

Fr Neal Henry Lawrence Jr Burial at Sea
Prior Roman Paur OSB, Trinity Benedictine Monastery, Fujimi, Nagano-ken

On Saturday, 8 April 2006, at about 9:30 on a clear morning in a simple ceremony that began with reciting a Tonka poem by Fr Neal Henry Lawrence, his ashes were committed to the blue shallow waters of the East China Sea where 61 years to the week earlier, Captain Lawrence was among those scared soldiers in the noisy crafts who were to land on the beaches of the small island of Okinawa. In so doing, we fulfilled his final wish that he expressed so well: *I want my ashes / Scattered at sea to join all / In peaceful oneness; / To follow the ebb and flow / Of tides for billions of years.*

The 3-month carnage of Okinawa that annihilated over a quarter of a million people, about half of whom were civilians, was so appalling to Neal that he vowed on the spot to dedicate the rest of his (long) life to peace. His post war initiatives in Japan and his rare official recognition by the Japanese government attest to Neal's commitment and the difference one person of courage and determination can make.

The small group of ten people, Mr Alex Kishaba, director of the Dqryukya America Historical Research Society, friend of Neal, and member of the Trinity Benedictine Monastery advisory board, Mr Hideyoshi Tomoyose and son, Tsukasa, owner of the boat, four National TV crewmembers and an Okinawan newspaper reporter, Edward Vebelun who prepared the short liturgy, and me, now bid Neal farewell at the coordinates 26.12822 degrees north and 127.32885 degrees east where the water is 57 meters deep near the Kerama Islands.

The white chrysanthemums marking the spot drifted away as Edward chanted *In Paradisum*. The concluding prayer remembered all the dead of these senseless battles and acknowledged the blessings of Neal's significant role in the post-war reconstruction period, and his career and life as an ambassador of peace even now as we are searching through the lessons of this tragic history.

Okinawa, the 47th prefecture (state), is an elongated subtropical island about 68 miles long, two and a half hours by plane southwest of Tokyo. It is a beautiful rugged land of red pottery, sugar cane, and orchids with a resident population of some 1.3 million whose origins may be different from mainland Japan. The recently completed Peace Park commemorates with dignity all who were killed on the island in WWII with black granite sentinels listing the war dead, civilian and military, friend and foe.

The burial at sea and the entire four-day visit were arranged by Mr Alex Kishaba and sponsored by Mr Masajiro Nashiro, Principal and owner of the Shogakuin Preparatory School

of about 2,000 students in grades 7 through 12, Naha City, Okinawa, in gratitude for the Saint John's University Neal Henry Lawrence four-year scholarships awarded annually to Shogakuin graduates since 2002. Currently there are 10 students from Okinawa in our colleges in addition to an exchange program between Saint John's Prep and Shogakuin. Two recent SJU and one CSB graduates are teachers at Shogakuin, Lindsey West, Tom Kain, and Aaron Troussaint. Since the formation of the partnership with CSB/SJU coordinated by Dr David Bennetts, 160 students from Shogakuin have participated in our summer English language program. The Principal's son, Mr Masaichiro Nashiro, is a visiting instructor on our faculty and living in Flyntown.

In a separate meeting, the mayor of an adjoining city, Kitanakagusuku-son, Mr Kunio Arakaki, expressed his gratitude to Saint John's for the 40 students who also participated in our summer English language program over the last four years. The city is eager to support this program of learning and cultural exchange.

At the request of the parish, about half of the cremains are in the Meguro Church columbarium, Tokyo.