

REPAYING THE FAVOR

Fred Hargesheimer, a World War II U.S. Army pilot, was flying a Lockheed P-38F-4 on a photo reconnaissance mission on June 5, 1943, over the island of New Britain, Papua New Guinea, when his plane was attacked by a Japanese Ki-45 Nick fighter.

Despite his injuries and jammed canopy, he was able to parachute to safety. For the next month, he fought to survive in the jungle. He was found by members of the Nakanai tribe after 31 days. They nursed him back to health and sheltered him for five months in the village of Ea Ea, risking their lives to protect him from being found by Japanese soldiers. He met up with Australian Coastwatchers who moved him inland.



On Feb. 5, 1944, Hargesheimer, along with other downed airmen, was rescued by the submarine *USS Gato*. He was awarded the Purple Heart, the Silver Star, the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air medal and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal.

Upon returning to the U.S., he raised funds to build a school – the first the Nakanai would ever attend. Over the next several decades, he continued raising funds to build more schools, a clinic, a library and more. He even moved his family to the

region to teach in the schools himself for several years. He was so beloved by the natives that they honored him with the title *Sara Aura*, or *Chief Warrior* of the Nakanai.

In 1999, aided by amateur Japanese historians of World War II, Hargesheimer contacted the wife of the man who had shot him down. He had always wondered why the pilot had never taken the time to finish him off when he was parachuting to the ground. By then, the man, Mitsugu Hyakutomi of Yamaguchi, Japan, was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. His wife said that her husband had always said that he could never shoot down such defenseless parachuting fliers.



(more)

When asked what motivated his lifelong commitment to the Nakanai, he told the *Associated Press*, “These people were responsible for saving my life. How could I ever repay it?”

Hargesheimer dedicated his life to repaying those who saved it. How would you respond to someone who granted you the same favor?

More importantly, how will you respond to the One who saved your soul – Jesus Christ, who suffered on a cruel cross to take away our sins and grant eternal life through acceptance of Him as our Savior?

Certainly, we can never “repay” Jesus, but we can commit ourselves to living for Him and serving Him. And we can honor His sacrifice for us by bring His message of saving grace to others.

We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19 NKJV).

– Beecher Hunter