

On November 6, 1942, Lieutenant Burkhart was among 1,500 prisoners packed into the coal bunker of the unmarked "hell ship" *Nagato Maru* to Japan. It took three torturous weeks for the ship to make its way from the tropics to the cold of Northeast Asia. Lieutenant Burkhart, nearly blind from malnutrition, was used as a slave laborer for the construction company Toshima Group—today's Tobishima Corporation. He was soon moved to the Hiroshima No. 1-B Zentsuji POW Camp on the island of Shikoku. The enlisted men at Zentsuji were slave stevedores for Nippon Express Co.—Nippon Tsuun—at Sakaide Rail Yards and the Port of Takamatsu. As an officer, Lieutenant Burkhart worked in the camp garden. On June 23, 1945, he and 334 officers were transferred to POW Camp 11-B Rokuroshi, deep in the Japanese Alps. Food was scarce, conditions were overcrowded, and winter clothes were unavailable, leading many to fear that they would not survive the harsh winter. Lieutenant Burkhart was liberated from this camp in early September.

Lieutenant Burkhart remained in the Army and had a distinguished career with the quartermaster corps, retiring in 1957 as a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army Reserve. Throughout his life, he was plagued by health problems most likely caused by the illnesses and hardships of being a POW. In 1972, at age 57, he passed away and was buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

Thomas Burkhart's daughter Caroline has honored his memory by working tirelessly to preserve the history of the POW experience and to teach its lessons of American perseverance and grit. Ms. Burkhart is an active member of the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society. In this year, the 75th anniversary of the fall of the Philippines, we appreciate the effort by Japan to reach out to Ms. Burkhart and the American POWs in the spirit of reconciliation and healing.

I ask my colleagues to join me in wishing Caroline Burkhart a safe and meaningful journey and in expressing our gratitude and appreciation to Thomas F. Burkhart and all veterans of the war in the Pacific for their heroic service and sacrifice.

#### TRIBUTE TO GEORGE JAMES WRIGHT

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, today I wish to honor George James Wright, a resident of Laurel, MT, and a veteran of the Second World War.

George, I would like to thank you and your family on behalf of Montana and the United States of America for your service to our Nation in times of war.

George was born on June 14, 1923, in Hinsdale, MT.

Like many Montanans from Valley County, he made a living off the land farming and ranching. He worked hard alongside his older brother, where he remembers driving the tractor and

looking up into the big blue Montana sky.

Also, like many Montanans, he did not back down from answering the call to serve his Nation when we needed him most.

In 1943, George enlisted in the Army, making him the first in his family to serve in the military.

He spent over 2 years fighting in the jungles and on the beaches of the Philippines and New Guinea as a proud member of the 32nd Infantry Division.

He braved the mud. He braved the rain. He braved the bugs, and he braved the bullets.

He saw the unimaginable, as Japanese kamikaze pilots slammed their airplanes into American ships.

He did the unbelievable, driving Army bulldozers into the unknown, making sure our soldiers got the supplies and food they desperately needed.

He served our Nation with bravery, courage, and dignity, working his way up to the rank of T5.

After America's victory, George came home, and returned to those same Montana fields and skies.

After seeing the war's destruction firsthand, he knew that the world needed to be rebuilt, and he knew he was the person for the job. He took what he learned on the battlefield and spent his next years doing construction work.

He married the love of his life, Vivian, who we remember today, and they had two children Roland and Sharon.

At the time, he did not receive the recognition that he was due for his service to our Nation, but we are here today to make that right.

Now, a proud father, grandfather of two, and great-grandfather of seven, he will get that long overdue acknowledgement.

I have the proud honor of presenting him with the following: Bronze Star Medal with one Bronze Service Star, Good Conduct Medal—Army, American Campaign Medal with three Bronze Service Stars, World War II Victory Medal, Philippine Liberation Ribbon with one Bronze Service Star, and Honorable Service Lapel Pin—WWII.

George, you are a Montana farmer through and through, whether feeding Americans at home or soldiers in the field.

I am proud to call myself a farmer, if only because it means I have something in common with a man like George Wright.

George, you have spent your life providing for Montanans at home and protecting Americans overseas.

These medals serve as a small token of our Nation's appreciation for your service and your sacrifice. You are an American hero and one of Montana's best. Thank you for your service.

#### TRIBUTE TO GERALD ROBERT ZELMER

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, today I wish to honor Gerald Robert Zelman, a veteran of the Vietnam war.

Gerald, I would like to thank you, on behalf of the State of Montana, and the United States of America, for your service to this Nation.

Gerald, known by his friends and family as Gerry, was born in Bismarck, ND, on June 25, 1947.

He married the love of his life, Dora Jean or D.J., on October 12, 1968, in Worden, MT, at the height of the Vietnam conflict.

Two months later, Gerry was off to war.

He attended boot camp in Fort Lewis, WA, and then moved on to advanced infantryman training in Fort Eustis, VA.

He deployed soon thereafter, serving proudly with the 101st Airborne Division out of Camp Eagle.

Gerry served as a helicopter crew chief, ensuring that pilots and crews were safe as they flew aerial missions. His skills on the battlefield ensured that rotary-wing aircraft were fine-tuned and ready to take off for their missions.

Gerry is a fixer and a problem solver.

In Vietnam, he fixed helicopters and kept our birds in the air, covering our soldiers on the ground.

When he returned from war, he worked as a maintenance foreman at Montana Sulphur and Chemical.

It is his skills on the battlefield, his bravery and courage, and his service to our Nation that earned him these commendations decades ago. It is my honor to finally deliver them today.

As a father to Carrie and Cody and grandfather to two grandchildren Sienna and Aden, he will get that long overdue acknowledgement.

I have the proud honor of presenting you, Gerry, with the Bronze Star Medal for your meritorious service in connection with ground operations against a hostile force.

I am also presenting you with copies of your previous awards: Army Commendation Medal, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal with Silver Service Star attachment, Expert Badge with Auto Rifle Bar, and sharpshooter badge with rifle bar.

Gerry, these medals are but a small token of our Nation's appreciation for your service and your sacrifice. You are an American hero, and Montana is proud to call you one of our own.

#### NATIONAL FOREST PRODUCTS WEEK

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, in support of National Forest Products Week and in my role as a cochair of the Senate Paper and Packaging Caucus, I would like to recognize the almost 20,000 hard-working men and women employed by the forest products industry in the great State of Arkansas.

Arkansas is home to over 90 wood products, paper, and packaging manufacturing facilities that make over \$8 billion in products annually and contribute over \$1.2 billion to the State and local economies through wages and compensation.