Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient

CPT Willibald C. Bianchi

MONUMENT DEDICATION

September 22, 2000
Brookings, South Dakota
Campus of South Dakota State University

The President of the United States

in the name of

The Congress

takes pleasure in presenting the

Congressional Medal of Honor

to

BIANCHI, WILLIBALD C.

Rank and organization: First Lieutenant, U.S. Army, 45th Infantry, Philippine Scouts.

Place and date: Near Bagac, Bataan Province, Philippine Islands, 3 February 1942. *Entered service at:* New Ulm, Minn. *Birth:* New Ulm, Minn. G.O. No.: 11, 5 March 1942. *Citation:* For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty in action with the enemy on 3 February 1942, near Bagac, Province of Bataan, Philippine Islands. When the rifle platoon of another company was ordered to wipe out 2 strong enemy machine gun nests, 1st Lt. Bianchi voluntarily and of his own initiative, advanced with the platoon leading part of the men. When wounded early in the action by 2 bullets through the left hand, he did not stop for first aid but discarded his rifle and began firing a pistol. He located a machine gun nest and personally silenced it with grenades. When wounded the second time by 2 machine gun bullets through the chest muscles, 1st Lt. Bianchi climbed to the top of an American tank, manned its anti-aircraft machine gun, and fired into a strongly held enemy position until knocked completely off the tank by a third severe wound.

CPT Willibald C. Bianchi Medal of Honor Monument Dedication PROGRAM SCHEDULE

September 22, 2000
Brookings, South Dakota

11:30 AM **Prelude and Seating**
SDSU *"Pride of the Dakotas"* Marching Band
Professor James McKinney, Director – James Coull, Assistant Director

12:00 Noon Entrance of Dignitaries
Leo K. and Gaylee Thorsness and Military Escort
Sue Marti and Military Escort
Mag Marti and Military Escort
Jo McGraw and Military Escort
Michael J. Fitzmaurice and Military Escort
Dr. Peggy Elliott, President of South Dakota State University
MG Philip G. Killey, Adjutant General of South Dakota
Governor William J. Janklow

12:05 PM **Opening Remarks and Introduction of Dignitaries**
COL (Ret.) Dwight Adams, Master of Ceremonies, Brookings, SD

12:10 PM **Invocation**
The Reverend Scott Miller, 1st Lutheran Church, Brookings, SD

12:12 PM **Presentation of Colors**
MG Philip G. Killey, Adjutant General of South Dakota
SDSU ROTC Army and Air Force Color Guard

12:17 PM **Our National Anthem**
SDSU *"Pride of the Dakotas"* Marching Band

12:18 PM **Remarks**
Dr. Peggy Elliott, President of South Dakota State University

12:21 PM **Remarks**
MG Philip G. Killey, Adjutant General of South Dakota

12:26 PM **Remarks**
Governor William J. Janklow

12:45 PM **Remarks**
Medal of Honor Recipient Leo K. Thorsness

12:50 PM **Remarks**
Sue Marti on Behalf of the Bianchi Family

12:55 PM **Official Monument Unveiling and Music**
Governor William J. Janklow – Leo Thorsness and Family
Bianchi Family – Michael J. Fitzmaurice
Independence Hymn by James Coull – SDSU *"Pride of the Dakotas"* Marching Band

1:00 PM **Taps and Flyover**
SD Air National Guard – 114th Fighter Wing
Jon Kahler and Sid Larson – Trumpet Soloists

1:05 PM **Conclusion and Presentation of Monuments**
COL (Ret.) Dwight Adams, Master of Ceremonies – Leo K. Thorsness and Family – Bianchi Family

CPT Willibald (Bill) C. Bianchi

Willibald (Bill) C. Bianchi was born on March 12, 1915, in New Ulm, MN. He grew up on a 73-acre poultry farm and assisted with farm chores. Responsibility was given to Bill early in life. While he was a sophomore at New Ulm High School, his father died and Bill had to take over the burden of farm work. At age twenty-one, Bill Bianchi enrolled at SDSU where he majored in animal science and was active as an Army ROTC cadet and as a Jackrabbit football player. Upon graduation, Bianchi was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the United States Army. He requested foreign service in order to see action at the earliest possible date.

In 1941, Bill's first task was to convert Philippine natives into trained soldiers. Bianchi distinguished himself by transforming these natives into fearless jungle fighters.

The Congressional Medal of Honor was awarded to Bianchi after the famous Toul pocket on West Bataan on February 3, 1942. Bianchi volunteered to lead part of a rifle platoon that was ordered to wipe out two strong enemy machine gun nests. He was wounded early in the action when two bullets passed through his left hand. He didn't stop for first aid, but discarded his rifle and began firing a pistol. He located a machine gun nest and silenced it with grenades. After being wounded a second time by two machine gun bullets through the chest, Bianchi climbed to the top of an American tank, manned its anti-aircraft gun, and fired into the strongly-held enemy position until he was knocked off the tank by a grenade blast. Bianchi's actions succeeded in weakening the Japanese position so that it was later captured by infantrymen with minimal effort.

Bianchi was captured with the main forces in the fall of Bataan on April 9, 1942. He was imprisoned with other troops for 24 hours without food or water, then started the infamous 65-mile death march from Mariveles to San Fernando. Despite hunger, thirst, and heat, Bianchi was up and down the line helping men, spurring them on, sharing their burdens.

Bianchi was moved to several camps, each with conditions worse than the one before. There were no medical supplies, clean clothes, or sanitary facilities, and little food. Prisoners slept on mud-floored huts, soaked by rain. Bianchi's reputation as a caregiver continued as he did what he could to aid his fellow men who, like himself, were suffering from the effects of the starvation diet, work, and dreadful living conditions. Bianchi bartered with his captors and managed to obtain food from their mess halls and made numerous personal contacts to land aid for hundreds of prisoners.

One of Bill's most difficult assignments was to provide the rather short rations that were issued by the captors honestly. All too often, those put in charge of food distribution used their position to better the lot of themselves and their friends at the expense of the overall group. This human weakness showed itself in all ranks and in people from all walks of life. It took a man of great character and determination, such as Bianchi, to first see that all men received a fair share.

On October 16, 1944, Bianchi was transferred to Bilibid prison in Luzon, where conditions were even worse than at O'Donnell and Cabuanatuan. He left Bilibid on December 12, 1944, aboard the Japanese ship Orokyo Maru, where he again provided assistance to his buddies. A few days later he was transferred to an unmarked prison ship. The morning of January 9, 1945, an American plane, unaware the target was filled with American prisoners of war, dropped a 1,000-pound bomb into the hold of the anchored ship. Bianchi was killed instantly. He was 29.

Carrie Bianchi (Bianchi's mother) wrote that, "As a mother, I am proud to be able to give to this generation and to our beloved America the most precious gift that life makes possible, my only son."