

Dark Side of the Sun

Book honours grandfather POW

by Heather MacAdam

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The story of a horrific time in George Palmer's life has been immortalized, thanks to the hard work of his grandson.

Micheal Palmer recently published *Dark Side of the Sun*, the story of his grandfather's experience in a prisoner of war camp in Japan during the Second World War.

historians, websites and old comrades of his grandfather who were in the battle.

"I accumulated more than 100 pages at that point. I came across some interviews that he had done and from his comrades [I heard] a lot of stories about him which was enough to piece together a story about him. A lot of emphasis, too, was about the camps he was in."

He decided to create a chapter

liked it, they thought it was a "small market, niche-type of book."

"It's Canadian military history so you're not going to garner a wide market with that," he said. "For some of these big publishers, it just wasn't big enough for them to take on, although they seemed to enjoy the story."

Palmer said he took a chance on trying to get the book published and it didn't work out, so he forgot about it.

Later on, Palmer said his cousin asked if he could give to book to his neighbour, who is a publisher with Borealis Press. Palmer agreed, but when he didn't hear anything, he forgot about publishing the book.

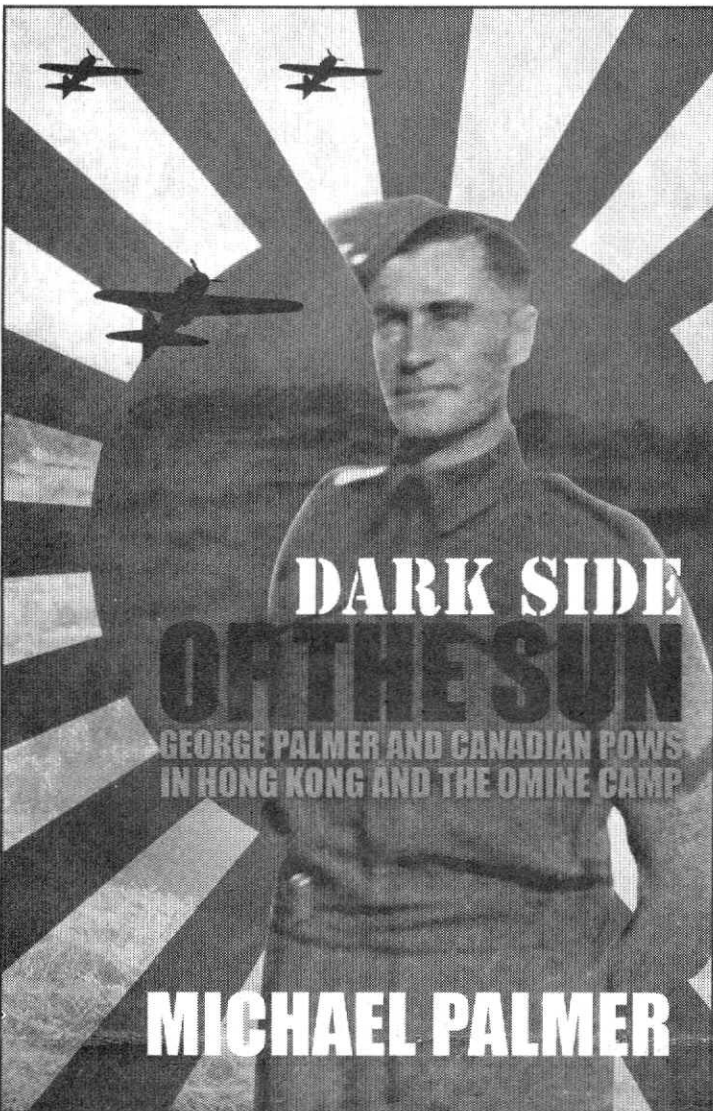
Months down the road, he heard back from that publisher who thought it was a great story.

"Their focus is on Canadian content, and he thought it was a great untold Canadian story," Palmer said. "About a third of the book focuses on the camp he was at - it's called the Omine POW Camp in Japan - and it's the only published book in existence that has any in-depth details about the happenings at this camp."

The book, which has been released online at www.borealispress.com, is also available at the Antigonish 5¢ to \$1.00 and will soon be available through Coles/Indigo/Chapters stores.

Palmer said he still finds it funny when people refer to him as an author.

"That's one of my favourite hobbies - to write. I did also write a fiction book as the same time I was writing my grandfather's book. I never really thought much beyond the hobby aspect. I never really thought about it too seriously until that day our family friend mentioned getting it published."



Antigonish native Michael Palmer recently published *Dark Side of the Sun*, the story of his grandfather's experience in a prisoner of war camp in Japan during the Second World War. (Contributed image)

Palmer, who was born in Antigonish and grew up on Pleasant Street, said he moved to Calgary after graduating from St. FX. in the mid 90s.

Palmer said he always had an interest in the Second World War era, adding so much happened in the world during that time. He read many books about that time since he was a teenager.

"Growing up, I always knew about my grandfather being in a concentration camp, basically, but he never talked about it."

Around 2003, Palmer said he was browsing on the Internet during his lunch break one day and began thinking about his grandfather, who passed away in 1991.

"I thought 'I wonder if there's any information on that battle he was involved in,'" Palmer said, adding his grandfather was captured during the Battle of Hong Kong.

"I knew a little about the battle – the general information, but I never knew any specifics. I thought 'maybe there's something in there about him – about things that he had done.'"

Palmer said after doing some research, he didn't find any specific information on his grandfather, but found out a lot about the battle and the camps where prisoners were held.

"There were about 1,974 Canadian soldiers," he said. "Once the Japanese overtook Hong Kong they were either killed or sent to camps."

During his research Palmer said he found some memorial websites started by children or grandchildren of soldiers who were in the Battle of Hong Kong.

"It got me thinking," he said, adding he planned to research his grandfather and the battle more to put together a booklet of information to share with his family.

"I had never in my wildest dreams thought that I would actually write a book – I thought I might uncover 10 or 20 pages of information."

Palmer said he came across great information from

book format. Nevertheless, he still wasn't considering publishing it.

Through his research, Palmer said he discovered his grandfather was around 31 years old at the time of the Battle of Hong Kong, which began in December 1941. Most of the Canadian soldiers involved in the battle were in their late teens or early 20s.

"So my grandfather's maturity steadied them during all the horrific experiences in the battle and camps."

The emphasis of the book is on his grandfather's heroics and character, Palmer said, adding he was a mentally and physically tough individual.

"It's a beautiful, loving tribute to his grandfather in terms of his courage and his toughness – he must have been a remarkable man."

Palmer's former teacher and friend Mike Marenick

Through stories from comrades, Palmer learned his grandfather was "always one who would help out others in the POW camps."

A friend was suffering from nutrition deficiencies, so his grandfather hid an orange in his armpit while coming back into camp from working in the mines.

"The last chapter quote in Chapter 9 is a quote by George himself on how he believed 'hope' and his happy-go-lucky style saved his life during those horrific years."

After about a year of writing and accumulating pictures and drawings of the camps, Palmer made a few copies his work and handed them out to those who helped him, as well as to family and friends.

A family friend told Palmer he really enjoyed the book and that he should try and get it published.

"I decided to give it a try – I made up a proposal letter and emailed it out to 20 or 30 publishers. I had a few bites – even some big publishers came back to me."

Although some of publishers

For a publisher to take on the project was a great feeling.

"For a while it wasn't happening I thought 'OK, I gave it a try and it didn't work out so let's just move on.'"

Writing isn't work for him, Palmer added.

"It's fun," he said. "I love this type of stuff. It's fun to see how it's evolved over the years and last few months."

His family is very supportive and happy that the project has come to fruition, Palmer said.

"They're all very excited for me."

In his acknowledgements in the back of *Dark Side of*

the Sun, Palmer makes special mention of his Grade 8 English teacher, Mike Marenick, whom Palmer said was able to "awaken my excitement and passion for writing."

Marenick said he just finished reading *Dark Side of the Sun* late last week.

"I loved it," he said.

Marenick said he remembers vividly that Palmer has a passion to write stories as a student and put lot of time and effort into his work.

"He didn't see it as chore – he saw it as a real passion," Marenick said.

He and Palmer have kept in touch, Marenick said, and Palmer would often send him material he had written to look at and respond to.

However, Marenick said he hadn't seen this book until it was published, but enjoyed it just the same.

"It's a beautiful, loving tribute to his grandfather in terms of his courage and his toughness – he must have been a remarkable man," Marenick said.

"It was quite a good read – quite an interesting story."

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