

ROLAND CHAMPAGNE

MY COMBAT YEARS

PART 3

LIBERATION OF THE PHILIPPINES



Dear Roland,

My name is Leonard Suniga and I am a Hospital Corpsman in the Navy. I served in both Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, and from one veteran to another, I just want to thank you for your service, and for sharing your memories in this book. My family and I are originally from the Philippines and seeing the pictures and reading/hearing some of your stories and experiences there is just fascinating and humbling at the same time. I appreciate you and your son were able to share this book and the others he made as well. Again, I thank you for your service and God Bless.

Wishing you good health and happiness,
HM2(GS/W) LEONARDO C. SUNIGA, USN



HM2 Suniga
Naval Medical Center
San Diego

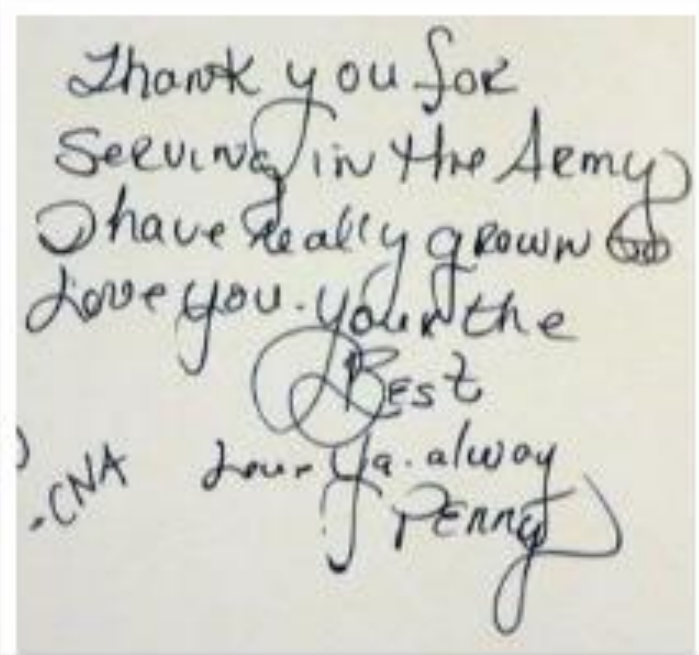
13 AUGUST 2014

Dear PFC Roland Champagne,
Today, the United States of America and many nations around the world are living and enjoying their FREEDOM. This did not happen easily but did so because many brave men and women like you stood and sacrificed on the front lines to preserve all of the freedom that we are enjoying today. This is why I am writing you this letter to personally thank you for your services during WWII. Your contribution has resulted to the liberation of many countries from oppression in Asia, including the Phil, where I was born. You went out & performed your best job putting your life at risk, and ensured

in Asia, including the Phil, where I performed your best job putting your life at risk, and ensured a better life for future generations. My father served as a guerilla fighter with the BOLD unit, 66th Infantry Reg, USAFIP. You all chose to fight and preserved freedom & independence. all of us today are indebted for your service and the sacrifices of all brave men and women for the preservation of Democracy. I am deeply inspired and thank you for sharing with me your book and your patriotism. This reminded me never to take Freedom for granted ever. May God bless you and your family.
A Thankful citizen, JOEL M. APDRES
USMC (ret)



Joel M. Apides
Commander
United States Navy Ret.
Naval Medical Center
San Diego
August 2014

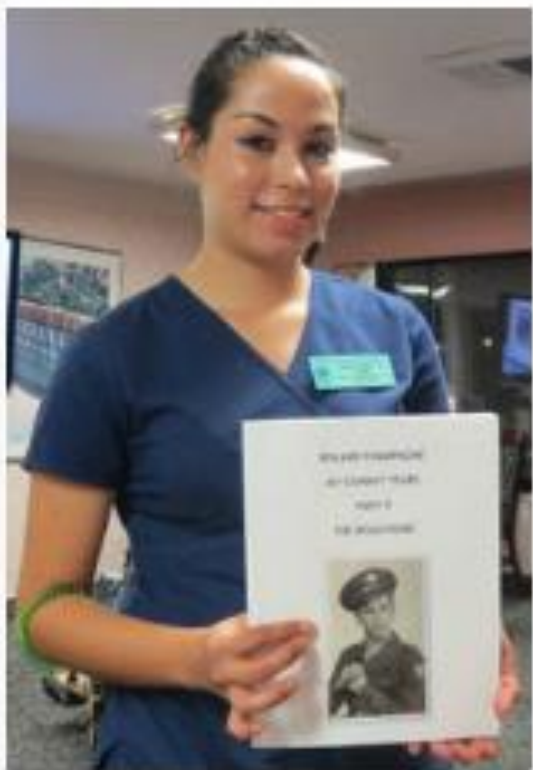


Penny, CNA
St Paul's Manor
San Diego
August 2014

Thank you for Serving
my Homeland, Philippines
Also so Grateful to have you! Juanita



Juanita R. Blue
CNA
St Paul's Manor
San Diego
August 2014



Thank you Mr. Roland
For the Service
I am glad to have you
at St. Paul's Villa!
Karen Gonzalez.

Karen Gonzalez
CNA
St Paul's Manor
San Diego
August 2014

For more than two years the high command of the Southwest Pacific had anticipated the promised return to the Philippines. That objective had governed nearly all of the planning and most of the earlier invasions. Now the day had arrived. Plans had been made and troops and cargo were aboard ships. The fleets of the Pacific Ocean Areas and the Southwest Pacific Area were about to join forces in a mighty assault against the Philippines.





Here is General Bradley telling his staff the surprising news. We would not be invading the tiny island of Yap. We would soon be invading the Philippines!

On 3 October the convoy arrived at Manus.⁶ The assault troops of the XXIV Corps were transferred from AKA's to LST's. The 96th Division on 9 October issued a final field order for the Leyte operation. This order allowed the regimental headquarters less than forty-eight hours to complete final orders, plans, and maps, and distribute them to the headquarters of the assault battalions.

On 11 October the LST transports carrying the assault battalions filed out of the Manus anchorage. On 15 October the President of the United States sent his best wishes for the success of the operation to President Sergio Osmeña of the Philippine Commonwealth, who was at sea with the expedition.

When the 3rd Amphibious Force joined the Seventh Fleet, the largest convoy ever seen in the Pacific up to that time was formed.

Thirty-four months had been spent in building and preparing these combatant and amphibious vessels.

Of the vessels assigned to participate in the landing, 157 were combatant ships: 6 old battleships, 5 heavy cruisers, 6 light cruisers, 18 escort carriers, 86 destroyers, 25 destroyer escorts, and 11 frigates. There were 420 transport vessels, including 5 command ships, 40 attack transports, 10 LSD's, 151 LST's, 79 LCI's, 21 LCT's, and 18 high-speed transports. The remainder included patrol, mine-sweeping, hydrographic, and service ships.



As the convoy came ever closer to the target, the atmosphere aboard the vessels became more and more tense. By 1800 on 19 October most of the vessels had arrived outside the gulf. The Far Shore was now near and could be seen vaguely in the distance. On board one of the vessels Protestant and Catholic evening prayers were broadcast over the address system. Some of the men felt that it gave them a lift, but many felt that they were being administered the last rites of their church.




On October 19 the bombardment was chiefly for the purpose of providing effective support and coverage for the underwater demolition teams. However, many of the defenses and installations of the enemy on or near the landing beaches, including buildings and supply dumps, were neutralized or destroyed.



Through the night of 19-20 October, destroyers shot at the Japanese forces on land. The American forces were safely within Leyte Gulf--A Day had arrived.

on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Patent or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

 <p style="text-align: center;"><small>(CENSOR'S STAMP)</small></p>	<p>TO: <u>MR. EUGENE CHAMPAGNE</u> <u>6 BUTLER ST.</u> <u>LAWRENCE, MASS.</u> <u>U. S. A.</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2</small></p>	<p>FROM: <u>Pvt. R. Champagne</u> 7/362922 <u>Co K 3528th APD 96</u> <u>C/o PM Fiesco</u></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>(Sender's complete address above)</small></p>
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Hello Gene, Well I received your letter today. That's the only letter I received since those two birthday cards mailed on the 28th. Nice going. This is also my first letter for quite some time. I started some but I tore them up. I think its time I told you that I'm somewhere at sea. I didn't want to tell you before so you wouldn't worry too much. I'm stumped again. I don't know what to write. All I think about is Christmas and next September. I hope you'll keep me posted on football and hockey. If this reaches you before its too late for baseball, I hope you'll send me the World Series' results. I sure miss that sports page. Keep on sending the Tribune and the Post.

*your "big" brothers
 Roland*

<p><small>HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?</small></p>	<p style="font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">V-MAIL</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; font-weight: normal;">REPLY BY</p>	<p><small>HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?</small></p>
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U. S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1942 O-340000

Hello Gene,

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Keep on sending the Tribune and the Post.

Your "big" brother,
Roland

The waters of Leyte Gulf were glassy calm as the convoys bearing the assault forces steamed into their appointed positions off the shores of Leyte in the very early morning hours of 20 October 1944.

By 4:00 AM the troops on board the transports had dressed by the red lights in the holds where they were quartered. There was very little talking. Many of the men sat on their bunks giving their weapons a final check. Others lay back and smoked in silence. A few sought the chaplains.



Breakfast was a good one with powdered eggs, bacon, toast, pancakes, syrup, and reconstituted milk and coffee. We did not know it at the time but this was to be our last good meal until Thanksgiving. Later as we stood on the decks we saw the huge armada of ships that had arrived throughout the night.



At 0600 on A Day, 20 October, the battleships assigned to the Southern Attack Force opened fire on the beaches with an intensive two-hour assault. The cruisers and destroyers delivered heavy fire. During this 39 minute period they shot at Blue and Orange Beaches 180 rounds of 14 inch shells; 180 rounds of 8 inch shells, 800 rounds of 6 inch shells, and 1,560 rounds of 5 inch shells.

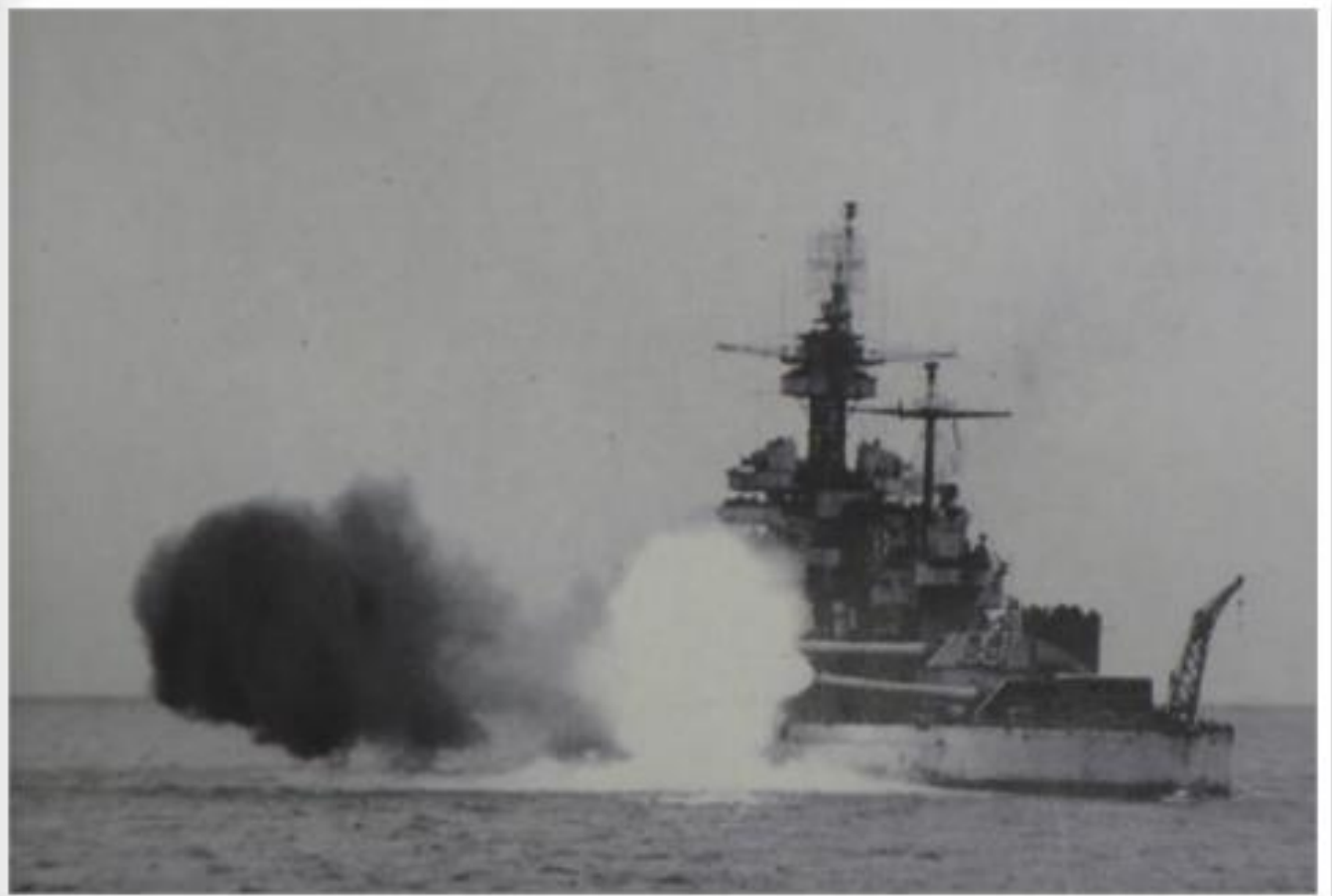
Gray smoke plumes were rising from the shores. The battleship Mississippi was working on the northern beaches. She was joined by the Maryland whose fire has apparently caused a large shore explosion.



You cannot imagine the noise caused by the naval bombardment. You could almost feel the shock waves as the shells traveled overhead.



We were all hoping that each volley would make our taking over the island a little easier.



At 0800 the first anchor chains of the vessels had rattled out; LCVP's were quickly swung over the sides; boats circled mother ships and moved to their rendezvous areas.⁹ The LCI mortar and LCI rocket ships took their places at the head of the assault waves. It was now 0945, fifteen minutes before H Hour. The LCI's raced simultaneously to the shores of Leyte, raking the landing beaches with rocket and mortar fire.



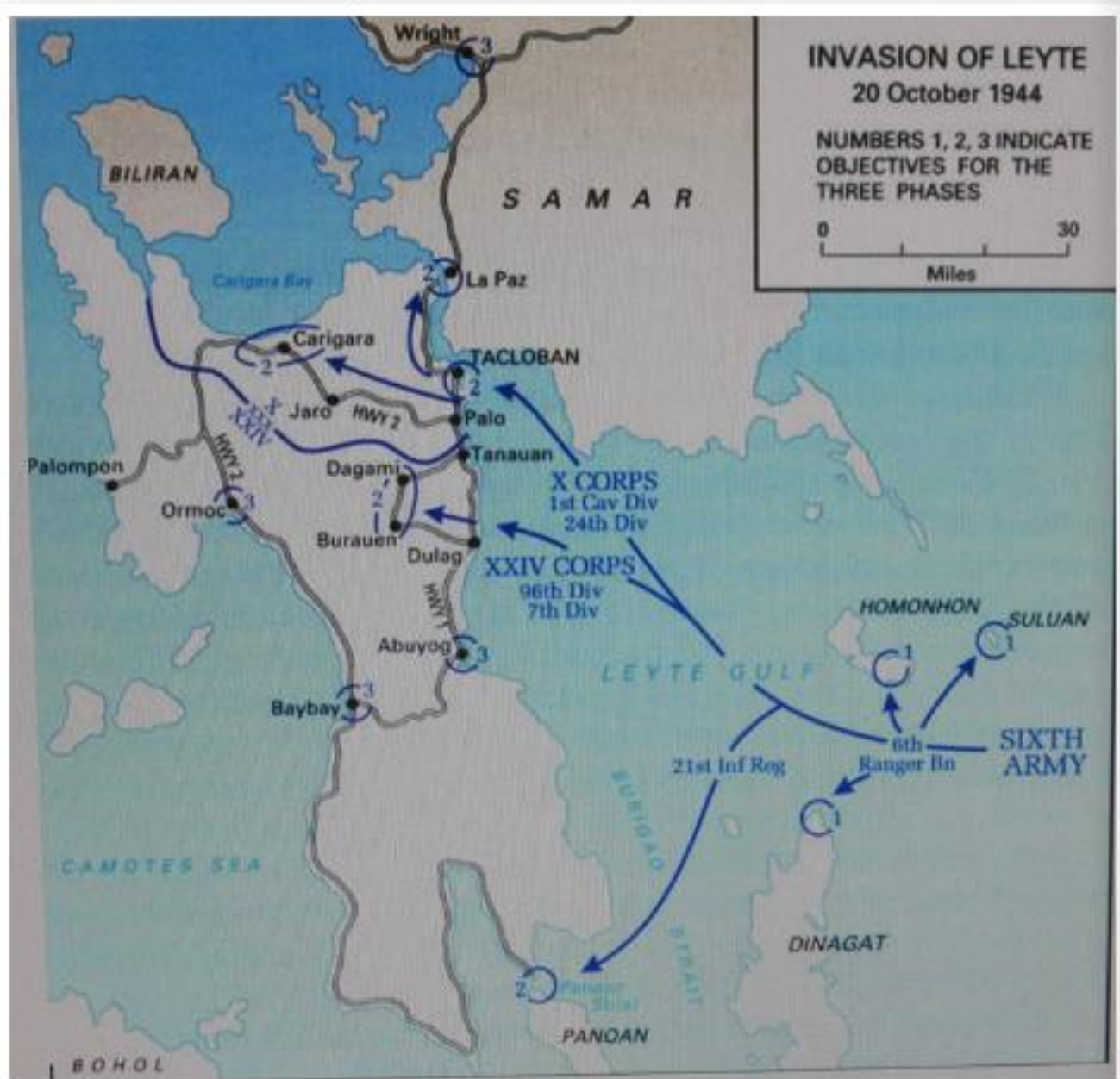
The bombardment grew heavier and more monotonous. Hundreds of small boats, flanked by rocket ships and destroyers, headed toward the beaches; thousands of rockets hit the beaches with the rumble of an earthquake.

It was impossible to distinguish one explosion from another in the unbroken roar. Over a smooth sea a hot, brilliant, tropical sun beat down. The American forces were ready to land.

The 96th Division had been assigned a beach line about 2600 yards long extending from the Calbasag River on the south to the village of San Jose on the north. It had been planned to put two Regimental Combat Teams (RCT) abreast.

The 382nd was to land on Blue Beach, the southern half of the division beach line, and the 383rd was to land on Orange Beach, the northern half of the division beach line. The 381st had been designated as the Sixth Army Floating Reserve.

The two assault RTCs were to land with two battalions abreast and to defeat and destroy the enemy forces in their zones of action. The 382nd was given an additional mission to protect the left flank of the Division. . Company K was in LST 1013.





The landing forces received close-up last minute naval gunfire support by LCI mortar and gunboat units which accompanied the leading wave of amphibious tanks to the beach. The LCI gunboat unit fired 20mm and 40mm shells continuously and rocket barrages from J-8 minutes to J-5 minutes. A total of 5,568 45 inch rockets were fired on the division beaches just prior to landing.

The order to send the landing force ashore was given at 0842. With the wave of amphibious tanks in the lead, the first wave of troops in LVTs crossed the line of departure at 0930 with others following on schedule. Companies K and L rode in the 16 LVTs used in the first and second waves. Navy boats acted as guides lining up the Company L LVTs on the left and Company K LVTs on the right. The amphibious tanks crossed the line of departure 2,000 yards from the beach at 09:35 AM closely followed by the first and second wave tractors at one hundred yard intervals. Our speed towards the beach was four miles per hour.



Throughout this time Navy destroyers and cruisers were bombarding the beach. Dust and smoke clouded our vision as US Navy Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bombers and F6F Hellcat fighters staffed and bombed the beach in rapid succession. We were all peering over the side of the LVTs to see the action. The light ship USS Columbia pounded Blue Beach 1 with four hundred six inch shells, stopping only six minutes before our landing.



To prevent piling up on the beach our plan was to have the amphibious tanks move forward until they were four hundred yards inland at the Japanese built anti-tank ditch. The first wave of assault troops were to stop behind them with the second wave stopping fifty yards behind the first.





I was in the first boat of the second wave. I was too busy to be scared but at the same time I was scared enough. We were in an amphibious vehicle.



The high humidity, heat, and all our gear made running for cover a very hard deal.



Hawaii was nothing compared to this weather. Now we knew what tropical weather really was. After ten minutes we were exhausted and drenched in sweat.

Here is an anti-tank ditch. Next page shows the 383rd on Orange Beach and the 382nd 3rd Battalion landing.





We advanced under enemy artillery, mortar and scattered small arms fire. Increased small arms fire was met about 300 yards inland from the beaches². The 382nd, commanded by Colonel Macy L. Dill, landed with its 2nd Battalion on the right and the 3rd Battalion on the left.

Enemy resistance intensified when the 3rd Battalion reached the foot of Hill 120 at 10:25 AM. An assault was organized with all available naval gunfire and mortar support was brought down on the Hill.



Troops continued to land ashore as we fought to gain more ground inland. At 10:45 AM a white phosphorous shell whistled overhead and hit the seaward facing side of Hill 120. Soon another hit. We were being bombarded by one of our own destroyers off shore.



Our company K suffered five or six casualties due to this “friendly fire” before it was stopped.

It seemed that we were advancing much more quickly than the Navy thought we would.



By 1040 the 3rd Battalion had reached the summit of the Hill. The American flag was raised by 1st Lieutenant Mills of Company K fulfilling General Douglas MacArthur's promise to return to the Philippines.



Here a soldier is looking down from Hill 120. Everything appeared to be a wasteland. Far in the distance is the beachhead where we had landed only hours before.

We felt good. Our first task had been completed, which enabled more ships to land with supplies. It would still take time to reach us however. Too much mud and swamps still faced us ahead.







Our first days in combat sure tested us. We did our job and got it done but we sure were nervous.





...tiously move toward an enemy machine gun position. Leyte, Philippines, late 1944

The 3rd Battalion continued its advance about 200 yards west of Hill 120 where it met with an enemy counterattack, which was preceded by mortar fire against its right flank. This slowed its advance considerably allowing only 1100 yards on the ground.

Our regiment also got bogged down in a deep swamp just inland from the beaches. That also made it impossible to have any tank support.



Our first night and we began to dig foxholes. I thought I would be smart and avoid all the dirt and mud by stacking up empty ammunition crates to make a barricade all around me. Bullets hit the crates all through the night. After that I dug a foxhole just like everyone else.

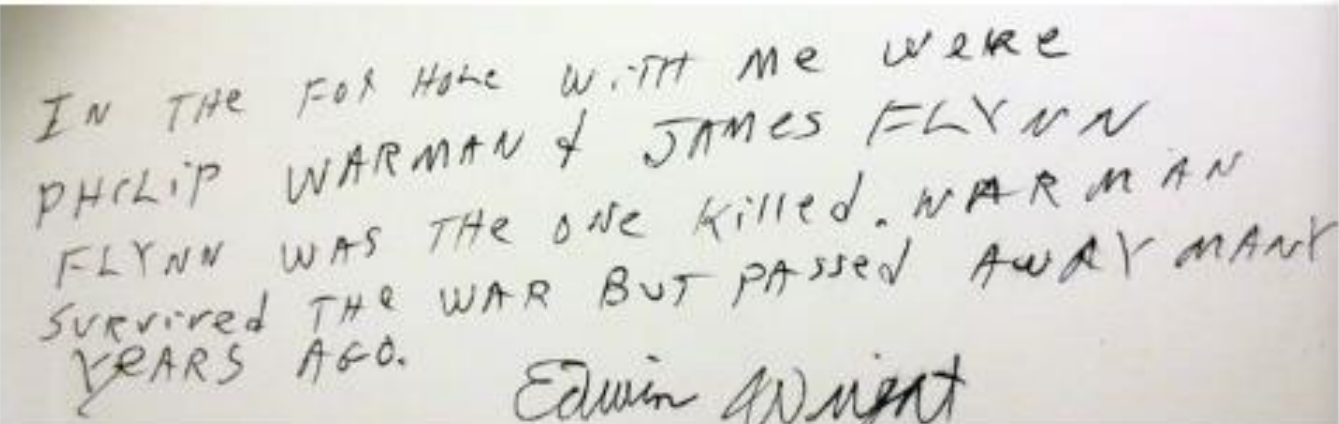
This story was told to my son Mark by Edwin Wright of my company K at the July 2014 Chicago reunion.



The Japanese soldiers were known to crawl all the way up to our foxholes to kill us. They were basically suicide missions. So we were told two things. First was to stay in our foxholes. Second was to shoot any figures crawling around in the darkness.

There were two radio operators in a foxhole not far from mine. They were Edwin Wright and his partner. Instead of lowering his voice to give a message to the Captain in a nearby foxhole, Wright's partner crawled towards the Captain. He was shot dead.

We all felt real bad for both the deceased and the man who shot him. That man had a very bad time and never really got over it.



IN THE FOX HOLE WITH ME WERE
PHILIP WARMAN & JAMES FLYNN
FLYNN WAS THE ONE KILLED. WARMAN
SURVIVED THE WAR BUT PASSED AWAY MANY
YEARS AGO.
Edwin Wright

Written July 2014 at Chicago Reunion

The next morning we had a K ration breakfast with some water that had been delivered in five gallon gas cans. The 382nd was able to push forward through the swamp 2,000 yards.

We encountered light enemy resistance throughout the swamp. It was only on the October 22nd that they were able to achieve the first days objective.

I saved a couple of these and when my own kids were small we opened them up.



As we advanced through the swamp the lack of supplies became a problem. Almost all heavy weapons, ammunition, and food was being carried on foot by native carriers and water buffaloes when possible.

It was still impossible for tanks, infantry cannon, or 42 inch mortars to support us front line infantry troops.



The heat and humidity continued with a lack of pure drinking water making it very hard to continue. Dehydration and its pursuant confusion was not conducive to alertness or readiness. This was a dangerous time with or without sniper fire and mortar attacks

Towards the end of the afternoon we hit slightly firmer ground and rice paddies. At around 4:30 PM we stopped our advance and dug in for the night. Supplies did not reach us so we went without supper. Those of us who still had some water left in their canteen drank it.



The usual nighttime rains began and we resigned ourselves to another miserable and wet night.

Above is a bogged down Sherman tank in the mud. We sure could use their help.



The terrain we were advancing over from the beach had been described in a survey conducted for the Southwest Pacific Command as “cultivated agricultural fields with abaca, corn and rice cultivation extending west across a ten mile width of the broad Leyte Valley”.

In other words this swamp we were traversing was thought to be farmland, and no special provisions had been made to ensure our supply lines through it. We were going hungry and thirsty, and depleting our ammunition very severely until we took began to take matters into our own hands.

We appropriated the stray Philippine carabaos or water buffalos. They were at home in the swamps and could carry food, heavy weapons, ammunition, and rations.



There was one big drawback. At any large mud hole the carabaos would try to take a mud bath. It was quite a struggle involving four or five men to keep them on their feet and trudging forward. I am sure it made for a comical scene though none of us were laughing.



Less rain fell on the third day though that would prove to be an aberration. We stopped around 5:00 PM and dug our foxholes for the night. We had now moved three and a half miles inland but were still in soggy soil.



Back on the beach more ships were landing and unloading much needed supplies. They were not yet reaching us, but they were on their way.

These ships were moored and unloading on October 22, 1944.





Here are amphibious cargo carriers making their way up the beach. With all the mud in the swamp they would soon become invaluable to our needs. They could not get supplies to us fast enough. We were especially in need of fresh water and ammunition.

We were eating coconuts, sugar cane, and some not yet ripe native corn. Our water was what was found in wells, smelly and not clean in the slightest. We hoped that our Halazone tablets really were purifying it.



As we prepared to move out on the morning of the 23rd a lone Japanese Mitsubishi twin engine “Betty” bomber flew low overhead.



The bomber was followed a short time later by sixteen Japanese single-engine Zero fighters headed for Leyte Gulf. We had no idea what was going on in other places of battle.



We trudged forward until at the end of the day it started to rain as we dug in for the night. I have never seen a Hollywood movie show the drudgery of digging a foxhole at the end of the day knowing that it will remain with one to two feet of water soaking us throughout the night.

You did not dare to leave the foxhole once dark as either a Japanese sniper or one of our own soldiers would be sure to put a hole in you. Think about it.

When you had to piss you did not leave the foxhole. You did what every little boy does in every swimming pool in the world. Only we did not have three thousand gallons of water to dilute it in.

On October 24th we continued northwest and then made a sweeping right turn to capture Tabontabon, the heavily fortified and defended Catmon Hill mass near the ocean north of the landing beaches.

There we were to link up with X Corps. We moved from our reserve position to meet the Japanese rear guard along the Julita to Hindang road that was little more than a dirt trail.



We moved out in the attack with I Company at our left and L Company in reserve. We encountered only a few Japanese stragglers and quickly overcame them. We secured the town of Hindang at 4:10 PM.

Villagers were always happy to see us. They had been through a lot with the Japanese for several years now. It was nice to be appreciated.

This appreciation continues to this day as my son is told by his co-workers that they appreciate what I did. That really gives me a lift to hear.



The town consisted of eighteen to twenty Nipa palm huts, some of which were on stilts to stay above the marshy ground. Beneath some of these were shallow pits for the villagers to hide in while bullets went flying by. There were only a few old men, women and some children in the village.

A M29 Weasel tracked truck arrived and we were finally given some much needed rations, water and ammunition. Some carabao also arrived carrying more supplies. At least some semblance of a supply line had now been established. We dug holes and except for some rain had an uneventful night.



AMERICAN RED CROSS

Dear Mom,

It must be getting cold
back home around this time.
I'm still at a loss as to what
I can say. Right now I can't
even tell you from where I
left the States. That's good!
So, what can I say about other
places other than I'm feeling
fine and homesick!
You needn't worry about me
forgetting my religion. I go to
Mass all I can and I pray
continuously. I sometimes
wonder where I'll be this Christmas.
Last year I had a wonderful time
in Chicago. This year who knows.

This is a letter I wrote to my mother during the first few days of the Philippines campaign. I am not sure of the date. The envelope is postmarked October 24, 1944.



Dear Mom,

It must be getting cold back home around this time. I'm still at a loss as to what to say. Right now I can't even tell you from where I left the States. Thats good!

So, what can I say about other places other than I'm feeling find and homesick!

You needn't worry about me forgetting my religion. I go to Mass all I can and I pray continuously.

I sometimes wonder where I'll be this Christmas. Last year I had a wonderful time in Chicago. This year who knows?



AMERICAN RED CROSS

You don't have to send me packages.
All I want is letters from home.

Packages are nice when things are
needed. I think I'll stop my
war bond allotment. It may not
be patriotic, but also wants to
buy bonds and fight the war.
After all, it's only my life I'm giving.

Will you buy a bond (\$18.75)
December 24TH. That will make
an even \$500 ~~cash~~ value.

Of course take it out of the bank!
Well I guess that's all for awhile.

your loving son,
Poland

You don't have to send me packages. All I want is letters from home. Packages are nice when things are needed.

I think I'll stop my war bond allotment. It may not be patriotic, but who wants to buy bonds and fight the war. After all its only my life I'm giving.

Will you buy a bond (\$18.75) December 24th. That will make me and even \$300 cash value. Of course take it out of the bank!

Well I guess thats all for awhile.

Your loving son,

Roland

On the morning of October 25th, after a K ration breakfast and filling up our canteens we spread out in a skirmish line with L Company.

This meant still moving through the knee deep swamp on either side of the road. We did not encounter any enemy so moving was quick and by the end of the day we had reached firm ground.

We did not have to sit in water in our fox holes that night but we never could escape the insects and rain. We camped a mile from our next objective; the barrio of Tabontabon.

This was where the Japanese had decided to make their second determined stand against further penetration into the lower Leyte valley by the 96th Infantry.

A battalion of the Japanese 9th Infantry Regiment was positioned here toward the northwest to protect its supply dump at Digahongan.

The Japanese troops had dug foxholes and trenches, built pillboxes, and had snipers positioned in the second stories of buildings.

Some remaining artillery was positioned in the foothills to the west.

At 3:45 PM a second barrage began as both our battalions attempted to cross the river. We were met by heavy machine gun fire. Company K suffered a number of casualties along with one of their M7s being knocked out by a suicide attack. We had to dig in for the night three hundred yards south of the river. Sleep was difficult not only due to nerves. A night long artillery bombardment of Tabontabon began soon after dark.



October 27th began with a flyover by a Japanese bomber at 7:00 AM. At 8:00 AM a low flying Zero fighter passed overhead. Some of the men fired rounds from their carbines at it.



In retrospect it is good the pilot was either too rushed or non-caring to turn around and strafe us. At 10 AM we commenced our attack with Companies K and I leading the charge to ford the river while being covered by heavy machine guns from Company M and mortar fire.

At the same time the 2nd Battalion moved out to attack the main part of town.

The commanding officer of the 382nd, Colonel Dill, was with Company L watching all of this transpire. As soon as he saw that our Company K and Company I had crossed the river he shouted to Company L, "Let's go"! They then charged across the bridge.

The nighttime bombardment had been so devastating that only scattered sniper fire opposed us. Every building had been totally destroyed with the exception of the Catholic Church which had suffered heavy damage but was still standing.

By noon we had taken the south-west portion of town, though the 2nd Battalion was facing heavy resistance in the center of town. Fortunately civilians had managed to flee our portion of the town as we only saw dead Japanese.

We made our ninety degree turn to the left and headed for the Japanese supply center at Digahongan. (This is referred to as Desahona in the 96th Infantry Division history.)

Shortly after noon six twin tailed P-38 Lightning aircraft flew overhead. They were a very welcome sight as these were the first US planes we had seen since the 20th, with the exception of some spotter aircraft we had seen on the 25th.



Now we knew that we had land-based fighters operating from Leyte.

On the 27th we dug in at the tiny settlement of Kapahuan. The heaviest rainfall we would experience thus far began shortly after dark.

The 2nd Battalion continued to have problems and would not destroy all Japanese positions until 5:00 PM on the 28th.

Our 3rd battalion objective for October 28 was the tiny settlement of Digahongan. Company K was in reserve this time while companies I and L began their advance shortly after 8:00 AM.

Company M provided mortar fire while our troops approached Digahongan at about 10:30 AM. The Japanese withdrew to a fortified position within the settlement. We advanced to the outskirts.

One of our field artillery observation planes appeared overhead so troops laid out a white-colored oilcloth panel. The first round fired by our 362nd Field Artillery battalion was smoke to verify range. Shortly after numerous 105mm shells landed at the spot.

Our observation plane reported that the Japanese were retreating from the junction taking their dead and wounded with them. The 3rd battalion then occupied the rest of Digahongan.

As reported by Filipino guerrilla groups Digahongan was a major supply hub. We dug in for the night just as some Japanese bombers and fighters were flying overhead towards the beach. Our assignment for the next week was to guard this strategic point that we nicknamed “Foxhole Corners”.

Just after dark a typhoon hit us with a torrential downpour. Winds up to seventy miles per hour were reported. Luckily by morning it was gone. During the night several of the enemy was shot trying to sneak up on us. They were killed just forty or fifty feet from our outlying foxholes.

Here is the letter where I finally am able to tell my family that I have been in combat; seen explosions, hearing bullets whiz by my head, and had friends die just feet away from me.

It took 27 days for my parents to receive this letter.

Carl H. Champagne ¹¹²⁶¹²²²
C.R. 3525 W. APO 96
4 1/2 PM 1 Francisco 11 2-4



Recd
Jan. 29
1946

V...- MAIL

DO NOT WRITE HERE

DO NOT WRITE HERE

Mr. Carl H. Champagne
6 Butler St.
Lawrence, Mass.



FOLD HERE

FOLD HERE

DO NOT WRITE HERE

DO NOT WRITE HERE

INSTRUCTIONS

(1) Make the return message clearly on the other side when making them.
(2) If the return message is to be sent by registered mail, it should be sent by registered mail.
(3) If the return message is to be sent by registered mail, it should be sent by registered mail.
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Print the complete address in plain block letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided. Use typewriter, dark ink, or pencil. Write plainly. Very small writing is not suitable.

No.



(CENSOR'S STAMP)

MR. MRS GIDEON CHAMPAGNE
6 BUTLER ST.
LAWRENCE, MASS.
U. S. A.

Post. Of. Champagne 3812412

605 382nd APO%

40 PM Frisco

Nov. 2, 1944

(Date)

Hello Everybody,
I hope you know now where I
am! I'm in the Philippines and I've finally
seen combat. You'll know more about it
if you read the newspapers I hope you
cut out all those clippings for me!
The Filipinos are filthy. They wear worn
out clothes and no shoes. They said the
Japs took all their food and made them
work for practically nothing. We said the
rosary on All Saints' Day! The Priest lost
his Mass Kit. I prayed continuously during
this operation. Have a Mass said for me on
Dec. 8th if you can, all right. Thanks.
I'll tell you now I was in the Hawaiian
Islands. That pineapple was really good - ice gold.
I visited Honolulu which stinks. I also saw Waikiki beach.
That's all.

V...-MAIL

Poland.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF ARMY NO. 1

Nov. 2, 1944

Hello Everybody,

I hope you know now where I am. I'm in the Philippines and I've finally seen combat. You'll know more about it if you read the newspapers.

I hope you cut out all those clippings for me!

The Filipinos are filthy. They wear worn out clothes and no shoes. They said the Japs took all their food and made them work for practically nothing.

We said the rosary on All Saints' Day. The Priest lost his Mass Kit. I prayed continuously during this operation. Have a Mass said for me on Dec. 8th if you can, all right. Thanks.

I'll tell you now I was in the Hawaiian Islands. That pineapple was really good - ice cold. I visited Honolulu which stinks. I also saw Waikiki beach.

Thats all,
Roland

Personal notes written on Contents page of Liberation of the Philippines, Ballantine's Illustrated History of WWII, 1971

“I was communications aid and spotter for gun crew.”

I do not recall the date but remember the action that took place for which I was awarded a Bronze Star for Gallantry in Action. The citation states for gallantry on or about November 1, 1944. This is not to be confused with the Division citation that we all received for merit upon executive order. Thus I was awarded two Bronze Stars.

Our squad became pinned down by enemy fire coming from a distant machine gun nest. Only three of us and the wounded survived. I left my cover and went from man to man under fire to patch them up as best I could. Not long afterwards a Japanese patrol came out and was looking for our exact location to finish us off. I had to keep one wounded from moaning loudly. I held him tight while whispering in his ear that he would be alright and that I would not leave him. I kept him quiet while he died in my arms.

He must have been bleeding internally as I did not see any blood on him. The enemy patrol missed us and walked on.

I had sent two replacements back for help. I do not know why but for some reason they made it back to camp but never told anyone where we were pinned down. My buddy, had to grill them to get the information, demanding from them where the others were. Finally help arrived with the welcome voice of Sergeant Oder yelling at us to identify ourselves. I yelled twice, "Champagne, company K!"

The XXIV Corps received an order in December of 1944 alerting us of the upcoming Okinawa operation. However we retained tactical operational responsibility for Leyte until February 10, 1945. At that time we also moved from Southwest Pacific Area Forces under General MacArthur back to the U.S. Army Forces Pacific Ocean Areas under General Richardson. All we knew at the time was we were still at war and facing more combat.

Philippine Islands
Nov. 3, 1944



Philippine Islands
Nov. 3, 1944

Hello Everybody, I should be writing
this letter ~~to you~~ ~~to you~~. That's the way
the Japs write. This paper was taken from
a Japanese hut - probably headquarters. Keep
it for me. I have a Japanese fan with a
flag on it. It was taken from a Japanese
officer's pack. I also have some
Jap money which is
strictly counterfeit. I'd like
to get a flag. They're really
nice and made of silk.
The officer's sword aren't as
good as I expected. I could have
kept bayonets, pictures and
other souvenirs but I didn't want
to carry them - too heavy!



Hello Everybody,

I should be writing this letter (sideways) .
Thats the way the Japs write. This paper was
taken from a Japanese hut - probably
headquarters. Keep it for me.

I have a Japanese fan with a flag on it. It was
taken from a Japanese officer's pack. I also
have some Jap money which is strictly
counterfeit.

I'd like to get a flag. They're really nice and
made of silk.

The officer's swords aren't as good as I
expected. I could have kept bayonets,
pictures, and other souvenirs but I didn't
want to carry them - too heavy!

Philippine Islands
Nov. 3, 1944



Nov. 3, 1944

Philippine Islands

that water buffalo in the picture is really re-
presented here. I've seen too many all over
the place. The natives use them for plowing
and also for milk. The infantry
used them to carry their packs
and ammunition. I crossed one
example than I want to see again.
The natives are happy now. They've
got every piece of GI equipment
they want to get. That's about
all for now.

Poland.

That water buffalo in the picture is really represented here. I've seen too many all over the place.

The natives use them for plowing and also for milk. The infantry used them to carry their packs and ammunition.

I crossed more swamps than I want to see again.

The natives are happy now. They've got every piece of GI equipment there is to get.

Thats about all for now.

Roland

PS - I request that Thanksgiving card.
Thanks a lot.

Dec. 3, 1944

Dear Mom,
Well here it is Sunday
again and I'm waiting to hear
from you sometime today. This
morning I could hear church
bells calling the natives to
the Church. On your last
letter (with the Record
clippings) you forgot to put
the APO number. You
don't need to put 3rd Box
in my address. Copy
it the way I write it.
Always check the address!

PS - I recieved that Thanksgiving card.
Thanks a lot.

Dear Mom,

Well here it is Sunday again
and I'm waiting to hear Mass sometime
today. This morning I could hear church
bells calling the natives to the Church.

On your last letter with the Record
clippings you forgot to put the APO
number. You don't need to put 3rd Bn in
my address.

Copy it the way I write it. Always check
the address!

In the future I may ask
you to send me a few
"canned goods." A can
of fruit once in a while
really taste good out here.
On November 24th we had
a turkey dinner brought
out to us. We had a
slice of white meat, mashed
dehydrated potatoes with gravy,
stewed tomatoes and green
beans, fruit cocktail, bread
no butter! I went through
the line twice and I
was really full. I had all
I wanted even a pint of fruit cocktail.

In the future I may ask you to send me a few "canned goods". A can of fruit once in awhile really taste good out here.

On November 24th we had a turkey dinner brought out to us. We had a slice of white meat, mashed dehydrated potatoes with gravy, stewed tomatoes and green beans, fruit cocktail, bread, no butter.

I went through the line twice and I was really full. I had all I wanted, even a pint of fruit cocktail.

3
On November 20th we had
bread with real creamery butter,
and ham and eggs. We
cooked it ourselves and it
was really a treat. That was
the first real good meal
we had in a long time.

Now we're eating from mess
kits such food as macaroni,
dehydrated apples, ^{canned} peaches and
pears with plenty of juice to drink,
bread sometimes, pancakes every
second day, oatmeal once in
a while and always coffee!

I've been sick for two weeks
with diarrhea. GI diarrhea
is really tough. I feel worse
than a sick dog.

On November 20th we had bread with real creamy butter, and ham and eggs. We cooked it ourselves and was really a treat.

That was the first real good meal we had in a long time.

Now we're eating from mess kits such food as macaroni, dehydrated apples, canned apricots and pears with plenty of juice to drink, bread sometimes, pancakes every

The Philippines December 3, 1944

If those cakes arrive in good condition, I may ask you to take me one, once in a while.

You know the ones - those white cakes with cherry or strawberry frosting. Out here I'm going crazy over good foods.

That's all I talk about in my fephole. Next February I'll go home and enjoy all the good things I've been craving about.

There was some talk out here about the President's speech concerning the liberation of the Philippines. He said those forces (the 96th) (included) would be in the States within six

If the cakes arrive in good condition, I may ask you to bake me one, once in awhile.

You know the ones - Those white cakes with cherry or strawberry frosting.

Out here I'm going crazy over good foods. That's all I talk about in my foxhole. Next furlough I'll go home and enjoy all the good things I've been craving about.

There was some talk out here about the President's speech concerning the liberation of the Philippines.

He said the forces (the 96th included) would be in the States within six

5
to 8 months. Boy I'm
praying that comes true.
He wouldn't say that unless
he meant it.

This Jap money is counterfeit.
Keep it for me as souvenirs.
The peso is equal to fifty cents.
The 5 and 50 centavos are
worth only half in American
money. I threw that Jap
fan away because it was
wet and falling apart.

Quite a letter for a
change, hey!!!
That's all for today,
your loving son,
D. A.

to 8 months. Boy I'm praying that comes true. He wouldn't say that unless he meant it.

This Jap money is counterfeit. Keep it for me as a souvenir.

The peso is equal to fifty cents. The 5 and 50 centavos are worth only half in American money.

I threw that Jap fan away because it was wet and falling apart.

Quite a letter for a change, hey!!!

Thats all for today.

Your loving son,
Roland

Philippine Is.

Feb. 8, 1944

Dear Lucille,

Well I missed

mom's birthday and now

Gene's. What am I to do?

We will receive all our back
pay in a few weeks.

The bonds I'm buying are
being held up until I get
paid. Now I don't have
to buy them if I don't want
to. There is 6 - ⁸50 bonds
to be decided. I'm wondering
if I should cancel those

Philippine Is.
Feb. 8, 1944

Dear Lucille,

Well I missed Mom's
birthday and now Gene's. What am I to
do?

We will receive all our back pay in a
few weeks.

The bonds I'm buying are being held up
until I get paid.

Now I don't have to buy them if I don't
want to.

There is a 6 - \$50 bonds to be decided.

I'm wondering if I should cancel those

bonds and get all that back
pay in cash. That'll be
about 200.⁰⁰ cash!

I hope you're getting the
camera and rolls of film.

I'll keep asking for canned fruit
and nuts. I'm in a position now
- where I can enjoy such things.

We have a PX (post exchange)
or to you a civilian candy store,
I'll be glad when they have ice
cream and nuts.

I just got this (an idea) -

Will you send me a handful
of 8d or 8 penny nails.

I'm building myself a "table"

bands and get all that back pay in cash.
That'll be almost \$200 cash!

I hope you're getting the camera and rolls
of film.

I'll keep asking for canned fruit and nuts.
I'm in a position now where I can enjoy
such things.

We have a PX (post exchange) or to you a
civilian candy store..

I'll be glad when they have ice cream and
malts.

I just got this (an idea) - Will you send me a
handful of 8d or 8 penny nails?

I'm building myself a "table"

and I don't have ² many things.

Although I have a hammer
and pliers (to pull the nails out)

The nails aren't very good.

I'm also making a little cabinet
to put my small things in.

You know it makes you feel
good when you do something by

yourself. I also made a candle-
light lamp with a shiny reflector.

If I get ambitious enough I may
even make a heart shape

pin with initials made from a dime.

The pin is made from coconuts.

I thought this was going to be
a long letter but as usual

and I don't have many things. Although I have a hammer and pliers (to pull the nails out)

The nails aren't very good. I'm also making a little cabinet to put my things in.

You know it makes you feel good when you do something by yourself.

I also made a candlelight lamp with a shiny reflector.

If I get ambitious enough I may even make a heart shape pin with initials made from a dime.

The pin is made from coconuts.

I thought this was going to be a long letter

I always run out of words.

Again I stress the need and pleasure
of a "good" camera.

Life in these Philippines would
be brought to you as I see
it. I'll bet there are sights
here that you never thought of.

It would be a good souvenir
of my pleasure trip (big game hunting!)
to these islands.

That's all before I find
myself and start writing a book.

Excuse these writing.

your brother,

J Roland

I always run out of words.

Again I stress the need and pleasure of a "good" camera.

Life in the Philippines would he brought to you as I see it. I'll bet there are sights here that you never thought of.

It would be a good souvenir of my pleasure trip (big game hunting) to these islands.

Thats all before I find myself and start writing a book.

Excuse thees writing.

Your brother,
Roland

Hostilities were declared over February 10, 1944. Our days would become somewhat leisurely depending on your immediate officer.

We all knew that we were waiting for more combat. We just did not know where exactly it would be. I was able to go swimming a lot now, set up a little area that was mine, and dream of the future.

Not many letters survived from this time, but I am grateful for what I do have now.

It is difficult to convey the feelings of combat. I told my family years later that combat was loud, deafening loud explosions, confusion, and at night blinding white flashes of light followed by dirt and rocks dropping down on you.

We did watch out for each other, as best we could. That feeling of comradeship is something that cannot be described. It is why combat veterans from all conflicts have a deep respect for each other.

You can see it in their eyes when they say hello or meet for the first time. Even in a casual meeting on the street or in a restaurant. Combat cannot be understood by anyone without having experienced it. For years in California I had a license plate which had a Purple Heart on it. People would wait for me to get out of my car and then ask me about it. You cannot imagine how nice that was for me, that so many years later people would be interested in what I did. I really appreciated it, that they expressed their appreciation for me.

Today my license plate hangs on my living room wall.



Divisions on Leyte



30th INFANTRY DIVISION



96th INFANTRY DIVISION



24th INFANTRY DIVISION



1st CAVALRY DIVISION

A report on the first four divisions on Leyte who battled their way across the island to funnel the fight into the Ormoc Corridor where they were joined by the 32d and 77th Divisions. There will be others in the Philippines.

WHEN the 32d and 41st (Infantry) National Guard Divisions came back from Guinea in 1943 for a rest and a bit of espionage, Regular Army units, around their old stamping grounds.

Around the bars of the National and Greenhampton in Brisbane, men wearing the 32d's Red Arrow found out that the long yellow horse-head shoulder insignia of the newcomers marked them as men of the dismounted 1st Cavalry Division, which called various Texas ensembles its home.

And in the hamburger and "fish and chips" joints of Rockhampton's Quay and William Streets, the happy-to-be-back (although when they left they didn't want to "see the damned place again") veterans of the 41st (Infantry) Division vied for waitresses' attention with infantrymen from the new-arrived 24th (Hawaiian) Division.

There were differences, mostly over beer and waitresses, but on the whole men from the four divisions got along pretty nicely. When the veterans beat their gums about what they'd been

through, the newcomers listened with suitable appreciation. And they were all excited on such things as surviving the MP's, the stinkers and American brands.

A year earlier, in the summer of 1942, the 7th Division, which had been disbanded two years previously under Maj. Gen. Joseph (Uncle Joe) Stilwell, sent a cadre to Camp Adair, Oreg., to form the 96th Division.

That cadre worked with the 96th for two years, whipping it into shape. Meanwhile the 7th, on May 11, 1943, began the bitter three-week battle for Aitua, went to Hawaii for jungle training, then early this year killed 2,000 Japs in the three-day battle for Kwajalein Island, which the division remembers still as a "piece." The 7th also assisted at Eniwetok.

Veterans of the 7th then went back to Hawaii, saved their hangover brains back on and resumed the more or less normal life. President Roosevelt reviewed them when he made his trip to the islands.

The 96th, back in the States, was having its troubles. It had 1,000 over-35 men, and had to

fit up in a hurry. The fitting-up came from Army Specialized Training Program men, military music men, who had been taking special army courses to bring the languages and engineering in college courses. The AITP'ers weren't happy about it (AITP required an IQ of 111, five points higher than OCS) and neither were the soldiers of the 96th.

That's the way it was, though, and the 96th shoved off for Hawaii to round off its training. There wasn't time for much training, just a month, and the men of the 96th didn't get to see a lot of Ft. DeFussy's Machine beer hall.

The 96th, with the 7th, was put aboard transport, slated for an invasion of Yap. Meanwhile, the 24th Infantry and 1st Cav had left Australia.

The 24th had teamed up with the 41st to enter the huge base at Hollandia, going in at Tanahmura Bay. Units from the 24th also backed up the 41st at Biak. The Philippines landing, however, was to be their first big sustained show.

The 24th had spent most of its time, to quote one infantryman, "making one camp after another." This was despite the fact that the 24th