

THE GENERAL COURT MARTIAL OF NAVY COMMANDER EDWARD N. LITTLE

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U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander Edward N. Little was a prisoner of war (POW) from April 1942 until August 1945, as one of the nearly 30,000 Americans interned by the Japanese during World War II.

Having survived the Battle of Bataan and the Bataan Death March, Little arrived at the Fukuoka POW Camp 17 on August 10, 1943. Located 46 miles east of Nagasaki, Japan, Camp 17 was initially built by the Mitsui Mining Company, and most of the POWs were forced to work in the nearby Miike Coal Mine.



As the highest ranking Navy officer, Little was assigned to be the Officer in Charge of the mess hall for Camp 17.

There were 1,737 POWs imprisoned at Fukuoka Camp 17, including 730 Americans, 420 Australians, 332 Dutchmen, 250 Brits, and five of other nationalities. One hundred thirty-eight POWs died while imprisoned, including thirty-seven Americans. Four Americans were executed or murdered by the Japanese. One man was executed for attempting to escape and another for fraternizing with Korean mine workers. Two others were killed for infractions at the mess hall: one for stealing buns and another for trading his rice for cigarettes. These two men were allegedly reported to the Japanese by Lieutenant Commander Little.

Little's Courts Martial resulted after the War Crimes Office received numerous complaints about his conduct. Following the camp's liberation in August 1945, dozens of former POWs reported violations of Rules of Land Warfare and Human Decency at Camp 17. One former POW, U.S. Army Corporal Billy Alvin Ayers, stated: "I wish to place some of the blame of such treatment of the men on LCDR Little, who collaborated with the Japanese authorities by reporting infractions of the rules to the Japanese authorities rather than dealing with them in their own way." Another POW, William D. Lee, U.S. Army, attested that "the Japanese would slap someone's face for a minor infraction but never deprived an offender of a meal. Little would often punish men by depriving food, many of which were also suffering from fever, diarrhea or beriberi."

Following an investigation of the allegations, a General Courts Martial was convened on January 15, 1947, at the U.S. Naval Gun Factory in Washington, D.C. Lieutenant Commander Little was charged with the following crimes:

Charge 1: Conduct Unbecoming an Officer and a Gentleman.

Charge 2: Maltreatment of a Person Subject to his Orders.

Charge 3: Conduct to the Prejudice of Good Order and Discipline.

In addition to the three main charges, **twenty-two additional specifications charged that Little:**

- 1) Kept and consumed more than his share of food contents of Red Cross parcels, delivered to him for distribution to the POWs at Camp 17.
- 2) Beat U.S. Army Corporal Bertram Freedman corporal, by striking and throwing him to the floor, causing Freedman to fracture a rib.
- 3) Ordered the beating of U.S. Army Corporal Russell E. Beasley, resulting in multiple wounds and bruises.
- 4) Deprived meals to multiple POWs on numerous occasions, knowing that the daily ration furnished by the Japanese was grossly inadequate, thereby aggravating their undernourished conditions.
- 5) Discarded edible rice into the garbage or on the floor of his office as a form of punishment.
- 6) Reported his fellow POWs to the Japanese, knowing that the Japanese authorities at the camp caused infliction of unreasonable and cruel punishment upon American POWs who were reported to them. **In particular, Little:**

Reported U.S. Marine Corps Corporal James G. Pavlakos for selling a bowl of rice to James O. Wise for two packs of cigarettes. Pavlakos was punished and beaten for nearly 30 days by the Japanese until he died.

Reported U.S. Army Corporal Frank J. Savini for stealing one cup of flour from the mess hall, resulting in him being starved and beaten for eight days.

Reported U.S. Army private William N. Knight for stealing nine buns, resulting in him being starved and beaten for four days until he died.

Reported U.S. Navy Lt. Biagio H. Furnari for stealing one bun from the mess hall, resulting in him being starved and beaten for ten days.

Little denied all of the charges and specifications.



The soldier on the left (whose name is not listed) is guarding Kunimitsu Yamauchi (middle) and Lieutenant Commander Edward Little (right). Yamauchi was a civilian interpreter with the Mitsui Mining Company and was later sentenced to 33 years for his treatment of POWs. The photograph was taken after the camp was liberated.

Little, age 39, had served in the U.S. Navy since 1924. He entered the service as an enlisted man and served for two years before being admitted to the Naval Academy in 1926.

Due to that background, he believed he understood both the viewpoint of enlisted men as well as the officer's leadership obligations to his men.

Little, as one of the first 500 Americans to first arrive in Camp 17 from the Philippines, felt that it was his duty to get as many of the original 500 men home as possible.

He testified that he believed the best way to do that was to maintain a fair and strict mess hall.

Violators of his rules in the mess hall often received punishment. Violations included trading food, skipping the line, stealing, and not sterilizing utensils. Punishment for infractions usually meant losing one's daily ration. Private James Stacy, U.S. Army, testified that "Little often took away a man's ration for some fancied wrong" and "took great delight in giving his orders in Japanese." Little frequently gave orders to American POWs in Japanese, even when the Japanese authorities were not present. Little said he didn't know why he did it, only that it became a habit.

The most deliberated specification concerned the death of private William Knight, who was suspected of stealing nine buns from the mess hall. Knight had a reputation for theft in the camp and, according to Little, was "a habitual offender." Knight even wore insignia on his jacket to signify that he was a known thief. Japanese guards took Knight to the camp prison and beat him with a pole that was two and a half feet long and six inches in diameter. When he lost consciousness, the Japanese revived Knight with cold water then continued beating him. Knight suffered fractures of his arms, legs, and skull, and died after four days of beatings.

Eighteen POWs testified that Little announced: "I am the one who turned Knight into the Japanese this morning and I hope they beat him to death." The message was unmistakable: If you stole from the mess hall, Lieutenant Commander Little would tell the Japanese. During the trial, Little claimed that he was shocked to learn of Knight's death and denied reporting Knight for anything, at any time. Little also testified that he had tried to forget as much as he could from that time and didn't remember many of the things he was accused of saying and doing.

The Japanese commander in charge of the camp was Captain Isao Fukuhara. During his own hearing in February of 1946, Fukuhara testified at the Tokyo War Crimes Trials that Little had requested punishment of a fellow prisoner (Knight) for stealing bread. Captain Fukuhara was later sentenced to death.

Little's overall defense for his conduct relied on Article 8 of the Articles for the Government of the United States Navy. Article 8 states that punishment, such as a General Courts Martial, may be inflicted on any person in the Navy who refuses or fails to use his utmost exertions to detect, apprehend, and bring to punishment all offenders, or to aid all persons appointed for that purpose.

Little's defense claimed that because he was subject to the Articles for the Government of the Navy, he was under an obligation to report offenders. Essentially, his argument justified his right to report offenders to the Japanese authorities while denying ever doing so.

On June 17, 1947, after five months of trial, Little was found not guilty on all charges and specifications. Following the trial, Little continued to serve in the U.S. Navy, including during the Korean War, and later retired with the rank of Commander. Edward Little died on June 28, 1967, at age 59, and was buried with honors at the Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno California.

This sounds like something that would happen today and is a disgrace to our Military Justice System and its interpretation. To me it's "called Bullshit"