

Willibald C. Bianchi Collection

Collection Summary

Identifier:	MA 57
Title:	Willibald C. Bianchi Collection
Dates:	1933-2001
Extent:	0.42 linear feet (1 document case)
Creator:	Bianchi, Willibald C.
Language:	English

Repository: South Dakota State University Archives & Special Collections, University Station, Box 2115, 1300 North Campus Drive, Brookings, South Dakota, 57007

Access Note: Open. Materials must be used in-house and do not circulate.

Preferred Citation: Title or description of item, date, MA 57, box number, folder number, Willibald C. Bianchi Papers, South Dakota State University Archives and Special Collections, Brookings, South Dakota.

Abstract

The Willibald C. Bianchi Papers document the life, military service, and posthumous commemoration of Captain Willibald C. Bianchi (1915–1945), a graduate of South Dakota State College and a Medal of Honor recipient of World War II. Bianchi served with the Philippine Scouts and distinguished himself during the Battle of Bataan on February 3, 1942, where he continued to lead and assist fellow soldiers despite sustaining multiple wounds. Following the fall of Bataan, he was captured by Japanese forces, survived the Bataan Death March, and endured more than two years as a prisoner of war before dying in 1945 when an unmarked prison transport ship was bombed.

The collection contains photocopies of personal correspondence written by Bianchi from the Philippines and during his captivity, providing firsthand accounts of military service and prisoner of war conditions during the early Pacific theater of World War II. Additional materials include correspondence with family members and military officials, newspaper clippings, memorial writings, and biographical documentation. The papers also include a photocopy of Bianchi's Medal of Honor certificate and a commemorative certificate signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Materials further document later efforts to commemorate Bianchi's legacy at South Dakota State University, including records relating to the establishment of a memorial plaque, scholarship fund, and commemorative events organized by Tom Beattie and the Willibald Bianchi Memorial and Scholarship Committee. Together, the collection preserves both contemporary documentation of Bianchi's wartime experience and later institutional and community efforts to honor his service and sacrifice.

Biography

Willibald C. Bianchi was born on March 12, 1915, in New Ulm, Minnesota, to Joseph and Carrie Bianchi.

He enrolled at South Dakota State College in 1937 and joined the R.O.T.C. program. Upon graduating in 1940, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. Army and entered Infantry School at Fort Benning, Georgia, later earning promotion to First Lieutenant.

In April 1941, Bianchi was assigned to the 45th Infantry Regiment of the Philippine Scouts to assist in training Filipino soldiers. He remained in the Philippines after the U.S. entered World War II and was wounded during the Battle of Bataan on February 3, 1942. Despite multiple injuries, he continued fighting until he was incapacitated by an explosion. For his actions, General Douglas MacArthur awarded him the Medal of Honor, making Bianchi the third recipient of the medal during the war.

Promoted to Captain, Bianchi was captured on April 9, 1942, during the fall of Bataan. He endured the Bataan Death March and worked to aid fellow prisoners in the camps. After over two years in captivity, he died on January 9, 1945, when an unmarked prison ship was bombed by American forces.

Bianchi's remains were never recovered. He is commemorated on the Wall of the Missing at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial in the Philippines, with a grave marker at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii.

In 1998, South Dakota State University honored Captain Bianchi with a memorial plaque in the Student Union, a commemorative ceremony, and the establishment of a scholarship in his name.

Scope and Content

This collection documents the military service and enduring legacy of Captain Willibald C. Bianchi, a 1940 graduate of South Dakota State College and one of the earliest Medal of Honor recipients of World War II. Bianchi demonstrated extraordinary heroism during the Battle of Bataan, continuing to lead and assist fellow soldiers despite multiple injuries, before being captured and later dying as a prisoner of war in 1945.

Materials include photocopies of Bianchi's personal letters from the Philippines and as a POW, offering rare firsthand insight into the experiences of an American officer during the early Pacific campaign. Additional records include correspondence with his family, military officials, and others, as well as memorial writings, newspaper clippings, and biographical information. The collection also features a photocopy of Bianchi's Medal of Honor certificate and a certificate signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in recognition of his sacrifice.

The collection holds further significance through its documentation of the efforts by Tom Beattie and the Willibald Bianchi Memorial and Scholarship Committee to honor Bianchi's legacy at South Dakota State University. These materials trace the creation of a memorial plaque, scholarship fund, and commemorative events, highlighting Bianchi's continued impact on the university and broader public memory.

Access Points

Subjects

- Prisoners of war
- Medal of Honor
- Soldiers

Names

- Bianchi, Willibald C.
- United States. Army. Infantry Regiment, 45th. Philippine Scouts

Conditions Governing Access

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Container List

Box	Folder	Description	Date(s)
1	1	Biographical Information: photocopies of photographs and brief biographies	undated
1	2	Congressional Medal of Honor for Valor: photocopies of letter and certificate	1943
1	3	Certificate of Recognition on Behalf of the United States of America for Bianchi and Signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson [photocopies]	1960s
1	4	Correspondence: Bianchi to His Family and letter to Tom Beatie explaining the letters [photocopies]	1941, 1997
1	5	Correspondence: Bianchi to His Family When He was a Prisoner of War [photocopies]	1944
1	6	Correspondence: Spaulding, Theodore I. to Carrie Bianchi [photocopy]	1951
1	7	Correspondence: Thomas, Mrs. Lowell to Carrie Bianchi [photocopy]	1943
1	8	Correspondence: Veteran's Administration to Mrs. John McKethen [photocopy]	1980
1	9	Correspondence: War Department to Bianchi Family [photocopy]	1942-1945
1	10	Family: Charles Bianchi (grandfather)[photocopy]	undated

Box	Folder	Description	Date(s)
1	11	Family: Joseph Bianchi (father) [photocopy]	1933
1	12	News clippings	1942-1995
1	13	Remembrances and Memorials: Acceptance Speech of Carrie Bianchi upon Bianchi Receiving the Medal of Honor [photocopy]	undated
1	14	Remembrances and Memorials: Army Report Tells Help Bianchi Gave to Prison mates [photocopy]	undated
1	15	Remembrances and Memorials: Bianchi Grave Marker at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, HI [1 color photograph]	undated
1	16	Remembrances and Memorials: Bill Bianchi, Bataan Fighter, in the Tuol River Pocket, Bataan, February 3, 1942 [photocopy]	1944
1	17	Remembrances and Memorials: Letter Jim Daly Sent to His Mother Regarding Bianchi [photocopy]	1942
1	18	Remembrances and Memorials: Memorial at Fort Smelling to Remember the End of World War II	1995
1	19	Remembrances and Memorials: Memorial Speech Given by Bianchi's Niece Sue [photocopy]	2001
1	20	Remembrances and Memorials: These Men Shall Never Die, Bianchi of the Scouts by Lowell Thomas [photocopy]	1945
1	21	Remembrances and Memorials: To Whom Honor is Due, Minnesota Recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor in World War II [photocopy]	1995
1	22	Remembrances and Memorials: Willibald [photocopy]	undated
1	23	Remembrances and Memorials: With Army Forces Western Pacific 29th Replacement Depot Near Manilla. [photocopy]	1945
1	24	SDSU Memorials: Military Science Hall of Fame Induction of Captain Willibald C. Bianchi [photocopies]	1990
1	25	SDSU Memorials: Alumni Remembrances	undated
1	26	SDSU Memorials: Alumni Trip to New Ulm, Minnesota	1998

Box	Folder	Description	Date(s)
1	27	SDSU Memorials: Correspondence Related to Memorial and Plaque between Tom Beatie and Others	1997-1998
1	28	SDSU Memorials: General Information Regarding Congressional Medal of Honor and Awardees from South Dakota	undated
1	29	SDSU Memorials: Listing of Alumni between 1940 and 1949	1997
1	30	SDSU Memorials: Memorial and Scholarship Committee	1997-1998
1	31	SDSU Memorials: Memorial Ceremony	1998
1	32	SDSU Memorials: Plaque in the Student Union	1997