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The Sammy Grashio Victory Course

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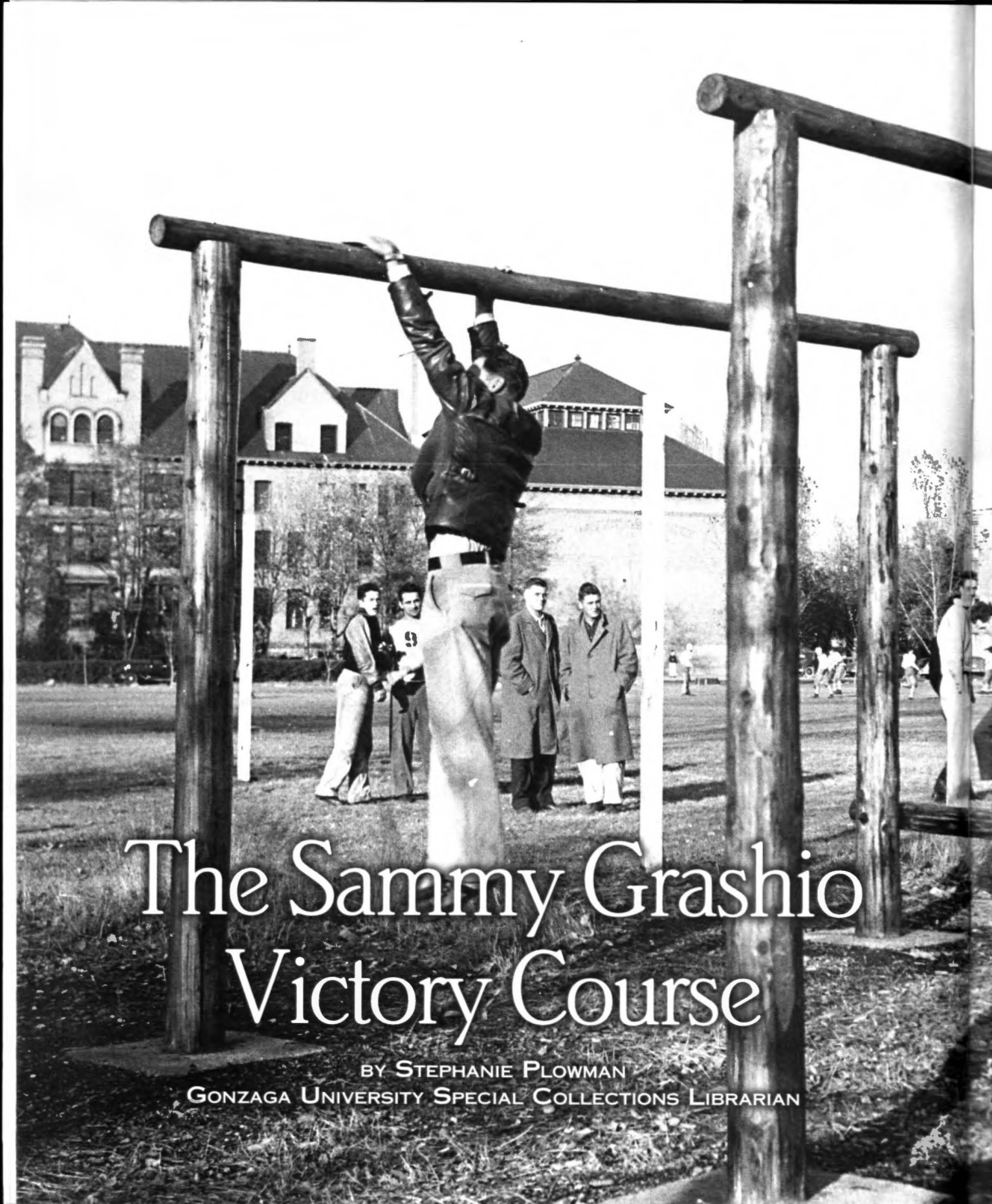


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Recommended Citation

Plowman, Stephanie, "The Sammy Grashio Victory Course" (2013). *Foley Library Scholarship*. 23.
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The Sammy Grashio Victory Course

BY STEPHANIE PLOWMAN
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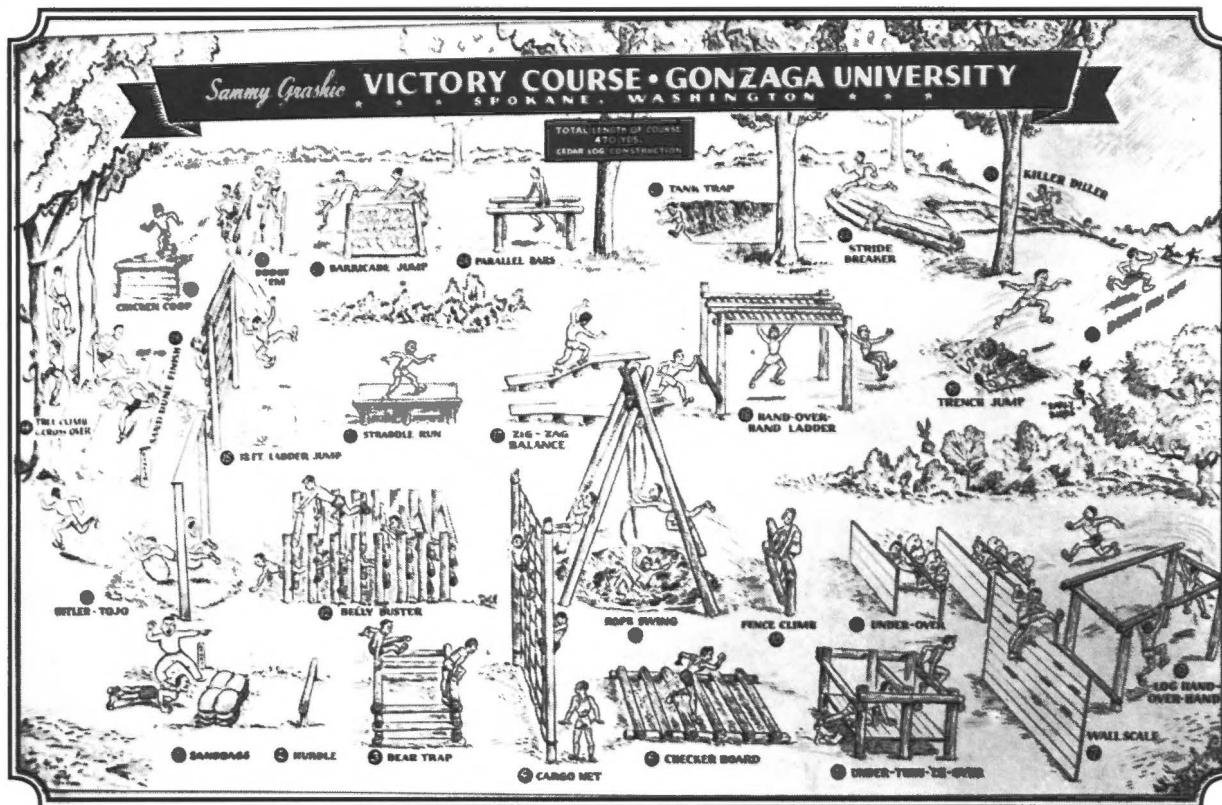


In 1942 Gonzaga University constructed an obstacle course to help with the physical training of its V-5 Naval Air Cadets and V-12 Reserves. Gonzaga's athletic director and alumnus, Fr. Arthur Dussault, SJ designed and supervised the work. Considered one of the toughest and most rugged courses in the country, it was recognized as basic in the physical training of the nearly 500 cadets and reserves. "Compact, complete, interesting, it affords vigorous exercise and a definite challenge to any young man." Its 470 yards included 28 obstacles, several set in concrete, and was designed to test the individual's every muscle as well as his stamina, strength, agility and muscular coordination. All construction was done with stripped cedar logs and finished with a double Old English oil application. Four minutes was considered a good time for the course. It was located where Herak Center and the soccer field are now.

The Early Birds Breakfast Club of Spokane paid for the entire construction expenses. Second Lieutenant Jesus Gavaldon of the U.S. Army 903 Engineers at Fort Wright was in charge of the project. The obstacle course was dedicated on November 21, 1942 as the "Sammy Grashio Victory Course," honoring one of Gonzaga's war heroes, Lieutenant Sammy Grashio of the Army Air Corps, then a prisoner of war in the Philippines.

Sammy Grashio was born April 1, 1918 in Spokane. He attended Gonzaga High School and graduated in 1936. He attended Gonzaga University from 1938 to 1940 where he was majoring in Philosophy. He left in 1940 to train to be an Aviation Cadet in Ontario, California. Following receipt of a commission as Second Lieutenant in the Army Air Corps, he was trained as a Pursuit Pilot until November 1941, when he was transferred to the Philippine Islands as a flight leader with the 21st Pursuit Squadron.

Grashio was captured at the fall of Bataan on April



Above: The Sammy Grashio Victory Course, 1943. Previous page: Cadets on "Log hand-over-hand," obstacle #8. Photos courtesy of Gonzaga University Archives.

9, 1942. He and approximately 75,000 Filipino and American troops on Bataan were forced to make an arduous 65-mile march to prison camps. The marchers made the trek in intense heat and were subjected to harsh treatment by Japanese guards. Thousands perished during this "Bataan Death March" as it was later called. After 361 days as a prisoner of war, Grashio escaped and served for seven months with the guerilla forces on the Island of Mindanao, Philippine Island. On September 29, 1943 he was evacuated by a U.S. submarine to Australia and then returned to the United States.

Grashio graduated from the University of Washington in 1947 with a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology. From 1944 to 1949 he served in various staff and compound positions in the field of air operations and air base management. He then

held various military positions in the United States, Italy, and Germany. In 1956 he was promoted to the rank of full colonel and was assigned a flying command at the base in Klamath Falls, Oregon. He was decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star with Cluster, the Bronze Star, the Legion of Merit, the U.S. Presidential Citation with three Clusters, the Philippine Presidential Citation, and the U.S. Treasury Department Award.

Upon his retirement from the U.S. Air Force, Colonel Grashio joined the Gonzaga University staff as assistant to the president and director of high school relations. He later transferred to the office of development in 1966 to help raise more than half a million dollars to support lay faculty salaries at Gonzaga.

In 1982, The Philippines government recognized



Above: "The Belly Buster," obstacle #12. Below: CPT Cadets go over the "Hurdle," obstacle #2. Photos courtesy of Gonzaga University Archives.



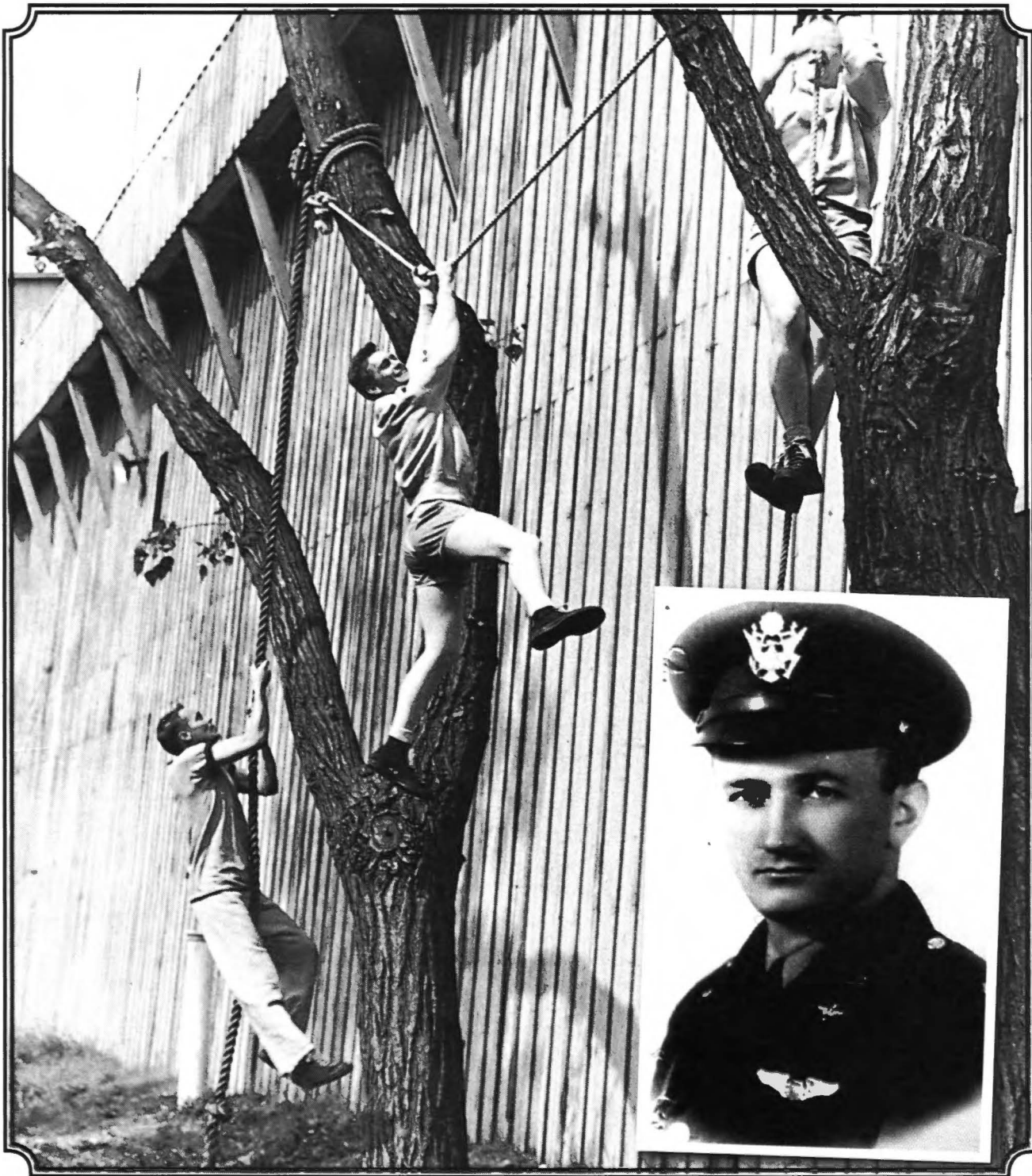


Above: The "Zig-Zag Balance," obstacle #17, with the football stadium in the background. Photo courtesy of Gonzaga University Archives.

his efforts with helping the guerilla forces on the Island of Mindanao and awarded him its Military Merit Medal with bronze spearhead "for heroic achievements during World War II from May 1942 to January 1945." The citation read: "During the oppressive occupation of Mindanao by the Japanese armed forces, these guerrillas... sought out and engaged in a fierce gun battle and succeeded in minimizing casualties of a returning liberating army by Gen. MacArthur. By this heroic act, these guerrillas earned distinct honor for themselves and their country."

Grashio relied on his faith in God to persevere and survive during extreme hardship. In a newspaper story about him in 1982 he said: "Like other former Japanese POWs I often have been asked how I survived the Death March and the prison camps. First I want to live, and second, prayer gave me the spiritual strength and the will to live. I always felt the presence of God and believed He would not abandon me."

Grashio co-authored *Return to Freedom: The War Memoirs of Colonel Samuel C. Grashio U.S.A.F.* with Bernard Nordling in 1982. Grashio died in 1999. ☪



Above: The "Tree Climb Cross Over," obstacle #14. Inset: Lieutenant Sammy Grashio, circa 1944. Photos courtesy of Gonzaga University Archives.