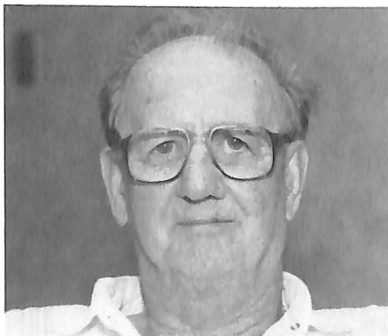


# THE LONG ROAD BACK

How do you deal with life after facing death six times in one day?

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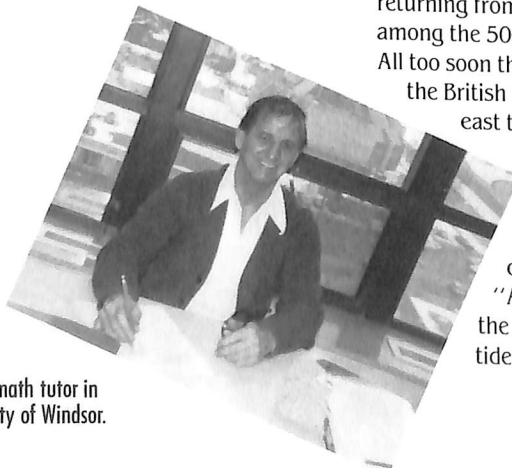


e are, say the experts, more resilient than we know. Fortunately most of us will never have to find out. We'll never be put to the acid test the way Duncan McIntyre was. He survived 48 hours in the sea, six firing squads and a disease-ridden prisoner of war camp, and ultimately managed to turn all that pain into achievement and triumph. McIntyre, who retired in 1985 after 28 years at Amherstburg, seems an easy-going man, but he has the tenacity of one tough cookie.

He was born in 1920 in the small town of Dumbarton outside Glasgow. No storybook childhood, his. The Depression meant that unless your family was wealthy, an extra salary was always needed. McIntyre left school at 14 to go to work. At 15 he ran away from home never to return. A year later he surfaced as an apprentice in the navy, one of the oldest boys in his class. Although he maintains that Scotsmen generally choose the army if they opt for a career in the service, McIntyre fancied himself a sailor. He thrived during his year of training, grew strong on seamanship drills and sports. It was all to stand him in good stead.

"Peace in our time" proclaimed British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain upon returning from Germany in 1938, but wiser heads had their doubts. Seaman McIntyre was among the 500 sailors sent to Portsmouth, where the battleship Royal Oak was waiting. All too soon these men found themselves sailing to the Mediterranean to replace losses in the British flotilla there. Then, in 1942, McIntyre was among a crew of 240 heading east to Singapore on the battleship Jupiter. The war news was bleak on every front. In the Far East, at the end of February, Japan launched an all-out assault on the island of Java, which it wrongly assumed had been turned into an armed fortress. During the Battle of Java Sea, the Jupiter was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine. It sank seven miles off the coast of the beleaguered island.

"A group of us had managed to scramble onto a life raft. We could dimly see the lights of Java on the horizon, but it soon became apparent to me that the tide was pushing us back to sea. I decided to swim for shore. The others



McIntyre today; as math tutor in his office at University of Windsor.



thought I was mad and after a day and a half I could understand why. I was totally exhausted. In fact, I half expected I'd die there in the water." He fell asleep, not realizing where the tide was carrying him. When he awoke, there were two destroyers close by. He swam closer, thinking they were French. His reception was a burst of machine gun fire. Panicky, McIntyre summoned up all his remaining strength and headed for a huge troop carrier he spotted some distance away. "They threw down a rope and I finally managed to get hauled on board. I thought my chest was going to cave in. And then I took a look around and knew I was a goner." McIntyre, one of 60 men who had survived the sinking of the Jupiter, had been rescued by the Japanese.

March 1, 1942, Java. A day that will forever live in horror for McIntyre. Six times he and seven other prisoners were lined up to be shot. Six times their execution was aborted. Simply bizarre circumstances – or was there something more? McIntyre still wonders. He mentions that the firing squad was composed of Japanese marines and that front-line soldiers traditionally have no heart for shooting their enemy. They kept changing the spot for execution, but something always interfered. One site was too near the ships sailing by. Another time, an endless stream of Japanese cyclists appeared out of nowhere. The officer in charge would insist on performing a pre-execution ceremony so elaborate that he himself always seemed to lose interest. Then, when finally the prisoners were lined up for the sixth time, another officer waving a piece of paper sped up on a motorcycle. Someone had decided the men would be more valuable as laborers than as corpses. In a pathetic gesture of apology, one of the soldiers handed out cookies and water.

**N**ow death was merely likely. McIntyre recalls a camp in Surabaya, where perhaps 10 percent of the prisoners would survive the war and maybe half of those wouldn't live another six months, so sickly were they. He remembers the island of Haroukou and the two volcanic hills he worked to knock down so an air drop could be built. When the war finally ended, McIntyre was in relatively good physical shape, but psychologically he had hit bottom. "Particularly March 1, I had been terrified, yet my training kept taunting me that I was a Scottish sailor, not a coward, and I had no business being scared. By the end of the war, I was totally drained and frightened of people. The worst part was being made to feel that somehow all the bad things that happened were my fault. It was years before I could say I was on the mend."

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Java: beautiful island in the wrong place at the wrong time.





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McIntyre, celebrating his first  
convocation day, with niece  
Margaret Grant; with nephew  
George Grant (l) and Wayne  
Lamphier, a friend.

He remained in the navy until 1953, then emigrated to Canada, settling in the Windsor area because he knew of relatives living in Detroit. In 1957 he found a job at the Amherstburg plant. And that should put a happy ending to McIntyre's story. In fact, the best was yet to come. "One day my niece and nephew said to me, 'You should do something with yourself. Why don't you go to university?' I told them they were nuts, that I had quit school at age 14. But they insisted I could do it. There was an initiative in those years to promote post-secondary school education among older people. By passing four out of six courses I could be admitted to university as a bona fide student."

And so began McIntyre's double life. By day he worked in the yard at the plant; by night he studied at University of Windsor. Passing his first six courses was only the beginning. The erstwhile dropout developed a love of learning and discovered he was a born mathematician. He plunged into university-level studies. Steadily his confidence grew, due in large part to the encouragement he received. His plant co-workers, he says, were especially supportive. The company found him work on the afternoon shift so he could attend classes in the morning. His counsellor on campus, a Dr. Britten, guided his progress, watched that he didn't take on too much at once and convinced him that his presence on campus was important. "You walk into a class," he told McIntyre, "and instantly you're a challenge to the professor. He thinks, 'If I can teach that old man, I can teach anyone.'"

McIntyre liked the teasing because there was truth to it. In a world he described as full of bright, disciplined and attractive young men and women, he was a novelty. "I'd automatically become the teacher's pet," he grinned.

In 1978, a very proud McIntyre stepped up to receive his university diploma. He was now the owner of a B.A. degree, honors in mathematics. And a B average, to boot. His honors studies had taken four years to complete. But now, rather than rest on his laurels, McIntyre wanted even more. He decided to work towards his Masters degree in mathematics and four years later, in 1982, he reached that goal, as well. "In the '70s," he explains, "if you were equipped with an honors degree in math, you were practically assured of a teaching job. That's where some of my group were headed. But I couldn't get involved with that at my age (he was now 55). No, I was doing it strictly as a hobby."

And maybe a little medicine, as well. To this day, when McIntyre talks about the group of 20 students he was part of, there's no mistaking his sense of pride and wonder that they welcomed him as one of them. "I wouldn't have expected it," he admits. "I felt they were paying me a great compliment and I was very flattered." That acceptance may well have banished the last of the ghosts that had haunted him since the terrible days of World War II.

Too bad about the teaching part, though, because McIntyre was a natural who instinctively understood the perils that can sabotage even a bright undergraduate. "Students coming into university often can't cope with the changes that are thrust on them. Everything's too big, there are too many people and the classes can be quite impersonal. Some students find it demoralizing, even dehumanizing. In self-defense they put up barriers to protect





Golf games, workouts at the plant gym and, at last, a measure of tranquility.

themselves and sooner or later their studies suffer." McIntyre found within himself a gift for teaching. He became a tutorial assistant, giving math students extra tuition and taking on some professorial chores such as marking homework assignments. "I could walk into a room, no matter how large," he says, "and break down any barrier that was there between the students and the professor. The students became my buddies almost immediately. I especially liked teaching the girls. They frequently have difficulties with math, but I think it's often the teachers' fault. They don't take care, they speak without thinking and say something stupid and discouraging. Any girl who came to me for tutoring help, why I could build up her self-confidence in a matter of weeks – then there'd be no stopping her. To watch that improvement gave me a great deal of personal satisfaction."

It's fair to say that McIntyre is happier today than he's ever been. Happy with Amherstburg, which he now calls his hometown and where he's lived longer than anywhere else. He still tutors those students who seek him out. He has a passion for golf and regularly breaks 100. And he considers himself a lucky man. "Twenty years ago I remember golfing with someone as old as I am now," he recalls. "He was very ill, but a great golfer, and he told me, 'Every day like this is a gift from God.' I recall that conversation and I am grateful. I've seen the worst of life on earth and I've also seen people at their best. I've been very fortunate." ■