

Bethel Baptist Church

Security Training 2/28/2021

Mercy Moments

In the last 100 years, no catastrophic event was as significant as World War II. In just 6 years, over 70 million men, women and children were killed around the world. Death was common, violent and even obligatory. However, there were times even then when mercy was the right answer. In the bloodiest of times, mercy moments happen, though if battles were not fought with resolve, the loss would be tragic.

Eli Ponich and Akira Ishibashi were on opposite sides of the battle in Okinawa in 1945. Ponich was a 715th American Amphibious Infantry Battalion sergeant; Ishibashi a sniper in the Japanese Imperial Army. The 715th landed three amphibious vehicles at Nakagusuku Bay, left their weapons behind, and began treating wounded natives in a cave as Ishibashi watched undetected from a dark hole in the same cave.

When the Americans left the cave, carrying the most injured to their craft for transport to better medical care, Ponich (alone) looked around for anyone they may have missed. In a dark hole, in a pool of his own blood, he found a scared little 5-year-old boy. As he picked him up, he saw the sniper with an M-99 Imperial rifle pointed at him.

Ponich slowly turned his back to the sniper, laid the boy in a safe place and dressed his wounds. When he was done, he stood with the boy in his arms, faced and bowed to Ishibashi. When he saw the M-99 muzzle lower to a non-hostile angle, he walked out.

I heard their story on a Dallas radio program in 1986, just after Ponich and Ishibashi met for the first time in the 40 + years since that mercy moment. Ishibashi had never told anyone, not even his own wife, until shortly before they met. I never forgot the story.

There are many good articles on Ponich and Ishibashi. A good one is by [Ronald Yates of the Chicago Tribune](#).

Think About it

While we honor every defender who administered heroic and often deadly action to save the innocent, we also thank the hundreds of police, military and civilian protectors every day who extend mercy to those who need it at that moment.

It's a tough line to walk; to know when and how to act. If you're wrong, the tragedy can be overwhelming.

For the mercy moments few (if any) will ever know about, thank you.