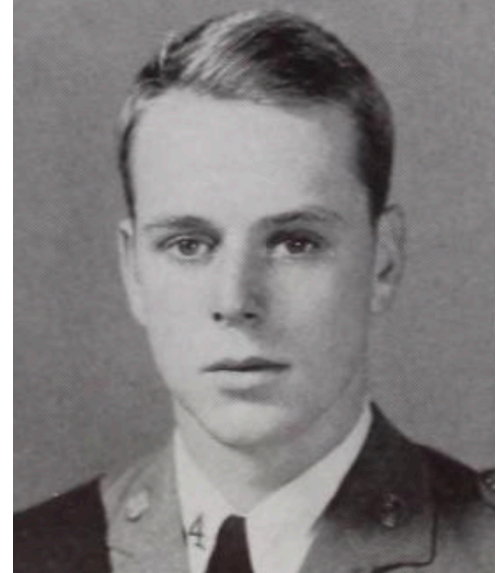


Cherished Chapter of Clemson History

It is likely that more people today are aware of Henry Leitner's story than at the time of his death in early 1945. When Leitner and fellow Clemson alumnus Otis Morgan nursed a diseased comrade back to health in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp, they inspired a story of friendship and sacrifice that became a cherished chapter in Clemson's history. It is a story familiar to thousands of Clemson alumni who attended the Ring Ceremony over the years and heard Colonel Ben Skardon's poignant reminiscence.



Henry Leitner was an accomplished cadet, excelling at academics, the military, and in extracurricular activities. A textile engineering major from Aiken, Leitner was an honor student and a commencement marshal. As a senior cadet, he was appointed first lieutenant and served as the executive officer of Company A, 1st Battalion, 2nd Regiment in the Cadet Brigade. Leitner's Class of 1937 elected him its vice president, and in recognition of his leadership ability and integrity, selected him as a representative on the Senior Disciplinary Council. He was a member of Phi Psi, the honorary textile society, which he served as secretary-treasurer. He was a member of the Central Dance Association which planned the college's dances, and served as secretary-treasurer and then president of Alpha Chi Psi fraternity. Leitner attended ROTC camp at Fort McClellan, Alabama in the summer of 1936, earning the 70 cents a day paid to cadets.

After graduation, Leitner took a position with Serrine and Company in Greenville. He also worked for the Graniteville Company, a textile manufacturer. He married the former Melville Calmes of Anderson.

In 1940, the United States Congress passed the Selective Service Act and Leitner was called to active duty. In October 1941, he sailed for the Philippines and what, at the time, was considered pleasant duty. It would turn out otherwise.

Leitner was assigned to the 92nd Infantry Regiment of the 91st Infantry Division, Philippine Army. The Philippines had begun building its own defense establishment only in the mid-1930s as it prepared for independence from the United States scheduled for 1946. To create the new army, Philippine President Manuel Quezon called on former US Army chief of staff, General Douglas MacArthur. MacArthur envisioned a small standing army backed by a large reserve force. With few experienced military officers among the Filipino population, American officers like Henry Leitner formed the cadre for the Philippine Army. Shortly after his arrival in the islands, Leitner was ordered to mobilize Filipinos at Tacloban on Leyte Island. After the Japanese attack on the Philippines began on December 8, 1941, he was recalled to Luzon.



Without reinforcements or resupply, the American and Filipino forces on Luzon could not hold out against the Japanese. Despite an inspiring effort, the Japanese steadily shoved the defenders south along Luzon's Bataan Peninsula. On April 9, 1942, out of food, ammunition, medicines, and other supplies, American and Filipino troops were forced to surrender. Leitner, along with 12,000 other Americans and 63,000 Filipinos became prisoners-of-war and began the infamous and cruel Death March to Camp O'Donnell some sixty-five miles north. The prisoners were forced to march without rations or sufficient water. Japanese soldiers beat and killed the prisoners and those who fell out were shot or bayoneted. But Henry Leitner survived.

From Camp O'Donnell, prisoners moved to a large prisoner-of-war camp at Cabanatuan. There, Leitner was in the company of two members of Clemson's Class of 1938, Otis Morgan and Ben Skardon. When Skardon became ill with beriberi, his prospects for recovery in a camp without medicine or sufficient food were grim. Sixty years later, Skardon recalled:

I also developed an eye infection with yellow discharge which would seal my eyes shut. I had no appetite, and I could hardly swallow. Henry Leitner and Otis Morgan, Clemson classmates, took turns spoon-feeding me, cleaning my eyes, carrying me piggy-back to an open latrine – washing me – and carrying me back to our NIPA shack. Most of our personal possessions had disappeared. However, I had managed to keep my Clemson class ring hidden. Otis, who worked on the farm as an “in-charge” (an American who understood enough Japanese to pass on the instructions to the POW work details), let it be known that he knew of a gold ring available for trade to the Japanese for food. A deal was made and one evening Otis came in from the farm with a small can of potted ham and a live pullet-sized chicken. Henry borrowed a tin pail, built a fire, and boiled the chicken. Nothing was left except the bones, which by that time were gleaming white. They broke the bones and retrieved the marrow with a piece of wire. Nothing edible remained. The little can of potted ham was used to make highly-flavored rice balls. My diarrhea dried up, and the yellow discharge from my eyes disappeared. My appetite was restored.

Skardon's return to health, a relative condition, at Camp O'Donnell, was due to the steadfast friendship of Leitner and Morgan—but it was the end of the ordeal for none of the three men. They were moved to another camp at Davao Penal Colony on the Philippine Island of Mindanao. When MacArthur made good on his promise to return to the Philippines with the landings at Leyte in October 1944, the Japanese began to move their prisoners-of-war out of the Philippines.

On December 13, more than 1,600 prisoners boarded the *Oryoku Maru*, a Japanese transport ship. The vessel was bound for Formosa, but two days later, while anchored in Subic Bay, it was attacked and sunk by planes from the American aircraft carrier *Hornet*. Three hundred of the prisoners were killed in the attack. The survivors were held on a tennis court with a single water faucet until Christmas Day when they boarded a train to San Fernando on Lingayen Gulf. On December 27th, Leitner boarded another Japanese ship, *Enoura Maru*, once again bound for Formosa.

On January 8, 1945, while at Takao Harbor, Formosa, this ship, which like the others bore no markings identifying it as a POW transport, was attacked by aircraft from *Hornet*. Otis Morgan was killed in the attack, but Leitner and Skardon were among the 930 POWs who survived. These men were now transferred to yet another vessel, the *Brazil Maru*. By the time *Brazil Maru* reached Moji, Japan on January 30, only 435 of the POWs were still alive. The lack of adequate food, medicine, and winter clothing meant that the attrition would continue.

Captain Henry Leitner died of pneumonia in the prisoner-of-war camp at Fukuoka, Kyushu on February 17. By the end of the month, only 264 of the 1600 prisoners who began the journey from the Philippines were still alive. One of those was Ben Skardon.

“My debt to Henry Leitner and Otis Morgan is heavy—it cannot be repaid,” Skardon would say many years later. The story of Leitner’s and Morgan’s brotherly love and compassion under the most trying conditions exemplifies the finest human traits and represents the “Ever Loyal” Clemson spirit.

Henry Daniel Leitner was survived by his mother, his wife, two sisters, and two brothers, one of whom was serving in the 8th Air Force. His remains were returned to the United States after the war and reinterred at the Jefferson Barracks National Cemetery, Saint Louis, Missouri.

