

Mitsuo Fuchida
Commander of the attack on Pearl Harbor

Sunday Morning in Pearl Harbor

The date was December 7, 1941. At approximately 7:49 a.m. Commander Mitsuo Fuchida, 39, led a fleet of 360 Japanese fighter planes through the billowy clouds high above Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. He had one thought in mind—cripple the American enemy. As Fuchida and his forces zeroed in on the peaceful harbor, the commander reached for his microphone, smiled, and ordered, "All squadrons, plunge in to attack!"

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During the ensuing hours, a pounding fury swallowed up the quiet waters as, one by one, American battleships were hit and began tilting into the sea—succumbing to the surprise invasion. Fuchida's fleet mercilessly bombed nearby airfields, dry docks, and barracks. And 3,622 U.S. military personnel were reported killed or missing, with more than 800 wounded. With the famous words, "Tora! Tora! Tora!" Commander Fuchida signaled over the radio waves to his Japanese generals that the attack had been made. "It was the most thrilling exploit of my career," Fuchida later stated.

Meanwhile...

That same morning, Sergeant Jacob DeShazer was on KP duty peeling potatoes at a U.S. army base in Oregon. When news of the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese came over the loudspeaker, DeShazer became enraged and shouted, "The Japs are going to have to pay for this!" At that moment, intense hatred for the Japanese was born in young Jacob DeShazer's heart, and it grew with every passing day. He soon volunteered for a secret mission as a bombardier in a squadron that became known as the Doolittle Raiders. Four months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, DeShazer and the other Raiders made a surprise raid on Tokyo, Japan. But after completing their mission, DeShazer's plane ran out of fuel. He and the crew were forced to parachute into enemy territory. DeShazer was captured the very next day and was held in a P.O.W. camp for 40 long months—34 of them in solitary confinement. During his captivity, DeShazer was severely beaten and malnourished. Three of his buddies were executed by a firing squad, and another died of slow starvation. All of this added fuel to DeShazer's fire of hatred for the Japanese, which was becoming all-consuming. "I began to ponder the cause of such hatred between members of the human race," he recalls. "I wondered what it was that made the Japanese hate the Americans, and what made me hate the Japanese." He was about to find out.

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Freedom in Christ -

DeShazer remembered hearing about Christianity and how it changed hatred into love. Suddenly overcome by a longing to examine the Bible to see if it held the secret, he began begging his captors for one. Finally, two years into his imprisonment, a guard granted his request, but said he could have it for only a few weeks. DeShazer dove in with wild abandon, eagerly reading chapter after chapter—first the Old Testament, then the New. He began to understand that his sin—including his hatred for the Japanese people—was keeping him separated from God. But it also became clear that he could be reconciled with his Heavenly Father through Jesus Christ. On June 8, 1944, DeShazer came across Romans 10:9: "... if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." With a believing heart, DeShazer confessed his sins to God and discovered what true forgiveness is all about.

Jacob DeShazer
One of the Doolittle Raiders

Freedom in Forgiveness

Something miraculous happened in DeShazer's cell that day. Though his physical body was battered from beatings and lack of food, God gave him a new spiritual life in Christ—one filled with joy. Reveling in the freedom of God's forgiveness, DeShazer suddenly saw his captors in a new light. "I discovered that God had given me new spiritual eyes," he said. "When I looked at the Japanese officers and guards who had starved and beaten me and my companions so cruelly, I found my bitter hatred for them changed to loving pity. I realized they did not know anything about my Savior and that if Christ is not in a heart, it is natural to be cruel."

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Just as Christ prayed on the cross, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," DeShazer began praying for God to forgive his torturers. And he vowed to someday return to Japan and share the message of salvation with its people, that they too might be reconciled to God. On August 20, 1945, the war came to an end and prison guards released DeShazer and the others. True to his commitment, he entered a Christian college and began studying to be a missionary, equipping himself to return to Japan and make Christ known.

A Changed Heart —A New Mission

After Pearl Harbor, Commander Fuchida was a national hero. But during the next four years of war he was determined to build on his effective work at Pearl Harbor—and lead Japan to victory. Needless to say, Fuchida was bitter and broken-hearted when the Emperor announced Japan's surrender. With the end of the war, Fuchida's illustrious military career was over and he returned to his home village near Osaka to begin farming. Summoned by General Douglas MacArthur to testify about war crimes, Fuchida stepped off a train in Tokyo one day when an American handed him a pamphlet entitled *I Was a Prisoner of Japan*. The author-Jacob DeShazer. Fuchida was moved as he read how the dynamic power of Christ had transformed DeShazer's life and his attitude toward his former captors. The peace that DeShazer had discovered was exactly what Fuchida had been seeking. Since the American had found it in the Bible, Fuchida purchased one, despite his Shintoist heritage, to see for himself. It was the account of the crucifixion that grabbed Fuchida's heart, particularly Jesus' prayer at the time of His death, as recorded in Luke 23:34—"Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

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"I was impressed that I was certainly one of those for whom Jesus had prayed," Fuchida shared. "The many men I had killed had been slaughtered in the name of patriotism, for I did not understand the love which Christ wishes to implant within every heart." Realizing that Jesus had given His life as a substitute for the wickedness of this world, Fuchida prayed, asking God to forgive his sins and change him from a bitter ex-pilot into a well-balanced Christian with a purpose. From that moment, Fuchida's life started to change. God began releasing the shackles of bitterness and hatred that once bound his heart, replacing it with love and compassion and a desire to tell others about freedom in Christ.

Reconciled to God...and Each Other

Fuchida did tell others about Christ, as did DeShazer. In fact, they both spent many years as evangelists—DeShazer in Japan and Fuchida throughout Asia and the world—sharing about the forgiveness they found through Jesus. Perhaps as important, the two former enemies became friends—a testament to God's miraculous healing of hearts. Only after DeShazer and Fuchida were reconciled to God were they able to find forgiveness in their hearts for those who had sinned against them. They learned that without God's forgiveness in their lives, they lacked the capacity and desire to forgive others. The forgiveness that DeShazer and Fuchida found through Jesus Christ is as available today as it was during World War II. If you would like to receive that same forgiveness, just pray this simple prayer:

Dear God, I admit I am a sinner and need your forgiveness. I believe that Jesus Christ shed His precious blood and died for my sins. I want to turn away from my sin and now invite Christ to come into my heart and live as my Savior. Teach me to read and understand the Bible and talk to You in prayer each day. Amen.