

The Note

By Sue Mayfield Geiger

Don Bodemann got up on the morning of September 5, 1945, a happy man. The war had just ended, and he was about to fly a new kind of mission. As a Navy pilot, he was finally out of harm's way and could look forward to going home and seeing his bride. But first, he would drop seabags full of food to prisoner of war camps in Japan where many American soldiers had been held captive for several long years.

Army First Sgt. Everett Roseen, a POW and survivor of the Bataan Death March, weighing a mere 70 pounds, got up that same morning, very aware that miracles do happen. He, too, was going home, but first he was about to taste the only real food he'd had in three and a half years – particularly a ham sandwich made from the ham and loaves of bread dropped by pilots like Don Bodemann.

Flying off the carrier, Bon Homme Richard, Bodemann had decided to include a note with his drop that read, "Compliments of USS Bon Homme Richard, More later, Ens. D.E. Bodemann."

When Roseen picked up the supply package from a nearby rice paddy, he found the note and silently thanked Ensign Bodemann as he tore into the precious rations. Roseen kept that note, vowing to someday, hopefully, be able to find Bodemann and thank him personally.

It would take over four decades, but the two finally met at a Bon Homme Richard reunion in Connecticut. It was an emotional meeting between two strangers who had never met, but who had been brothers during wartime. The note is now a part of the Bristol Military Museum in Bristol, Connecticut.

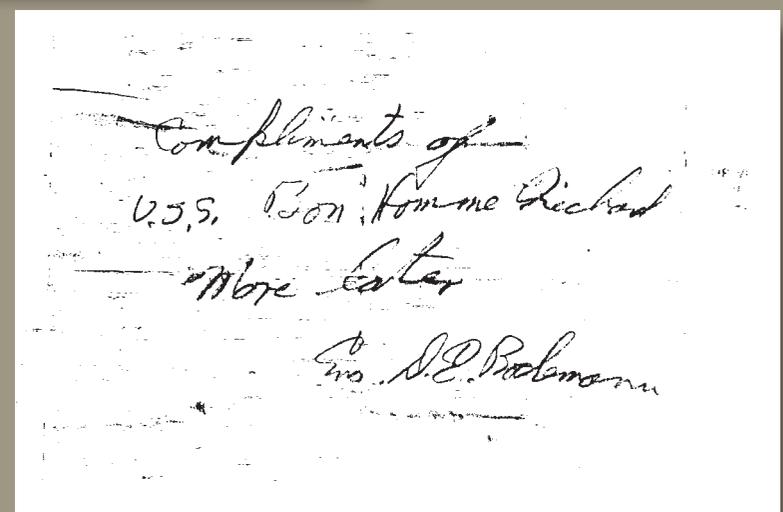
When Don Bodemann died last year at the age of 81, this story



Ensign Don Bodemann

was told at his funeral. It is one of the many stories that weave throughout the fabric of WWII. So many stories, so many lives, so much history. Yet it is these little details that mean the most when we hear about men such as Bodemann and Roseen.

Born in Oklahoma City, January 18, 1924, Donald Eugene Bodemann, was the youngest of four children; moving to Denver with his family when he was two. He grew up in south Denver and Littleton, graduated from Littleton High School, and enlisted in the Navy as a Naval Aviation Cadet in 1942. He trained at various Naval bases before being assigned to a squadron at Quonset Point,



Rhode Island where he met Virginia Ann (Ginny) Gray in 1944. They married on February 7, 1945, but the honeymoon was short-lived because Bodemann left for the Pacific almost immediately. In the Pacific, he joined up with his carrier, the Bon Homme Richard, the only naval carrier that served in three wars – WWII, Korea and Vietnam.

During his time in the Pacific, Bodemann flew night missions off the carrier in a TBM Avenger aircraft. On August 5, 1945, during one of those missions, Bodemann had engine trouble and had to ditch the plane. But he, along with the gunner and radio operator, all survived and were picked up out of the water by another Navy destroyer.

After Japan surrendered, Bodemann's mission was to drop food and supply packets to POW camps. On occasion, he wrote a short personal note, and Roseen happened to be the recipient that morning of the seabag and the note, vowing that he would keep that note until he could personally shake the hand of the writer.

Finally, in 1988, Roseen found out about a reunion of the Bon Homme Richard through Jack Denehy, Curator of the Bristol Military Museum. The contact was made and the two men finally talked on the phone. Within a year, Don and Ginny traveled to Connecticut to meet Roseen. "I was real excited about meeting Don Bodemann," says Roseen, "because I had thought about it for so many years. It was always on my mind that someday we would make contact." The museum is where Roseen placed his note from Bodemann.

Ginny Bodemann likes to talk about Don and paint a picture of the great husband and father he was to their two daughters. "He was a kind and very caring man," she says. "We had 60 great years together, so I feel very blessed. He told me that he felt really good to drop food from the sky that day. But, that's just who he was; always willing to help, always had a smile, and did things for everybody. If anybody needed something, he would figure it out and do it for them. He was a Mason, in the Shrine, and played trombone in the Shrine

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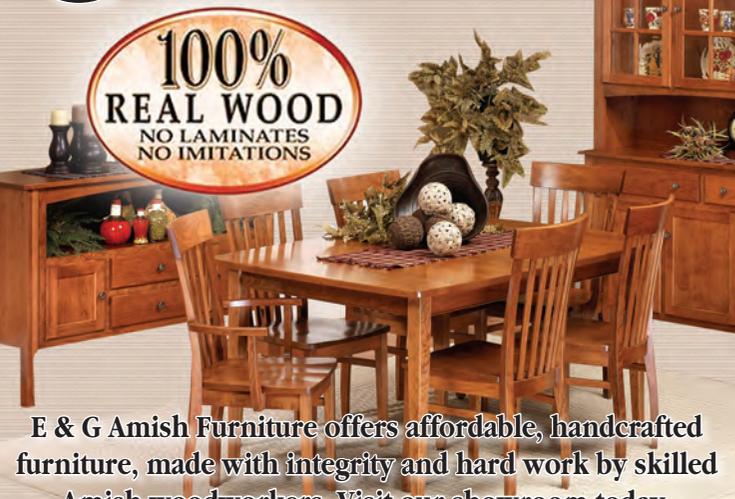
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Sergeant Everett Roseen

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band. He adored his two girls. We miss him, but we had a wonderful life."

Everett Roseen, now 88, still lives in the very same house he moved to when he

was seven years old. Of course, a lot happened between then and now. Like Bodemann, he was one of four children. Growing up in West Hartford, Connecticut, his life was pretty ordinary until he went into the Army. Roseen says he most likely survived Bataan due to the fact he had been trained and conditioned four years prior to being captured. Plus he knew enough Japanese to understand what his captors were saying most of the time.

"We were in the tropics and would be without water for as long as 10 days, many of the men contracted Malaria; the death toll was really high, plus the inhumane way we were treated is something you never forget," he reflects.

"When the seabag was dropped, it was 50 ft. out in the rice paddy; we all scrambled for it, and when I saw the note, I put it in my pocket. As POWs, we were lucky. I saw thousands of American servicemen buried in unmarked graves. I knew I wanted to shake Bodemann's hand, no matter how long it took me to find him."

After 24 years in the Army, Roseen worked in a civilian capacity, then went into the insurance business. Today, he is retired and does a lot of volunteer work with the Veteran's Administration. He son and grandson live nearby.

Despite the three and one half years as a POW, Roseen says Bodemann is the real hero here. "He was a bomber pilot," states Roseen, "flying night missions. That is about as risky as you can get. I was just a soldier. Plus he brought us the only real food we'd had in years while many men were still dying of starvation. So, he saved our lives."

So doesn't Roseen consider himself a hero, as well? "I did nothing compared to what Bodemann did," he says.

But, of course, both men are heroes in this story along with the thousands of their comrades who did not come back. Roseen says that only about thirteen survivors of Bataan still exist.

As for the gift of the ham sandwich that landed in the rice paddy that day, Roseen proclaims, "It is still the best meal I ever had."