

“Remembering Pvt Joseph Hass: A Tale of Sacrifice and Honor”

Welcome to Eagle Historical Society’s Podcasts from Eagle Wisconsin. I’m your host, Mike Rice, and our story this week is: Season 1, Episode 6, titled **“Remembering Pvt Joseph Hass: A Tale of Sacrifice and Honor”**.

In the shadow of war, beyond the economic and environmental toll, lies a deeper impact—a wound etched into the heart and soul of a nation and its people. The most profound loss, however, is that of human lives—both civilian and military. These lives, often devoid of spouses or children to mourn them, often fade from memory within a generation or two.

Such is the poignant story of US Army Pvt. Joseph Hass, hailing from West Allis, Wisconsin. Joseph, alongside his brother Charles, toiled on the farms of Eagle, where they were well-known and respected by the local community.

In 1941, at the age of 18, Joseph enlisted in the US Army to confront the evil Axis powers—Germany, Italy, and Japan. Following basic training, he found himself stationed on Corregidor Island in the Philippines. While Europe bore the brunt of the US war effort, the Japanese turned their attention to the Philippines, seeking control.

Early victories there led to a full-scale assault by Japan, culminating in the surrender of Corregidor Island in May 1942. Thousands of troops, including Joseph Hass, became prisoners of war, subjected to brutal treatment by their Japanese captors. Starvation, disease, and torture plagued these men as they toiled as slave labor, loading and unloading supplies from ships and railroads.

Survival meant living on meager rations—barely 600 calories of moldy rice and seaweed, occasionally supplemented by rotting fish or meat. Beriberi, a vitamin deficiency, claimed many lives.

Joseph’s body bore the scars of relentless labor and harsh conditions. An infected wound turned gangrenous, and beriberi weakened him further. In February 1943, he succumbed to cardiac failure, a casualty of war.

His family received the grim news in July 1943. The Eagle Quill carried his obituary which read: “Private Joseph Hass, 20, has died in a prison camp in Japan, the war department has notified his father, Vincent Hass, 827 S. 112th Street, West Allis, Wis. This information was obtained from the Japanese government through the International Red Cross, the war department said.

Pvt. Hass worked on the Conrad Rudolph farm for two years and then went to work for Ralph Baker near Eagle, where he worked until his enlistment in 1941. He enlisted at the age of 18 years. He was well known here in Palmyra.”

May Pvt. Joseph Hass be honored for his sacrifice, and his memory live on—a testament to the enduring cost of war.