewalk and almost touch an electric trolley wire. When a young woman walked on the downed telephone wire, she felt a shock. Neighbors propped the wire up with a rake. Mrs. George Lupi, 1545 Loomis Street, said she telephoned the streetcar company just after 6:30 p.m. on June 19 to tell them a telephone wire was down over a trolley wire. After darkness fell, more passers-by received shocks. Mrs. E. R. Vaughn, 1552 Loomis Street, called the telephone company at 10:30 p.m. to report the dangerous situation with the downed wire. The operator she talked to said the telephone wire would be fixed in the morning.⁵

At about 11:30 a.m. the next morning, Chester Britt and two other children were picking clover blossoms along the boulevard of Gillette Street. The telephone wire, electrically charged by contact with the streetcar trolley wire, was lying in the grass. When young Britt touched the telephone wire, he was severely burned on his legs and hand. A neighbor, hearing his screams, pulled him away before the shock was fatal. Workmen nearby were called to the scene, and they removed the telephone wire. Four-year-old Chester Britt spent a painful, sleepless night at his home after being treated by Dr. A. A. Skemp.⁶

Casting blame for an accident that could have killed a child began almost immediately. The streetcar company confirmed a telephone call by a woman on Thursday night about the wire. The telephone company, however, denied knowing anything about it until 10:45 a.m. on Friday, the day of the accident and claimed a repair crew had been dispatched immediately. Archie Britt hired a lawyer to sue the telephone company.⁷

By 1930, the Britt family was living at 1508 Wood Street in La Crosse.⁸

Chester Britt recovered and had an active boyhood. He joined the Boy Scouts at the age of 12 and won medals in model aviation and archery.⁹ One of the model aviation contests that Britt won was the American Air Cadet Derby at Riverside Park. That earned 15-year-old Britt his first ride in an airplane,

courtesy of Winneshiek Flying Service, in 1930.¹⁰ Britt was also part of the staff at [Camp Decorah](#), and he became an Eagle Scout, as well as a [Sea Scout](#).¹¹

Britt was a good student, and he was an honor graduate from Logan High School.¹² He graduated with the seniors in the January 1933 class.¹³



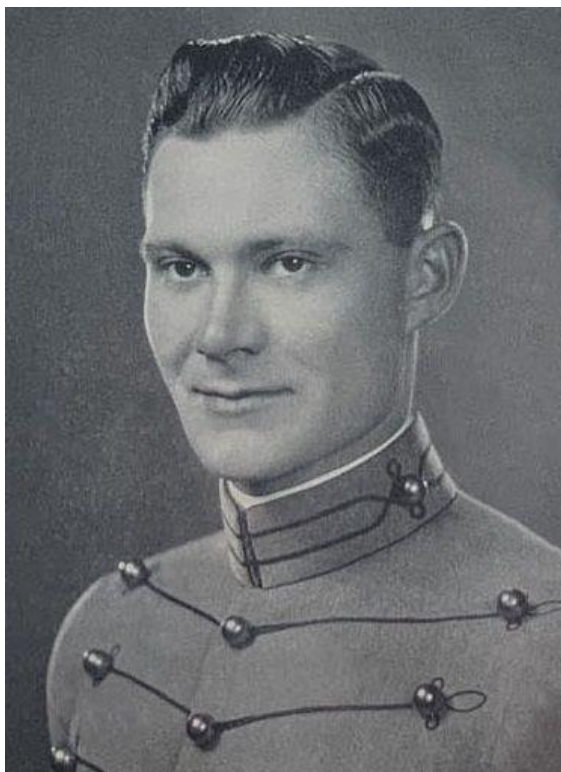
Chester K. Britt in 1933

(*Winneshiek* [Logan High School Yearbook], Winter 1933, page 4)

In the fall of 1933, Britt enrolled at La Crosse State Teacher's College.¹⁴ During his two-and-one-half years there, he was a member of [Kappa Delta Pi](#) the international honor society for education. Britt then earned an appointment to the prestigious and rigorous [United States Military Academy](#) at West Point from Congressman [Gardner R. Withrow](#). He reported to West Point on July 1, 1936.¹⁵

The West Point yearbook for his senior year described "Chet" Britt as "conscientious almost to a fault." It also stated, "His natural reserve kept many from knowing him well, but those of us who did, vouched for his generosity, sincerity and good manners." The final verdict was that Chet Britt was "a credit to the Army."¹⁶

Toward the end of his senior year at West Point, Britt became engaged to Grace Runice of 1929 Prospect Street in La Crosse.¹⁷ Britt [graduated](#) from West Point on June 11, 1940. The next day, Lt. Chester Britt and Grace Runice were married in the [West Point Chapel](#).¹⁸ The newlyweds drove from New York to La Crosse, arriving on June 19 to spend part of the summer before Lt. Britt's first duty assignment.¹⁹



West Point Cadet Chester K. Britt

[\(Find A Grave\)](#)

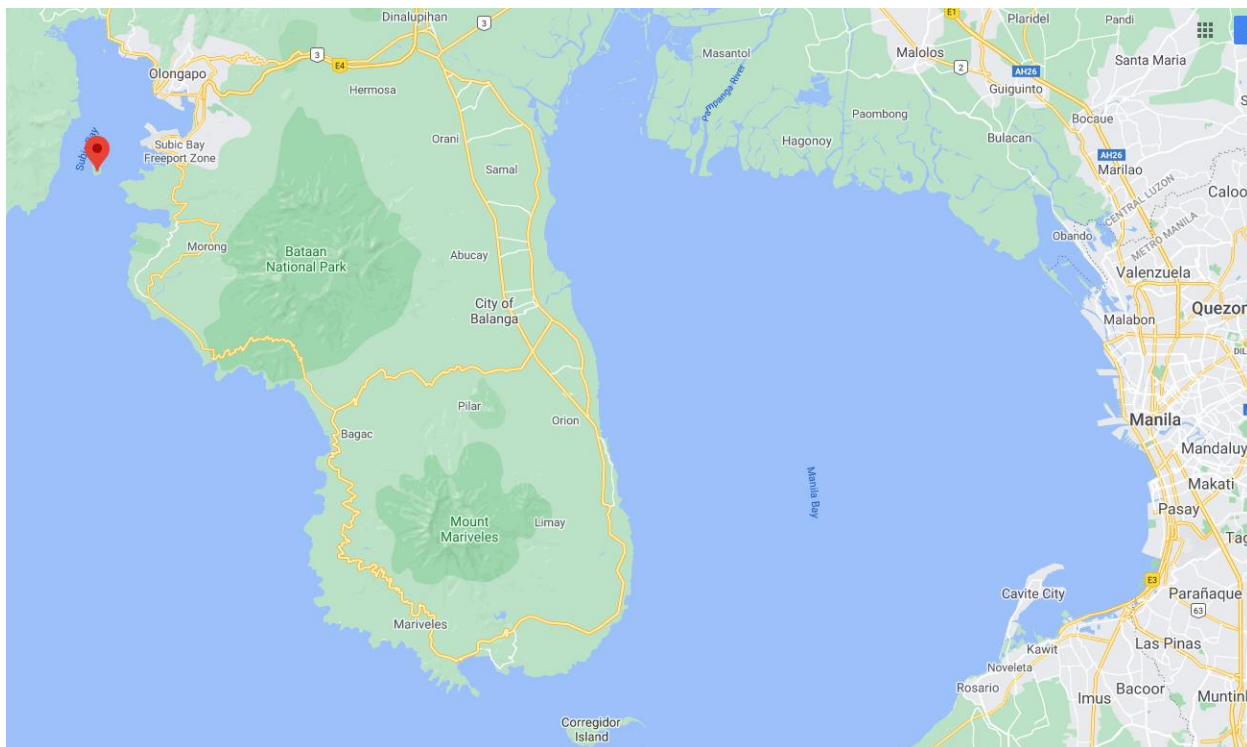
At the end of July 1940, Lt. and Mrs. Chester Britt left for [Fort Monroe, Virginia](#). They were there until September 14 when they went to New York to sail to the Philippines. It was supposed to be a two-year posting in the Far East.²⁰ World events greatly altered that plan.

In the Philippines, 1st. Lt. Britt was assigned to D Battery of the 92nd Coast Artillery Regiment, which was charged with protecting Manila Bay and Subic Bay.²¹

When tensions with Japan increased in early 1941, women and children of American military personnel were sent back to the United States. The pregnant Grace Britt went with them in May 1941 and resided with her parents at 1629 Prospect Street in La Crosse.²² Their son, Chester Kieser Britt, Jr., was born on September 21, 1941, at St. Ann's Hospital in La Crosse.²³ It would be four years before Chester Britt, Sr. even saw or touched Chester Britt, Jr.

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, suddenly brought the United States into World War II. At that time, 26-year-old Lt. Britt was stationed at [Fort Wint](#) on Grande Island in the Philippines.²⁴ He was a forward artillery observer and had additional duty as transportation officer.²⁵

Japanese bombers struck American airfields in the Philippines soon after the Pearl Harbor attack. These attacks destroyed most of the American aircraft on the ground. The Japanese landed near Manila, the capital city, on December 22. General Douglas MacArthur declared Manila an open city and pulled his 80,000-man American-Filipino army back to defensive positions in the Bataan Peninsula.²⁶



Grande Island is indicated by the red dot; Bataan Peninsula in the left half; Corregidor Island at the bottom middle. Grande Island was abandoned when General MacArthur pulled American and Filipino forces back to the Bataan Peninsula. After Bataan fell, the island of Corregidor held out for a bit longer.

(Google maps)



Battery Hall No. 1 Gun (6 inch) in the foreground in Ex Fort Wint, Grande Island Subic Bay - 1999

Photo: David de la Hyde

Coastal artillery guns at Fort Wint, Grande Island

(Delahyde.com)

Lt. Britt sent a cable at the end of December to his parents stating that he was well and wishing them a Merry Christmas.²⁷

In letters to his wife and parents mailed on February 15, 1942, Britt stated that Fort Wint had been evacuated on Christmas Eve, 1941. His unit was in the Bataan Peninsula, and he was "well and getting along fine." They were awaiting reinforcements from the United States.²⁸ After their coastal artillery was abandoned at Fort Wint, Britt was now with a field artillery unit.²⁹ He commanded A Battery in the 301st Field Artillery Regiment during the Battle of Bataan.³⁰

The Bataan peninsula, where Britt and his fellow soldiers were fighting the Japanese, was well-suited for defense. But the American-Filipino army was under-equipped, malnourished, and had no air or naval support. Disease started to take its toll on the defenders, with 20,000 sick from malaria and thousands more affected by other diseases. The food situation became so desperate that they resorted to eating horses, mules, and monkeys.³¹

Help from the United States was not forthcoming; "The Battling Bastards of Bataan" were on their own. General MacArthur was ordered to escape to Australia, and he left on March 11 with his family and staff. Following a Japanese offensive in early April, 78,000 American and Filipino troops surrendered on April 9, 1942, in the largest surrender in the history of the United States Army. Just over 13,000 men held out on the island of Corregidor until May 6 when they surrendered to avoid a massacre.³²

After the war, Chester Britt said he was taken prisoner on April 10, 1942. Then he marched with other prisoners for five days to San Fernando where they boarded trains to Camp O'Donnell on Luzon.³³ This was the infamous [Bataan Death March](#).



Just some of the men on the Bataan Death March

([United States Army](#))

The Japanese considered surrender to be dishonorable, so prisoners of war were treated with contempt and cruelty. The Bataan Death March was just a preview of what was to come for Allied POWs. Over 75,000 men were lined up four abreast in long columns after being stripped of food, water, and personal possessions. Guards shot any soldier found in possession of Japanese money, and rings were taken by cutting off fingers. The prisoners were exhausted from months of fighting, and many were sick and starving. They marched twelve hours a day in the hottest month of all in the Philippines. They were allowed very little food or water along the way. Anyone who fell out during the march was shot or bayoneted, and some were beheaded. By the time they reached Camp O'Donnell, about 750 Americans, and 5,000 Filipinos had died. In just their first two months in this prison camp, 1,600 Americans and 14,400 Filipinos would die.³⁴

Back in the United States, the news that Bataan and Corregidor had fallen was especially distressing for those who had loved ones stationed in the Philippines. The War Department notified Chester Britt's parents on May 26, 1942, that he was missing.³⁵

Britt was moved several times while a [prisoner in the Philippines](#). In June 1942, he went to Cabanatuan on Luzon. Then he was shipped to the island of Mindanao in October 1942. In June 1944, Britt was transferred back to Cabanatuan.³⁶

Meanwhile, back in La Crosse, Britt's family was desperate for information on his fate. It was not until December 1942 that Britt's family was informed that he was a prisoner of war in the Philippines.³⁷ More than a year after his capture, the first communication from Britt came in the form of two Japanese prisoner-of-war typewritten postcards that arrived in early September 1943. On one he had written to his wife, he said, "I am thinking of you constantly and hope to be back soon."³⁸

The only way the Britt family could communicate back to him was through the International Red Cross. The standard cablegram, one per year, allowed 25 words, including the address, salutation, and signature.³⁹ In 1943, they also sent mail and packages to Britt on the Swedish ship [Gripsholm](#) that was sent to rendezvous with a Japanese ship for an exchange of civilian prisoners.⁴⁰

Like so many other American families, the Britt family was contributing all that it could to bring the war to an end and bring their loved ones home. Grace Britt was doing defense work at Northern Engraving and Manufacturing while her mother took care of Chester Jr. Mrs. Britt contributed twenty percent, rather than the usual ten percent, of her wages to war bonds.⁴¹ Three of Chester Britt's brothers were in the armed forces in 1944. Franklin Britt was in the Army Air Force; Edgar Britt was the pilot of a navy patrol bomber in the southern Atlantic; Archie Britt was in medical training under a navy program at the University of Wisconsin.⁴²



—Tribune Photo
First Word In A Year from their husband and father—a prisoner of the Japanese—came Tuesday to Mrs. Chester Britt and son Chester, Jr., 1629 Prospect. The two postcards had Japanese post-marks, Lieut. Britt's signatures on the front and a typewritten message on the back. The La Crosse man was captured in the fall of Bataan, and no word had been received from him since that time. While his mother, the former Grace Runice, reads the cards, two-year-old "Chesty" keeps a protecting arm about the photograph of his father, whom he has not seen.

(La Crosse Tribune, 1943 September 9, page 1)

American prisoners of war began to see a little hope for salvation as American forces brought the fight back to the Philippines. On September 21, 1944, his son's birthday, Chester Britt and the other POWs in

the Cabanatuan camp on Luzon had their spirits temporarily lifted when U.S. Navy dive bombers flew directly over their camp. A navy fighter plane shot down a Japanese plane that crashed just outside the fence surrounding their prison. Everybody in the camp hoped they would have a chance to meet that navy pilot someday. After the prisoners were moved to Bilibid in Manila on October 13, 1944, Britt later said, "for two months we watched navy planes bomb military installations about the city and harbor."⁴³

With American forces closing in on the Philippines, the Japanese started moving prisoners of war out of the islands and closer to Japan. This movement of prisoners was accomplished by Japanese naval vessels that became known as "hell ships." Besides enduring horrific conditions on the ships, the POWs were also subjected to bombing, strafing, and torpedo attacks by Allied planes and submarines that had no idea these vessels contained POWs. Thousands of American and Allied POWs were killed or wounded by their countrymen.

On December 13, 1944, Britt and his fellow prisoners were loaded onto a Japanese passenger ship, [Oryoku Maru](#), along with Japanese civilians who were also being evacuated.⁴⁴ In addition to the 2,000 Japanese civilians on board, at least 1,600 POWs were crammed into the holds of the ship. Men who were already weak and malnourished now had to endure stifling heat.⁴⁵ One of the POWs on this ship, John M. Jacobs, recalled:

The prisoners had been so crowded in these other holds that they couldn't even get air to breathe. They went crazy, cut and bit each other through the arms and legs and sucked their blood. In order to keep from being murdered, many had to climb the ladders and were promptly shot by guards. Between twenty or thirty prisoners had died of suffocation or were murdered during the night.⁴⁶

Estel Myers, another POW on the ship, saw the same thing happen in his group. Men crazed by thirst drank the blood of those who had suffocated. Some even attacked those who were asleep, slitting their throats and wrists. Others drank their own urine to quench their thirst. The lucky ones were able to lick condensation off the steel bulkheads. Nearly every man suffered from diarrhea or dysentery, and the only toilet facilities were a few buckets that were quickly overflowing. The combination of heat and stench was overpowering.⁴⁷

On the morning of December 14, planes from the aircraft carrier *USS Hornet* attacked the *Oryoku Maru*. They continued to attack at intervals throughout the day. The American planes finished the job on December 15, and the *Oryoku Maru* sank off the coast of Luzon. More than a thousand American POWs ended up in the water swimming as best they could toward the shore. The Japanese recaptured all of them.⁴⁸

The surviving prisoners, including Britt, were then put on a horse freighter at San Fernando. This ship was sunk by bombs on January 9, 1945, at Takao, Formosa.⁴⁹

Britt and his ever-dwindling group were then put on a third ship. It was attacked by submarines several times but made it to Kyushu, Japan, on January 30, 1945. It was winter, and the POWs were clad only in shorts.⁵⁰ They unloaded at the port of [Moji](#).⁵¹

Out of the 1,600 American POWs who started the journey, only 600 made it to Japan. By the end of the war, Chester Britt was one of only 128 confirmed survivors of the *Oryoku Maru* left alive.⁵²



Oryoku Maru, with Lt. Chester Britt on board, being attacked on 1944 December 14

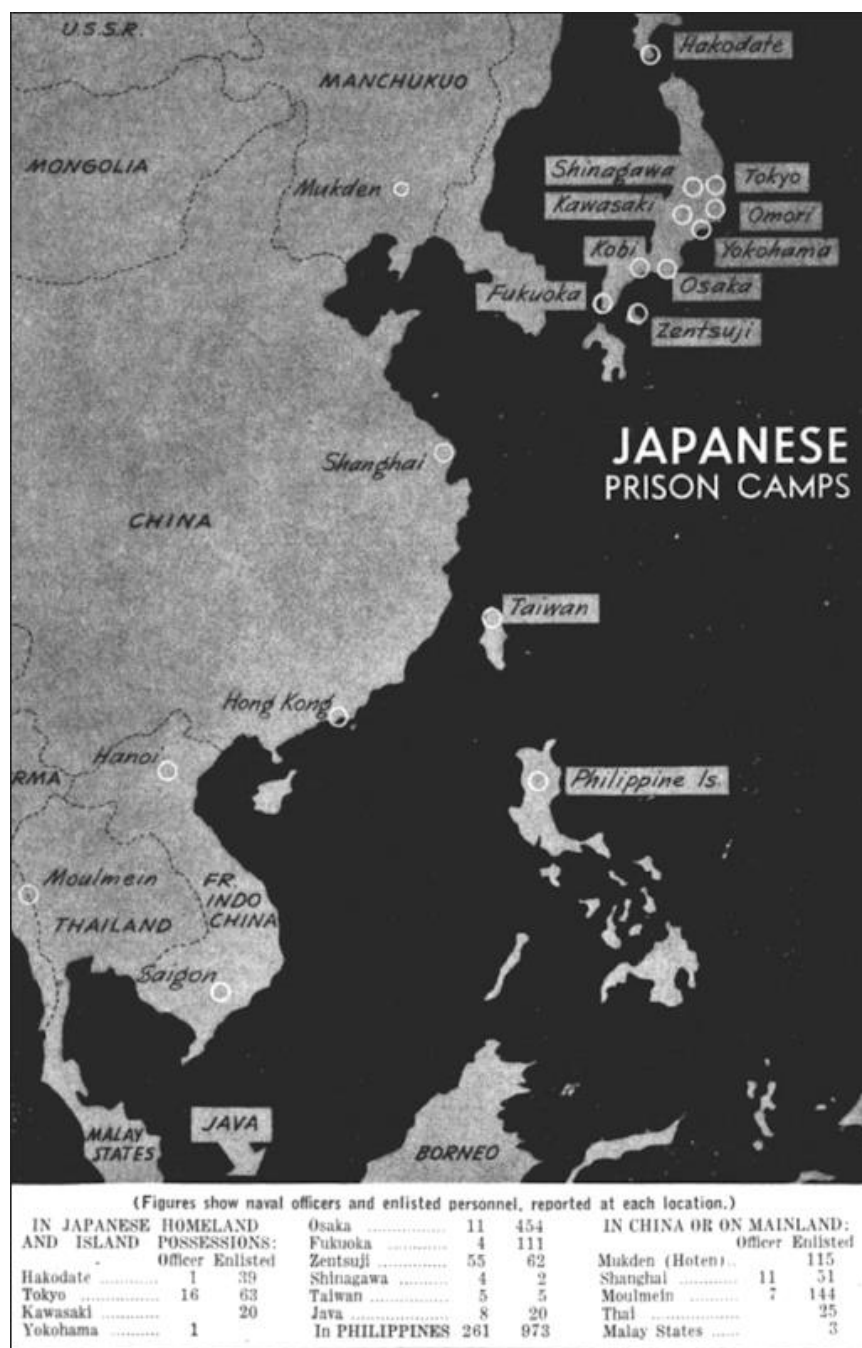
[\(Naval History and Heritage Command\)](#)

During World War II, there were 134 Japanese ships categorized as "hell ships" that transported POWs as well as cargo. These ships made more than 156 voyages carrying an estimated 126,000 Allied prisoners of war. About 1,540 Allied POWs died in the holds of these ships from the conditions or at the hands of Japanese guards, and more than 19,000 were unintentionally killed by Allied attacks on these ships by planes and submarines.⁵³ Chester Britt survived three of these "hell ship" voyages.

On January 16, 1945, Grace Britt received a card from her husband that had been sent from his prison camp in the Philippines. Chester Britt had written: "In good health. Not under treatment. Am well. Merry Christmas to you. Chan [West Point classmate Chandler Baldwin] sends greetings to you. Stay well and God bless you."⁵⁴

While he was in Japan, Chester Britt was in the [Fukuoka POW Camp #3](#) on the island of Kyushu.⁵⁵

Britt was in Japan until April 25, 1945, when he was moved to [Mukden, Manchuria](#).⁵⁶ His family, however, was informed in June that he was in a prison camp on the island of Honshu, Japan.⁵⁷ In her book, *Guests of the Emperor: the Secret History of Japan's Mukden POW Camp*, author Linda Goetz Holmes claims that Unit 731, a Japanese Army biological and chemical warfare research and development unit, experimented on some of the prisoners in the camp.⁵⁸



(factsanddetails.com)

All through their captivity, these starving, disease-ravaged men were treated like slave labor. Their diet consisted mostly of rice, a soup made from green vegetable tops, and occasionally a little meat or dried fish. Small gardens produced some vegetables. They had to work on farms and roads even when they were ill. Britt had malaria an astounding 66 times while he was a captive of the Japanese. They slept on bamboo slats.⁵⁹

Britt did receive some letters and photos of his son from home, but sometimes they were delayed as much as one-and-one-half years. The Japanese read everything before it was given to the POWs and censored much of the content, including the word "love" before a signature. Britt lost the photos on his journey to Japan.⁶⁰

The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in early August 1945 finally convinced the Japanese to sue for peace. On August 17, six American paratroopers led by one of Britt's West Point classmates, Major James T. Hennessey, jumped into the camp in Manchuria to ensure the safe release of the POWs. Russian troops, who had invaded Manchuria shortly before the war ended, liberated the camp and disarmed the Japanese. B-29 bombers dropped food and supplies on the camp to sustain the prisoners until they could be transported.⁶¹

At this time, the six-foot-three-inch-tall Britt weighed just 103 pounds. He could not walk and was near death. Had rescue come just one week later, he probably would have been dead.⁶²

Toward the end of August, the Britt family in La Crosse received confirmation that Chester Britt was in [Camp Hoten](#), Mukden, Manchuria.⁶³

On September 2, 1945, Britt started his long journey home. He was flown to Sian, China, and then to Kunming, China. A transport plane took him to Manila on September 6. Ill with malaria, Britt spent a month in a hospital in Manila. His brother, Franklin, was in the Philippines, and they were put in touch with each other by the Red Cross.⁶⁴ Franklin, who was a corporal in the Army Air Corps, was a tail gunner in a B-24 Liberator bomber.⁶⁵ Franklin spent some time with Chester at the hospital in Manila.⁶⁶

After a month of medical treatment and "forced feeding" in the Army hospital near Manila, Britt's weight was up to 135 pounds.⁶⁷

Chester Britt was flown to [Letterman General Hospital](#) in California, on October 4.⁶⁸

His wife met him in Chicago, and then they took the train back to La Crosse. On October 20, 1945, Chester Britt, now a captain in the United States Army, came home for the first time in five years. At the train station to meet them were Chester's father and mother, his brother, Kenneth, Grace's mother and sisters, and Chester Britt, Jr., now four years old. Senior and Junior met each other for the first time. When asked how it felt to be back, Capt. Britt, after all that he had been through, simply said, "It's wonderful. There's nothing like it."⁶⁹

During his week in La Crosse, he spent time at his parents' home at 1508 Wood Street. His sister, Mrs. Jesse L. T. Morrow, came from Texas, and his brother, Lt. Archie Britt, and his wife came from Cape May Point, New Jersey, for a family reunion.⁷⁰



—Tribune Photo

This Picture Marked An Event in the Chester Britt family. It was the first time Capt. and Mrs. Britt and their son, Chet, Jr., had their pictures taken together. Capt. Britt arrived at the home of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. A. R. Britt, 1508 Wood, a few days ago after three and one-half years in a Jap prison camp. He reports Sunday at Vaughn General hospital, Hines, Ill.

(*La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28, page 3)

The celebration of Navy Day was going on in La Crosse during that week too. On Wednesday, October 24, squadrons of navy planes flew over the city. Two planes landed at the La Crosse airport on French Island because the one piloted by Commander William A. Dean of Detroit had engine trouble. Chester Britt drove out to the airport, apparently to take a look at the aircraft. When Britt found out Dean had seen action in the Pacific, they talked about their respective experiences. During the course of this conversation, Britt learned that it was a plane from Dean's squadron that had shot down the Japanese plane over Britt's prison camp on Luzon on September 21, 1944, his son's third birthday.⁷¹

After his stay in La Crosse, Capt. Britt reported to [Vaughn General Hospital](#) in Hines, Illinois, for further treatment.⁷²

The Japanese captured approximately 320,000 Allied service personnel during World War II. This included 140,000 Europeans and North Americans. Of these, 25,600 were Americans. Of the Americans, 8,288 (35.6 percent) died in captivity from all causes.⁷³

Chester Britt intended to make a career in the Army. He was stationed at [Fort Bliss, Texas](#), in 1946.⁷⁴ When he was stationed at Fort Bliss, Britt was awarded a [Legion of Merit](#) citation "for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services" when he was the supply,

communications, and transportation officer for his unit at Fort Wint in the Philippines during their redeployment to the Bataan Peninsula.⁷⁵

He and Grace also added to their family. A son, Donald, was born on September 26, 1946.⁷⁶ They also had a third son named David.⁷⁷

But the years of malnutrition, disease, and brutal living conditions had taken a toll on Chester Britt's body. When he was in California with the Army, he had a stroke in 1950 that forced him to retire from the Army and return to La Crosse.⁷⁸ Their home was at 2043 Prospect Street.⁷⁹

Just three years later, Chester Britt was dead. He was only 38 years old when he died on July 6, 1953, in the veterans' hospital in Minneapolis. Funeral services were at the Bethel Lutheran Church and burial was in Oak Grove Cemetery.⁸⁰

Grace (Runice) Britt died on May 2, 2003, in La Crosse.⁸¹ Her children live in three different states. Donald Britt is a retired minister who lives in Minnesota. David Britt retired as a Lt. Colonel after 22 years in the United States Air Force and lives in Florida.⁸² Chester Britt Jr., who was just four years old when the father he had never seen came home from the war, went on to attend [Augsburg College](#).⁸³ That was followed by a stint in the United States Navy in the early 1960s, where he served on the heavy cruiser [Los Angeles](#).⁸⁴ He was married in La Crosse to Mildred L. Loging on May 5, 1962.⁸⁵ Chester Britt Jr. was a banker and then a small business owner. He is now 79 years old and works at [Long Beach City College](#), Long Beach, California, where he manages maintenance and scheduling of facilities.⁸⁶



Oak Grove Cemetery, La Crosse, Wisconsin

([Find a Grave](#))

Chester Britt is a member of the La Crosse Logan High School Wall of Fame.⁸⁷



(Courtesy of Jordan Gilge)

Chester Britt, a survivor of a potentially fatal childhood accident, a survivor of the Bataan Death March, a survivor of three Japanese "hell ships," and a survivor of three-and-one-half years as a Japanese prisoner of war---now that is a true survivor.

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One of Chester Britt's sons has written a book about his father's military career and World War II experiences: ***Relentless Hope: A True Story of War and Survival* by David L. Britt with John Duresky and Vickie Graham**. The eBook is available on Amazon with Kindle: ISBN 978-1-09838-540-8. The print copy is ISBN 978-1-09838-539-2.

Sources & Notes:

¹ "Survivor of Bataan Dies," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1953 July 7, page 1.

² "Chester Kieser Britt," *Find A Grave*, accessed 2020 October 30, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/92773357/chester-kieser-britt>.

³ 1930 U.S. census, La Crosse County, Wisconsin, population schedule, La Crosse, p. 9A, dwelling 173, family 194, Archie and Hazel H. Britt; image, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 30); citing NARA microfilm publication T626, roll not indicated; *La Crosse Tribune* 1953 July 7.

⁴ "Four Year Old Boy Severely Burned By A Charged Wire," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1919 June 21, page 1.

⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1919 June 21.

⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1919 June 21.

⁷ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1919 June 21.

⁸ 1930 U.S. census, La Crosse Co., Wisconsin, pop. sch., La Crosse, p. 9A, dwelling 173, fam. 194, Archie and Hazel H. Britt.

⁹ "Honored," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1936 June 26, page 6.

¹⁰ "Air Cadet Winner Rides In Airplane," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1930 April 14, page 9.

¹¹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1936 June 26.

¹² *La Crosse Tribune*, 1936 June 26.

¹³ "High School Students Complete Their Work At Central and Logan," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1933 January 27, page 10.

¹⁴ "New Relief Plan Enables Students To Attend College," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1933 September 22. The university had 717 students for the 1933-1934 school year.

¹⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1936 June 26.

¹⁶ *Find A Grave*.

¹⁷ "Mid-June Bride," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1940 March 24, page 8.

¹⁸ "Grace Runice Bride Of West Point Man," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1940 June 5, page 4.

¹⁹ "Graduate From West Point, Bride Among City Guests," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1940 June 20, page 8.

²⁰ "Locals," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1940 August 1, page 4.

²¹ "World War II Prisoners of the Japanese File, 2007 Update, 1941-1945, ARC ID 2123836," *National Archives at College Park*, College Park, Maryland, (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 30), transcription, "World War II Prisoners of the Japanese, 1941-1945," crediting National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland.

²² "Family Gets Britt Letter," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 January 21, page 4.

²³ "New Citizens," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1941 September 22, page 7. The birth notice shows the spelling of his middle name as "Kaieser."

²⁴ "La Crosse Army Officer On Duty At Grande Isle," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1941 December 10, page 13. In "Names Of Many Others In U.S. Units Compiled," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1941 December 9, page 13; it is stated incorrectly that Chester Britt was with the Army Air Corps at Fort Grande in Hawaii.

²⁵ David Britt, email to the author, 2020 November 16. David Britt is the son of Chester Britt, Sr.

²⁶ Donald Miller, *The Story of World War II* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 101-103.

²⁷ "Soldier Sends Cable Telling Of His Safety," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1941 December 30, page 3.

²⁸ "Welcome Letter Received By Britt From Officer On Bataan Peninsula," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1942 April 1, page 3.

²⁹ "4 La Crosse Men, 22 From Area Believed With Troops On Bataan," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1942 April 9, page 3.

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- ³⁰ David Britt, 2020 November 16.
- ³¹ Miller, 102.
- ³² Miller, 104-105.
- ³³ "Story of Hardships During 3 1/2 Years In Jap Prison Camps Told By Britt On Return Home," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 28, page 3.
- ³⁴ Miller, 106-112.
- ³⁵ "Missing," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1942 May 26, page 1.
- ³⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28.
- ³⁷ "Prisoner," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1942 December 15, page 1.
- ³⁸ "Prisoner Of Japs Sends Two Cards," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1943 September 9, page 1.
- ³⁹ "Red Cross Helps Britt Family Send Message To Prisoner Held By Japs," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1944 March 14, page 12.
- ⁴⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1943 September 9; "The Gripsholm WWII Exchanges," *Densho Encyclopedia*, 2020 August 24, http://encyclopedia.densho.org/The_Gripsholm_WWII_Exchanges/.
- ⁴¹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1943 September 9.
- ⁴² *La Crosse Tribune*, 1944 March 14. Their youngest brother, Ken Britt, later served in the army and was stationed with the occupation forces in Japan after the war. (David Britt, 2020 November 16)
- ⁴³ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28.
- ⁴⁴ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28.
- ⁴⁵ Adam Bisno, "The Japanese 'Hell Ships' of World War II," *Naval History and Heritage Command*, 2019 November, <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1944/oryoku-maru.html>.
- ⁴⁶ Lee A. Gladwin, "American POWs on Japanese Ships Take a Voyage into Hell," *National Archives*, Winter 2003, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2003/winter/hell-ships-1.html>.
- ⁴⁷ Judith L. Pearson, *Belly of the Beast: A POW's Inspiring True Story of Faith, Courage, and Survival Aboard the Infamous WWII Japanese Hell Ship Oryoku Maru*, (New York: New American Library, 2001), 140-141.
- ⁴⁸ Bisno.
- ⁴⁹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28.
- ⁵⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28.
- ⁵¹ David Britt, 2020 November 16.
- ⁵² Bisno.
- ⁵³ Bisno.
- ⁵⁴ "Family Gets Britt Letter," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 January 21, page 4. Chandler Baldwin was from Kansas. He died in early February 1945 in a POW hospital at the Fukuoka #3 prisoner-of-war camp in Japan. (David Britt, 2020 November 16)
- ⁵⁵ David Britt, 2020 November 16. "World War II Prisoners of War Data File, Records of World War II Prisoners of War, 1942-1947," Records of the Office of the Provost Marshal General, Record Group 389, *National Archives at College Park*, College Park, Maryland, (<http://ancestry.com> : accessed 2020 October 30), transcription, "Records of World War II Prisoners of War, 1942-1947," crediting National Archives at College Park, College Park, Maryland; shows Britt in Fukuoka #1 prisoner-of-war camp.
- ⁵⁶ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28.
- ⁵⁷ "Believe Britt At Isle Camp," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 June 22, page 8. The *La Crosse Tribune* of 1945 October 21, page 1, states that Britt was held on Honshu during his captivity. The *La Crosse Tribune* of 1945 October 28, page 3, states that his ship reached "the northern tip of Kyushu." It does not specifically state that he was imprisoned on Honshu, but the northern tip of Kyushu is adjacent to southern Honshu.
- ⁵⁸ "Mukden POW Camp," *US-Japan Dialogue on POWs*, 2011 January 27, <https://www.us-japandialogueonpows.org/MukdenPOWcamp.htm>.
- ⁵⁹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28.
- ⁶⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28.
- ⁶¹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28.

⁶² David Britt, 2020 November 16. According to Mr. Britt, two men who knew and were rescued with his father are still alive. One, a West Point classmate, is 102 years old; the other is 103 years old.

⁶³ "Lieut. Britt In Manchuria," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 August 28, page 1.

⁶⁴ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28.

⁶⁵ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 June 22.

⁶⁶ Delores Britt, wife of Franklin Britt, Onalaska, Wisconsin, telephone interview by the author, 2020 October 31. She is 95 years old.

⁶⁷ David Britt, 2020 November 16.

⁶⁸ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28. This article incorrectly places Letterman General Hospital in Hines, Illinois.

⁶⁹ "Britt, Prisoner Of Japs 3 Years, Greets Family," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1945 October 21, page 1.

⁷⁰ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28.

⁷¹ *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 28. The *Tribune* article gives the impression that William Dean shot down the Japanese plane. Research by John Duresky (email to the author, 2021 June 8), using the "Aircraft Action Report" and Dean's pilot log, shows that Dean did not shoot down a Japanese plane that day. His squadron was part of a large number of planes from the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Hornet* that flew over Britt's POW camp on their way to bomb and strafe shipping in Manila Bay. Eight pilots in Dean's squadron shot down Japanese planes that day, so it was one of them that shot down the Japanese plane on the birthday of Britt's son.

⁷² *La Crosse Tribune*, 1945 October 21.

⁷³ Jonathan F. Vance, ed., *Encyclopedia of Prisoners of War and Internment* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, 2000), 333.

⁷⁴ Delores Britt.

⁷⁵ "Britt Receives Army Citation," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1946 September 29, page 6.

⁷⁶ "New Citizens," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1946 September 28, page 2.

⁷⁷ *La Crosse Tribune* 1953 July 7.

⁷⁸ Delores Britt.

⁷⁹ *La Crosse Tribune* 1953 July 7.

⁸⁰ *La Crosse Tribune* 1953 July 7.

⁸¹ "Grace Rubena Runice Britt," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 2003 May 4, page 6.

⁸² David Britt, 2020 November 16. Mr. Britt is writing a book about his father's World War II experiences.

⁸³ "2 City Students At Augsburg College," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1959 September 17, page 20.

⁸⁴ "Locals," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1961 August 21, page 6.

⁸⁵ "Marriage Licenses," *La Crosse Tribune*, La Crosse, Wisconsin, 1962 May 1, page 12.

⁸⁶ David Britt, email to the author, 2020 November 17.

⁸⁷ David Britt, 2020 November 16.