

On April 19 of 1945, my father and his classmates at St. John High School in Bancroft, Iowa, were startled by the sound of a church bell somberly ringing at the



nearby Catholic church. The parish priest rang the bell at his first knowledge of the passing of one of his parishioners—one bell for every year of that person’s life. On that day, the bell rang 20 times. Though he hadn’t been officially notified, my father and all his classmates knew that his brother

Tommy had been killed in the war.

Uncle Tommy, for whom I am named, wrote to my father in February 1945. He told my father not to drink, smoke, or join the Army. “I’ve seen all the world I want to see and would settle for Iowa any old time,” he wrote that last time. The rest of the letter was filled with fabricated pleasantries of life at that time in the Philippines. Soldiers had been ordered not to share the grim reality of the war for fear of upsetting their families. Two months after writing the letter, he was shot to death in an ambush as he was following a tank unit through a narrow pass in Luzon en route to Baugio in the Philippines.

They called him a hero. But the people of Bancroft, the “Garden Spot of Iowa”, a town of 727, had another reaction. It was captured by Harold Clark, editor of the *Bancroft Register*, in a poem entitled “**Tommy**”:

Don’t say a world moved, a nation rose on Tommy’s death.

Just say he smiles no more and he is cold as winter’s breath.

He is no more. Though he was youth, his story ends.

He did the things he must for home and friends.

And that is all.

Don't say he gave his life, or sought the light of some ideal.

At twenty, men don't wish to give a thing so real.

Just say his life was snatched before the start.

Because the world said, "Do your duty. Bare your heart."

And that is all.

Don't prate of mock heroics.

Only briefly say

He did the thing he had to do.

He fought that day.

To live. He lost a game he'd hoped to win.

Because conventions say, "You fight or sin."

And that is all.

Won't say we're proud he died for this, our cause.

Or that there's compensation in applause

From fellow men. Just say we love him now as then

And pray youth won't be sacrificed again.

Let that be all.

Uncle Tommy was a baseball star at Bancroft St. John High School, pitching and winning for an undefeated team that won the 1943 Iowa Fall State Championship—the

first Catholic school in Iowa to win a state championship in any sport. But he played in pain. Uncle Tommy had even been exempted from the draft for severe juvenile arthritis, but he insisted on joining the Army. Upon enlistment, he chose one of the most dangerous positions in the war: operation of a man-portable flamethrower.

Fort Dodge Senior High School was scheduled to play a baseball game against Bancroft St. John on the day my family was notified of Uncle Tommy's death. Under the tragic circumstances, officials from Fort Dodge contacted St. John to respectfully cancel that afternoon's game. My grandfather, however, announced that even in the face of heartbreaking sorrow, life must go on for the important things, especially for something as paramount as a baseball game. His nephew John Devine, and his son, my dad, John Murray would play and even win that game.

The famed and historic Bancroft Memorial Baseball Park which opened for play in 1948 on land in part donated by my grandfather Art Murray and financed with the G.I. life insurance payment for Uncle Tommy—is dedicated to him and all soldiers who have sacrificed their lives for this country. Bancroft's Pioneer Collegiate Baseball Team, the Bandits, will take on league foe Albert Lea on June 2, 2018 to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the first game played at Memorial Park, also against Albert Lea.

The Bancroft American Legion has been synonymous with Memorial Park and Bancroft baseball since that inaugural game 70 years ago, and even long before that time. The Bancroft American Legion team won Iowa State Championships in 1936, 1943, 1945, 1957, 1958, 1959, and 1962.

The members of the Bancroft American Legion continue to support Memorial Park with an annual Veterans' Game and an Annual Avenue of Flags presentation in honor of 115 deceased veterans at Memorial Park on Memorial Day and July 4th.

Tommy Murray is the author of, *Fathers, Sons, and the Holy Ghosts of Baseball*, a novel that tells the story of a small town in northwest Iowa in 1974 where baseball is a religion told from the perspective of three veterans from foreign wars in World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War.

Compiled by Bill Dudding  
Register • May 10, 1945  
World War II  
**Killed In Action**



*Pvt. Thomas A Murray*

Pvt. Thomas A Murray, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Murray of Bancroft, died in action on Luzon, Philippine Islands, April 16, according to an announcement received Wednesday of last week.

**Murray Killed**

Pvt. Thomas Murray, son of Mr. and Mrs. W. A. Murray of Bancroft, was killed on Luzon in the Philippines, April 19. The above message was received this (Wednesday) morning by his parents from the War Department. Details of his death are not known.

Tommy entered the service on July 26, last year, and was home on a short furlough at Christmas time. He left for overseas duty shortly thereafter. It is known that he had seen considerable action from letters received from him during the winter months.

He is survived by his parents; one sister, Mrs. Eileen Kelly; and four brothers, Lt. (jg) Joseph, Pfc. Donald, and John and James at home.