

Chapter 1. Induction & Training

1940 - mid year. Registered as required under the Selective Service act. Passed physical and notified I was in category 1A. In late 1940 I was notified that my number had been picked but that I would be deferred until the end of my freshman academic year at Alfred University.

On July 14, 1941 I was inducted into the army and assigned to Fort Niagara, N.Y. for my staging area. There were perhaps a dozen from our group in Dunkirk. All but one were deferred college students, most from Fredonia Normal School. We were outfitted, lectured and interviewed on the first day. Early on the second day our one non-college inductee was shipped out to the artillery. He was happy; he had feared, since he was a six-foot muscular specimen, that he would be sent to a Military Police unit.

On the fourth day, all but two of our remaining group were sent to various infantry camps. Since they had come out of a teachers college, what better use could they be than teaching new recruits how to read and write! The rate of illiteracy among the draftees was much higher than any of us suspected.

The two of us that remained compared notes. I had told my interviewer that I was studying to be an engineer. Great! We'll get you into the Army Engineers. The other fellow had made his preference for Special Service - Army Band (he played clarinet). No one gave him much more a chance than the proverbial snowball in Hell, but he got his assignment to the US Army Band on the same day that I was told that the Engineers didn't need me but that there was an opening for Ordnance. So, off I went to the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, Maryland for basic training and Instrument Repair (non-electrical) School.

Basic training was the standard close order drill, learning discipline, bivouac, hikes, etc., etc., but gratefully, of shorter duration than what the foot soldier went through.

At the school sessions we were all, to a man, put through elementary essentials of repair education. We had a master welder who could burn a perfect circle in a half-inch sheet of steel. He, with the others in his class, had to spend the first week learning the names, proper care and uses of welding tools. We had a master machinist who joined his fellow students in reducing a 1 $\sqrt{1}$ inch cube of iron to a one inch cube, using only a vice, a pair of files, and a micrometer. He spent two days cursing the stupidity of the job while he shaved off layers of metal.

In groups of six or eight we were taught the use of tools. Example: "This is a screwdriver. It is not a pry bar. It is not a chisel. If you use it as a chisel or a pry bar it will soon riot be a screwdriver and you won't be able to use it as a chisel or a pry bar!"

Mercifully, the basic instruction lasted only a week. Then we learned a quick but thorough theory of optics, the parts of optical instruments, how to disassemble, clean, lubricate, and reassemble binoculars, artillery aiming devices, telescopes and other optical (non-electrical) instruments. Each instrument had an SNL - a Standard Nomenclature List. The SNL was an amazing bible. It showed the instrument complete, followed by several exploded views with every part down to the last screw pictured. Each part, down to the last screw again, had an army part number,

complete dimensions and each screw or screw hole was notated with the thread class and threads per inch as well as all dimensions.

Our barracks, a two story wooden structure, was inhabited by what was probably a typical group of recruits at that time and situation. We did have one or two who stood out from the crowd.

One was a professional magician - a tall, handsome fellow who was quite good at his trade. He kept us entertained for about two weeks after which he was medically discharged because he had a severe allergy to the army pillows and mattresses!

The second was the company "goof-off." He could start correctly on his left foot at the command of "March!" and in three steps be out of step with everyone else. He baited the first sergeant as often as he could and spent much time on the K.P., Garbage Detail, or Guard Duty.

One Saturday morning we were to have our weekly barracks inspection and he was assigned the duty of latrine cleanup, probably as a "reward" for some goof-off.

By chance, I was assigned as "Barracks Proctor" or some such title. My job was to stand at the barracks door and watch for the inspection party: all the officers, the First Sergeant and the Barracks Sergeant. As soon as they entered the door (which was just a step away from the latrine entrance), I had to shout "Barracks A: Attention!" to alert everyone that the inspection was starting.

I heard a loud command from the latrine orderly: "Toilet Seats, Attention!" He had rigged strings over the steam pipes and attached them to each toilet seat. With the command, he pulled the strings and there was a straight, smart line of toilet seats standing at rigid attention!

The barracks sergeant and first sergeant had been the first into the room. The four officers made a hasty retreat, hands over mouths to make the guffaws inaudible. The sergeant's faces were beet red from a combination of stifled laughter and intense anger.

After all four barracks had been inspected, we four Barracks Proctors had to report to the commanding officer that each barracks was "secured." This simply meant that we acknowledged that the inspection had taken place and all was in order.

When I got to the headquarters office, all the officers and the sergeants were still laughing heartily. I heard one sergeant say: "Funniest damn thing I've ever seen but we can't let him get away with it! Even putting him on permanent latrine duty wouldn't be enough. If anyone has a good idea, let me know!"

At the completion of the instrument repair school I was sent to a "casual company" to await assignment. The company consisted of nine soldiers waiting to learn where we were assigned, a lieutenant, a few office staff and a mess staff (cooks, etc.). This, at least, was what was in residence. There was also a group of 120 soldiers and staff on the road doing PR work: explaining to the taxpayers what an Ordnance Company did. There had been a traffic accident with a civilian fatality on their return

trip to Aberdeen and the entire group was required to stay close to the accident scene until an investigation was completed.

The casual company drew rations for the fifteen or so in residence at Aberdeen plus rations for the 120 who might be back any moment. The cook would plead with us: "Eat up. How about another steak? More ice cream?" I never ate so well in my life.

Assigned to 22nd Ordnance Co. (Medium Maintenance) at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri (near Jefferson City). 140 man roster - Co. Commander Capt. James Coyle. Company was 50/50 regular army/draftees. Coyle was ROTC from Texas and smart enough to let the first sergeant and the section chiefs (all regular army) run the company.

The company had an excellent esprit du corps. To a man, they thought the "double deuce" was unbeatable. "Esprit" doesn't really describe it either. There was no: "We're No. 1," rather an attitude that "You're expected to do a top job every time, so you'd better do it." This earned the company a Meritorious Unit Citation for a job we did in New Caledonia.

The Company was divided into sections:

- Administrative & Clerical
- Supply & Mess Hall
- Automotive Repair
- Artillery Repair
- Small Arms Repair
- Instrument Repair
- Machine Shop

Most of us stayed in camp after work hours (we were being paid, as the song said, 21 dollars a day, once a month). There was a post theatre, a post exchange, and barracks buddies to pass the time.

Pearl Harbor threw everything into a turmoil. All leaves cancelled (I was to make it home for Christmas), rumors, guesses -

Chapter 2, Australia

In early January we were told to do our packing. Suddenly we were on a train and in two days we were at our staging area: Indiantown Gap, PA. Two days later my brother, his girlfriend, my sister and my girlfriend were at the Gap. Just a one day visit but time enough to arrange a code with my girlfriend: first letter of the third word in each paragraph.

January 18 we were on the train again. January 20 we stopped at a pier on the East River, New York City. Very quickly up the gangplank of the Oriente - a West Indies Cruise Ship - renamed the U.S. Army Transport Thomas H. Barry. There was large crew of welders on board, putting in three tiers of bunks.

January 23 we left port, officially the start of our overseas time. It meant free cigarettes, free toilet articles, and eventually free mail. The welders stayed on board for an extra two days and were taken off by a tug off Cape Hatteras.

Through the Panama Canal into the Pacific. Throughout the sea trip we had two meals a day - breakfast at 6:30 AM and dinner at 6:30 PM. One canteen of water per day for drinking and washing, salt water showers. I learned to play bridge on the trip.

In mid or early February our transport (we were one of seven with a destroyer escort) peeled off and took off on a solo excursion. Next morning we cruised into the harbor at Bora Bora (one of the Society Islands. Tahiti is in the group). We took on fuel and the natives paddled their canoes out to the ship and threw fruit up to us. I caught a lime and ate it on the spot - skin and all.

Back to sea and rejoined the convoy. We made the equatorial crossing with proper ceremony and lost a day crossing the date line.

Near the end of February we awoke to find ourselves alone again. Next morning we were in some very rough weather (in the Bass Strait). On the first of March '42, we landed in Melbourne, Australia.

Though we spent only seven days in Melbourne, our stay there was memorable. The Australian army was fighting in North Africa; there were no young men in Melbourne. The night before we landed a Japanese submarine surfaced in Sydney harbor and shelled the shore. The populace was glad to see us. We spent one day unloading artillery shells and aerial bombs and the rest of the week was free.

Our first free day, three of us decided to see what Melbourne was. A large, clean, modern city. We were rubber-necking at the tall downtown structures when we heard; "Hey mates, wait a moment!" A gray-haired man of muscular build walked up: "Would you boys like a glass of good beer?" Of course we would, so he reached into his top-coat pocket, pulled out four glasses, pulled a large bottle of beer from another pocket and served us up. He toasted us with words about "Welcome to Austr-ile-ya," and "Thanks for drinking with me." When we finished our beer, he collected the glasses and stowed them and the bottle back into his coat pockets with a, "Thanks again, Maties."

Further down the street we were admiring a display of bakery goods when two elderly (to us) women walked up and asked if we'd like some really good cookies. Of course, yes. We walked a few blocks to a residential area, answering their questions. They invited us into their house. The dining room table was covered with a fine linen cloth and about a dozen fine china plates, each piled high with their home-made cookies. At their invitation we sampled many, with tea. I remember as specially delicious a passion fruit filled tart.

There were many stories of their hospitality. The fellow being stopped on the street by a motherly lady and asked, "What would you like to have right now?" "A good hot tub bath!" So the lady drew a tub for him and told him to put his clothes outside the door. In a half hour, after drying off, he peeked out the door and found a stack of clean, ironed clothing. He thanked the lady and as he was walking home found that she had slipped a five pound note in the trouser pocket.

There was the event where the ladies in a two block neighborhood rented the ballroom of a good hotel, rounded up as many young ladies as they could find and then invited every soldier off the street to go in and join the dance. The hotel supplied the band.

These are only a few of the outpourings of hospitality by the Australians. Their simple sincerity was so complete that we felt that they liked us as friends and wanted us to be their friends if only for whatever time that we would be there.

Chapter 3. New Caledonia

On March 8 we loaded on the Kungsholm - a Swedish luxury liner - and took off for New Caledonia. Just before we disembarked at Noumea Harbor we were told to be "battle ready." The ship's commander had been given a message of a possible French Vichey uprising. [Most of the French on the island, though they did not love the Nazi cause, took the stand that they had been beaten and belonged to Germany!] We landed without incident.

Noumea was the capitol of the island. All the French lived here and occupied most of the city. I have a picture in my mind of red tiled roofed houses, small and unpretentious, set on the hillside, one behind the other in rows, almost like a terraced garden. Each house had an outhouse and the "honey wagons" came once a day to collect the contents of the buckets. This was then used as fertilizer on the local farms. I refused to eat any uncooked vegetables there.

The only imposing structure in the city was the Catholic cathedral, sitting on the crest of a hill overlooking the harbor. On the road up this hill was a very good bakery and an ice cream parlor with very reasonable prices. During the first week of U.S. troop occupation, ice cream cones soared in price from 5 cents to 35 cents. At that point our commander, General Alexander Patch, sent a contingent of Military Police to the establishment with Off Limits signs and instructions to see that no U.S. personnel entered the store. Within a half hour the price dropped back down to 5 cents a cone. Every Sunday each occupant of our tent chipped in 15 cents and someone made the bakery purchase for the day. The 75 cents total gave us enough cookies to last the day with some left over.

Though the contingent that landed on New Caledonia was basically a division - three infantry regiments (the 164th, 132nd and 182nd), artillery consisting of 105mm howitzers, 155 howitzers and 105 rifles, quartermaster, ordnance, medical, signal corps support groups - it was designated as a Task Force rather than a division. Our ordnance group was larger (medium maintenance) than a divisional group (light maintenance). Our medical group was thin (a field hospital and one dentist with a foot-operated drill). Not usually a part of a division, we had an anti-aircraft battery attached to the group, a 37mm (howitzer and rifle) artillery group and Colonel George's Jeep Corps. In all, we totaled about 25,000 troops.

Colonel George and General Patch were great buddies. They shared both an admiration for the Jeep motor vehicle and a vision of its utility as a battle instrument. About sixteen or twenty vehicles (no one could agree on a count) were manned by fearless road cowboys who practiced running at full throttle over fields, up hills, across creeks and through forests. Each Jeep had a crew of four: a driver and three machine gunners. They practiced strategies on how best to take "enemy objectives."

One day Colonel George brought a Jeep into our automotive section with a question of the plausibility of mounting a 37mm cannon where the rear seats were. Our Master Sergeant assured him that a mount that gave the rifle a 180 degree traverse was very possible. Colonel George said he didn't want some jury rig that would break loose after a couple shells were fired. The Master Sergeant guaranteed that the mount would hold up fine.

So the mount was bolted and welded to the rear platform of the Jeep. As a trial run, the Colonel instructed a crew to drive a Jeep across a field to a white line, stop the vehicle so that the cannon was aimed at two hay bales at the other end of the field and fire off a round at the hay. All this was to be done in the fastest possible time.

As reported by our Master Sergeant: "When they fired that first round, the front wheels went north, the rear wheels went south and the body of the Jeep settled down about two feet vertically in a cloud of dust. And, fellows, there wasn't a single cracked weld or broken bolt on

that mount." Colonel George's comment: "Back to the drawing board."

Our workshops were in Noumea. The machine shop and the instrument repair shop were in two school bus-size trucks, each fitted with work benches. The small arms, artillery and automotive shops were housed in what had once been a warehouse. On occasion we were sent out up the island to do field work. I visited Bourake, Bouloupari, Thio, Nakety and Dumbea. Actually these were nothing more than localities of shacks and mud huts.

Two of these field trips stay in my mind, probably because of the circumstances. One, I served on a board of inquiry in a case where an artillery shell landed short and killed two soldiers on a patrol. The howitzer had not been moved from where it had fired the fatal round. My task was to visually inspect the artillery scope and the aiming circle (an optical instrument) without making any physical contact with the instruments or the weapon. [There was a stern-faced Major watching me closely and I'm sure he would have screamed if I had lifted a finger toward the evidence.]

After my inspection I was questioned:

- Do the instruments appear to be whole and in good repair?
- As nearly as you can determine, do the instruments appear to be aimed in the proper direction for firing?

I answered "Yes" to both questions and then signed a witnessed statement that I had said Yes to both questions. That was it.

For the second trip I was sent out with the artillery sergeant to investigate a problem (that's all we knew) at an anti-aircraft battery. When we got there we were told that a round had been fired the night before in one of the three-inch guns and it was stuck in the middle of the barrel. These A.A. rounds were pre-set to explode either at a certain altitude or on contact with a solid object. The artillery sergeant said, "No problem," and asked for a tent pole which had a hollow end. He instructed me to get on the open breech-end of the gun and catch the projectile when he forced it down. With no small amount of trepidation, I caught the slug. The sergeant inspected the rifle barrel, said it was serviceable and sauntered back to our vehicle. As soon as we were out of earshot he explained that the projectile would not be armed until it had gone at least fifty feet out of the barrel so there was no danger when he pushed it out. He further explained that he didn't want the gun crew to know that it was a safe procedure, "otherwise they'll attack the next hang-up with hammers and crow bars."

In mid-July '42, a contingent of about twenty was sent to Bourail in mid-island to service the outfits in the upper section of the island. This cut down travel time - the roads were rutted dirt and narrow, winding through steep hills. We had very little work to do. We learned that the artillery and infantry groups wanted to break the monotony of the "wild country" and used any excuse to take their repair work to Noumea, the big city. I was the sole instrument man and I still had practically no call for my services. So I joined the others; explored the country-side, fished a couple of streams, climbed a high hill, discovered an abandoned orange grove (we brought back about a bushel of oranges), and enjoyed other such pleasures. We scared up many deer which gave someone the idea of organizing a hunting party. They brought in two deer the first day so we added venison to our ration of canned meat and vegetable stew. We searched for, but never found bananas, though we knew they were cultivated and grown on the island.

One afternoon the company clerk came into our tent and told the three of us to be prepared to sneak out with him at 4:30 P.M. He had an invitation to dinner at a French planter's house. He had met the planter and used his limited high school French language to start up a friendship. The four of us presented ourselves to the Frenchman and met his wife. Their home was small but comfortable. The clerk translated our English amenities to the husband who retranslated the

high school jargon into understandable French for his wife. We had an enjoyable dinner - meat, vegetables, potatoes, fruits and desert. At the end, one of the fellows asked the clerk to thank the wife for the delicious dinner and added: "Tell her the rabbit was very tasty." This was translated to the husband who looked quizzically at the clerk and then broke into a large smile. He translated the remark to the wife who shook her head while she roared with a hearty laugh. The husband then turned to the clerk and in broken English explained: "Not rabbit; flying fox." We had had a tasty dinner of tropical bat! It might be said that the flying fox is as big as a large rabbit and eats nothing but fruit. It is considered a delicacy in the tropics.

News was hard to come by in our area. We had Armed Forces Radio (if someone had a radio) and now and then we would get a copy of the Armed Forces Newspaper (was it called the Stars and Stripes?). Coverage was not extensive. At one point, a contingent was to go to the Northern end of the island to service shore batteries. Suddenly, the trip was called off. At the same time, we started getting "combat training." We actually went out and did target practice with our Lee Enfield rifles. We dug air raid trenches. We learned defense tactics (but not a lot) and suddenly realized that we would be ill prepared if we met an enemy.

This program lasted three days and then one of the crew of the shore defenses visited us with news that there must have been something happening out in the ocean. Much floating wreckage, life rafts, many bodies were washed up near their camp. [This was just about the time of the Coral Sea battle.]

One day at morning assembly the Captain announced that the company had been requested to modify four 155mm artillery rifles from wheeled mounts to Panama (stationary) mounts. The 155 rifle had a barrel (I would estimate) about 15 feet long and fired a 6.1 inch diameter shell. We were asked to take the gun barrel off the six wheel mount and put it on a circular plate which would later be welded and bolted to a concrete and steel base so that it could be swung through an arc of 180 degrees. The catch was that the bases were being constructed in Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides and the 155s and their attached mounts would be transported on the U.S.S. President Coolidge. The Coolidge was in Noumea harbor, due to leave in four days. With one day for loading, we had three days.

Under searchlights at night and under the sun during the day every available man pitched in. I wire-brushed parts and sanded welds and hustled cylinders of acetylene, helped torque bolts - anything that was needed. Everyone pitched in and the job was complete in two and a half days. This resulted in the award of the Meritorious Unit Citation.

On the fourth day we watched and waved as the Coolidge left the harbor. Two weeks later we received the news that the ship's Captain entered Espiritu Santo harbor, took a wrong turn, hit a mine and, thinking he could beach the boat, reversed engines, went into the deepest part of the harbor and lost the Coolidge and the shore battery of four 155mm rifles on Panama mounts. [Click [here](#) for more info on the Coolidge.]

On the lighter side: Our Master Sergeant was just leaving the compound in a jeep for a trip up-island when he was flagged down by a lieutenant. The officer explained that he, also, had to take a trip but there were no jeeps left in the motor pool. "So, sergeant, you'd better take the half-ton truck and I'll take the jeep." While both were gone, orders arrived that the sergeant had received a direct commission to Captain. The machine shop hurriedly made a set of silver captain's bars and various officers contributed proper uniform pieces. The new Captain arrived back at camp a half hour before the lieutenant so there was ample time for congratulations. When the lieutenant arrived, the new Captain notified him that, "From now on you take the half-ton," as he dusted off his new shoulder bars.

Chapter 4, Guadalcanal

Early in August '42 we learned that the 1st Marines had landed on Guadalcanal. There was much activity to indicate that we would soon be moving. Infantry and artillery units were pushing for their equipment which was in our repair shops - repair if possible else return unrepaired. In early October, a contingent from our company was headed for Guadalcanal with a regiment of infantry, an artillery battery and small contingents from service groups.

On the first day there, the service groups were told that a Japanese reinforcement force was expected to be landed that night and they were the repulse group. They were put in trenches twenty feet from shore, with nothing but the ocean in front of them and a thin line of 1st Marines behind them. They saw no action; the Japanese landed about a mile north.

Near the end of October, our Lee Enfield rifles were replaced with Springfields. In early November the rest of the division was on Guadalcanal. The island was exactly as it has been described endlessly: hot, humid, mosquito-infested. A vast sea of mud, damp and soggy. Standard joke: Don't hang your laundry out to dry. It will just get wetter.

One of the first things I learned was to be able to tell the difference between our and Jap two-engine bombers by sound. The motors on our planes were synchronized and gave an even, steady sound: ----- The Jap Betty (for such was it called) gave an undulating sound:



"Charlie" brought his Japanese bomber over nearly every night for the "milk run." Searchlights would pick him up immediately but he was out of range of our anti-aircraft guns. Soon after he arrived, shells from Japanese cruisers came *shwish, shwish, shwish'mg* overhead to explode at Henderson field. Charlie would hang around for thirty to forty minutes and would then sign off by dropping a single bomb. He, of course, was directing fire and he did a good job. One night the shelling was particularly heavy and the next morning we had one airworthy aircraft, and that was a Piper Cub scout plane. For some reason they did not follow through that next day: no uncontested low level bombings, no attempt at reinforcement.

One day, I was at Henderson field, which was two parallel landing strips separated by a twenty foot grassy strip. An air alert sounded and just as we got into the slit trenches up on the hill, the bombers came in at a low level and dropped the bombs in the grass strip (one bomb hit the edge of a runway). It was explained that this happened more times than not.

The South Pacific was the "other front." Most of the better equipment was earmarked for the European Theatre - this was the stated strategy. Our air defense was mostly Naval aircraft, operating off the carriers. There were some land-based pursuit planes; they were not great in number and also were outmoded craft, far inferior to the Japanese Zeros.

One day a flight of P-38s, our vastly superior pursuit plane, flew in to Henderson Field, probably from Espiritu Santo. They were a full flight of twelve and they were cheered as they circled the field. The first plane landed and taxied to a parking area off the strip. The second and third likewise landed and formed a neat row with the first. The fourth hit the runway, blew a tire, veered directly into the first three and all four went up in black smoke. It was most disheartening.

I was called on to inspect and repair, if possible, an anti-aircraft director - a cubic-yard size box full of wires. It was an electrical-mechanical device connected to an anti-aircraft gun. As the gunner sighted on the aircraft and followed it in flight, the director calculated how much "lead" the gun should have.

Early in the morning I was at the Navy pier and was put on a PT boat. The skipper looked familiar and I was trying to place him. Had he been an Alfred classmate or someone from my hometown? One of the other boat riders said that he, too, thought the skipper looked familiar.

The engines roared and we were on our way to the island of Tulagi, forty miles away. We slowed once to pick our way through floating debris. We stopped for a short time to inspect a downed Jap plane, still afloat. One of the sailors pointed ahead and we saw - and smelled! - Tulagi. The island is covered with wild geraniums and what it sweet smell it was. We disembarked: forty miles in forty minutes. As we set foot on the pier we were told: You had a famous skipper. That is Robert Montgomery, the movie actor.

I was Jeeped to the AA battery. I asked where the AA Director was. It was in a tent on a long table, entirely disassembled in spite of warnings on top, bottom and four sides. DO NOT ATTEMPT TO OPEN ANY PANEL. LEAVE ALL SCREWS INTACT. My aghast reaction was, "Who did this?" A voice behind me boomed out, "I did, Joe Ritz. What the heck are you doing here?" He was a First Marine Gunnery Sergeant but he had been a messenger at the Van Raalte Silk Mill, Dunkirk, N.Y. while I was a cloth tester. We both decided the time would be better spent talking and swigging beer, of which he was able to round up four cans.

One evening word got around that there would be a special show at the movie area with live talent. Unbelieving, we still went to see. Of a sudden there was a roar of a Jeep motor, a screech of brakes as the driver negotiated a sharp turn in the rutted, muddy road. Sitting on the hood of the Jeep with his arms outstretched was Joe E. Brown, the comedian with the big mouth. Even seeing him it was hard to believe that he was there in the middle of a stinking, sloppy, dangerous combat area. He did several of his famous routines, mostly baseball characters and after a half hour followed the audience out of the area when air alert sirens sounded.

One day I came in from the field and went into the repair bus to drop off my tools. I found one of the fellows working industriously at a vise. He told me he was making a neat souvenir - he had a 50mm bullet and was using a small screwdriver to drill out the powder from the center of the shell. "Nothing but tracer powder," he said. I told him he was out of his mind and headed for the rear door. Just got there when the thing exploded. He came charging out and I caught him. He was peppered with literally hundreds of tiny pieces of brass, covering just about completely from his hair line to his belt area and not a single piece in his eyes! There were four other soldiers sitting at the benches and none of them were touched. After we got the injured man to the aid station and he had been treated, the doctor said to me, "Let me look at you." I had picked up four small pieces of brass in the top of my head and one went through my ear - in and out. They were so small I never knew it.

Although we were a small part of the history, we did not share the news. We knew that things were "tough" but that we were doing "pretty well" - this from an infantryman who came in for supplies. There were no maps of the field of action or description of the fighting. We were in a complete void. So it was a complete surprise, in February '43, to be told that the Japanese had left the island and we had won! The shellings and bombings were no longer daily incidents but became now-and-then, hit-or-miss affairs.

And then the reorganization: A division was to be formed - the three regiments of infantry and the field artillery batteries were to be the nucleus and were supported by service groups. Our ordnance company was to be split into two companies: 22nd medium maintenance and 721st light maintenance. My name was on the list for the 22nd and no one knew where they would be stationed. In a week a new list came out and I was with the 721st to be stationed in an unnamed rest area. We felt we had a good deal when we found the rest area was Fiji. We learned that 22nd was sent to New Zealand where they spent the rest of the war. They lived in the Wellington Hotel when they were on the North Island and in a country inn when at the South Island.

Chapter 5, Fiji

We became the Americal Division when we reached Fiji. The division was not assigned a number. It was the Americal (Americans In New Caledonia). Real corny.

In early March, '43 we were at our R&R location on the main island (Viti Levu) of Fiji. Specifically we were on the western part of the island near Lautoka (La-Toe-Ka) and Nadi (pronounced Nandi to rhyme with "dandy"). Nadi was the site of an airfield; Lautoka was a fairly large village, largely inhabited by indentured émigrés from India, a number of Indians who had managed to buy out of their servitude, a few Chinese merchants and a hard core of English Colonials. Pushed to the side in their thatched hut sections were native Fijians and half-castes.

On the third day after our arrival two of us were called into the headquarters tent and told to take a jeep ride to Suva, the main city and capitol of Fiji. The objective was to pick up supplies which were being held at the port. Of course, when it was noised about that we were headed for Suva, we had many requests to search out likely spots for rest and recreation with emphasis on the latter.

The trip covered about 150 miles over well kept (though unpaved) roads. The scenery was beautiful - lush, green, unspoiled hills with very little sign of habitation. We arrived in Suva in mid-afternoon and searched out the city's only hotel (for which we had vouchers).

After our primary objective of securing and loading the supplies, we looked into the secondary reason for the trip: the assessment of the area as a base for seven days' leave. It wasn't too encouraging: a small city, a few souvenir shops, one hotel that lacked electricity (no-one knew how to fix the system), a soldier population that at least equaled the locals, but many well-stocked restaurants that served a steak and eggs meal for seventy-five cents. Tent cities were being set up for the expected influx of soldiers on leave.

A few days after we returned, a couple of my tent-mates quietly asked if I wanted to go on a seven day cruise for my allotted seven day leave. They had hired a native sail boat with a crew of four to take six of us to a small chain of islands - the Yasawa Islands. It would cost each of us a dollar and a quarter - seven dollars for the week's rental of the craft and fifty cents to buy a large bag of Kava root. More of that and its use later.

We begged food - Army K rations, a five pound can of hard candy and several cartons of cigarettes from company supply. On a bright Saturday morning we boarded a two-masted sail craft and embarked on our cruise.

There is an interesting preamble to the trip description. Several of the fellows had made friends with the Sun Oil Company representative for Fiji - a "proper but affable" English colonial. He arranged the same trip for another group before ours. When our group asked him to arrange a similar tour for our group, he explained it wouldn't be possible: the crew captain had four dollars and each crew member had a dollar. That was wealth to last them a month. A meeting was arranged with the captain with the logical negative results. "Boat has hole in bottom, has to be fixed. Sail is torn, have to get new. Two crew are sick; bad stomachs. No trip!" Our English friend found another boat and crew for us.

Sailing with full reliance on the wind to move us and the crew to keep us in the right direction was a new experience to me. I enjoyed it to the hilt. Any and all of our concerns or questions were answered with the same sentence: "Don't worry. The captain is with you!" And he was. He, or one of the crew, tailed us everywhere we went, even when we searched for a likely toilet spot.

Each island visit was the same except for the Chief's island. Except for one occasion we six were the only non-natives on any of the chain.

In mid-afternoon of the first day we arrived at Vomo, the first island. A large gathering of natives waited for us on shore. We landed with a canteen cup full of the hard candy to be distributed to the children - young and old. Our captain, by pre-arrangement, distributed the candy equitably and in an orderly fashion. (We would have been mobbed.) Then we were escorted to our area and left alone.

We rested, washed, opened a can of army rations and had a hot meal. Just before sundown the drum beating (sticks on logs) and hand clapping started. Six native girls came to escort us to the "Tra-la-la." None of the women (or young ladies) came up to Hollywood standards of South Sea Islanders. They were well-fed but not flabby; I would guess it was not the style to be thin and shapely.

Around a blazing fire, the men were arrayed on one side, pounding out rhythms with sticks against anything that would make a noise - logs, coconuts, rocks - you name it. The girls, six or eight at a time, danced in a circle around the fire while the whole assemblage sang a native song. We sat and joined in the clapping to the rhythm. This went on, so help me, until after 2 A.M. The ship's captain finally broke up the party. We shook hands with all the participants, went back to our area and climbed into our bed rolls on the sand. We slept soundly.

By 8 o'clock the next morning we had broken camp and were on the way to the beach. Every man, woman and child was there to bid us Goodbye - safe journey - come again. (We didn't know the words of their language but could interpret.)

Onto the sail boat and anchor aweigh. Out of the harbor and into the expanse of water. Soon all six of us were catching the sleep we had missed. We were in good hands because "the captain is with you." We were awake before noon, refreshed, sailing along at a good clip under a cloudless sky, cutting our way through moderate waves.

About mid-afternoon, one of the crew pointed off in the distance. At first we could see nothing but then, dimly a shape stood out on the horizon. We were heading for a landing on Waya Lailai (Why-a Lie-a-lie). The greeting on landing and the evening/night celebration were carbons of the previous day. After we had rested, the captain announced that we would visit the "store." Down the beach and around a bend was a boarded-up shed. The captain explained: this had been a trading post, run by a Chinese but owned and financed by the English on the mainland. A supply boat came once a month and deposited what the natives ordered - mostly cloth and a few staples such as sugar, spices, etc. These were bartered at pre-arranged prices for coconuts, mother-of-pearl shells, dried fish, an occasional turtle, etc. What happened to the Chinese trader? When the war started, the natives chased him off. He looked too Japanese. Now the English brought the supplies monthly and made their own trades.

Again that night a tra-la-la.

The next morning, after the natives waved us off, we noticed some fast-moving small clouds overhead. When we cleared the harbor we saw that we had white-capped waves, rather than our usual calm water. Still, we had good sailing until early afternoon. The wind picked up, the waves got bigger and the white clouds turned dirty. A half hour of this and the captain started a tacking maneuver. We saw our island and heard the surf against the shore. Many times as we tacked back and forth to make our landfall we heard the reassuring: "Don't worry. The captain is with you." Suddenly, as though some divine benevolent hand had stilled the waters, we were in a calm harbor and we could see that we had made a protected cove.

Here we met the only whites on the trip. Just shortly after we felt dry land under our feet, we heard a shout from the bay: "Will you give us a hand here?" A small power boat had pulled into the bay and was standing offshore. The six of us (captain and crew stayed on the beach) waded out to the boat. The water was chest deep. A family of five - two children, man and wife and wife's mother - needed transport to shore. The children rode piggy-back. The wife and mother rode in "arm baskets" - two of us making a square seat with hands grasping wrists. The man told us that he, too, would need a ride to shore after he had secured his boat. He, too, was carried in using an "arm basket."

When he was deposited on shore, and without a word of thanks, he announced: "I hope you chaps realize this is private property and you can't camp here." British Cheek!

The captain quickly told us that one of the crew members would guide us to the other side of the island. The captain and other two crew members brought the sail boat around. After about a half-hour walk we were at another beach, the sun came out and our boat came into sight.

This was the island Waya. We had a clean, sandy beach as our home. The island was relatively uninhabited. We spent some time climbing the low hills, following cliff paths and exploring gullies. Of course, we were always shadowed by the crew members. We saw no more than a half dozen native men who greeted our crew while quizzically eyeing the white-skinned foreigners. Our crew must have made a good explanation for we received a warm smile and hand wave when they left.

Without any dark-skinned sultry beauties to sing and dance around the bonfire we had no Tra-la-la that night. We were more than glad to spend the hours sleeping.

The next day we sailed in beautiful weather to Naviti (Nah-Vee-Tee). This was the island of the chief of the Yasawa group of islands. A rough-hewn canoe, manned by four natives, pulled along-side our sailboat and we were invited to get in. The captain stayed with his craft to bring it to anchorage. It was logical that our native craft, with four natives, six white soldiers and three crew members, would swamp before we got to shore. With great peals of laughter we were thrown into chin-deep water. We made it to shore in a mad scramble.

Our captain arrived soon after we and just in time, for we were surrounded by outstretched hands. Of course, he had brought the ration of candy and a carton of cigarettes. We passed out the candy and the captain doled out the cigarettes - two to each man and one to each woman. We were then escorted to the chief's hut and were presented to the chief. Each of us received a handshake and three or four Tiger's Eyes - a semi-precious stone harvested from the sea floor by native divers.

Our captain had also brought our bag of Kava. Kava is a thin, stringy root and as purchased still had a quantity of topsoil attached. The chief expressed his deep appreciation and clapped his hands as a signal to prepare for the Kava ceremony. A large pot was brought in, a fire was built, the root was dropped into the pot of water with native incantations (and also with the original garden dirt attached). It was boiled, transferred to another pot to cool and set aside. We six soldiers, the chief, our captain and crew and what must have been the island council (eight or ten) formed a circle sitting cross-legged on the ground.

A half coconut shell was dipped into the warm Kava and presented to the chief. He took a drink and passed it to his guests then on to the captain, crew and council. As it was emptied, the shell was refilled. When it had made a transit of half the circle, a second "cup" was brought out and continued the round. Incidentally, it tasted like muddy water in which some nondescript weed had been boiled. After the ceremonial drink had made three complete circuits, the chief rose a bit unsteadily, clapped his hands and the dancing girls came forth for a tra-ia-la.

They say that Kava is mildly narcotic, causing a weakness in the legs. I'll leave it up to you how your legs would feel after squatting cross-legged for a long fifteen minutes.

The chief announced (and our captain interpreted) that we would sleep in his hut on straw mats that night.

While the dance went on we were served palm-leaf trays of broiled fish and clams. It was tasty.

A large pit had been dug in the sand about four feet wide, six feet long and a foot and a half deep. The pit was filled with dried coconut husks and set on fire. The coconut husks make a very hot fire. When the flames had died down and the white hot embers remained, one of the native boys let out a yell and ran toward the six foot length of the fire. He didn't stop but took two steps over the coals. We were watching Fijian fire walkers! (Actually, they were fire runners but I wouldn't do it!) A half dozen natives and even two of our crew made the run. I watched closely to see the trick. Their feet did not sink into the hot embers but seemed to skim over the surface. It probably helped, too, that their feet, never having been encased in shoes, had very thick callused soles. We gave them a long round of applause, well deserved.

Eventually we went to bed in the chiefs hut. In the morning we awoke to a breakfast of spit-broiled chicken, one for each of us served on the spit fore and aft. Actually they were small chickens - about squab-sized. Very delicious and tender.

Our captain had a short, serious conversation with the chief, then relayed a message and request to us: Chief had sore knees and back. Did we have any medicine? We were truly sorry that none of us had so much as an aspirin to relieve his rheumatism or arthritis.

We spent the fifth day sailing to and visiting Yangetta (Yan-Get-A) and Nathula (Naw-Thu-La). Yangetta was a short trip and Nathula was our overnight area. Neither island was heavily populated.

Our plan had been to spend the sixth day at Yasawa (Yaw-Sow-A) island, the last in the chain. We were told that it had an underwater cave with "Chinese" writing on the walls. However, when the sixth day dawned, our captain noted the wind and gathering clouds and elected to head home, stopping at Waya overnight and on the mainland on our last day. The captain was right in his assessment, as usual. We debarked at Lautoka, said goodbye to our captain and crew and returned to our camp.

Though we didn't know it, we still had about six months residing on Viti Levu Island, Fiji. We, as a new division, found that it was not much different than when we had been a task force. Since we had been split off from a medium maintenance ordnance to become a light maintenance we were a smaller group and were told we would have less duties. We picked up quite a number of new men since the reorganization had left us undermanned.

The instrument repair group, on our arrival at Fiji, consisted of Joe the section chief and another Joe, repairman. The first replacement group gave us Ernie, a watchmaker, and Paul, Ronald and Don, repairmen. Ernie was Mexican, Paul was Slavic, Don was a quiet Jewish fellow and Ronald was I don't know what. The other Joe soon decided to transfer to the small arms section to be near his hometown buddy.

Ernie conceded that he was the Mexican Bing Crosby, though he sounded more like Bert Lahr. Paul was energetic and quick to learn. Don quietly went his way but did more work than anyone. He made up for Ronald who snuck in bunk time whenever he could get away with it. In all, it was a workable group.

For a while our Captain insisted that we find something to do in the shops, even if there was little or no actual work. He soon realized this was futile and told us we were on our own: When work came, it should be first priority until finished. During dead periods we could do as we pleased as long as we stayed out of trouble. It worked out well.

We found a nearby tree loaded with mangos, ripe and delicious. We visited Lautoka, bought hand-made silver trinkets from the Indian merchants. Tried curry and rice meals and just generally toured.

One day another group set up tents next to our area. We learned that they were quartermaster corps. One rather large tent had two guards posted at the front entrance. This greatly heightened our curiosity, so while Paul and I engaged the guards in conversation: "What's your outfit? Where's your home town?, etc.," two of our tentmates were surveying the contents of the tent, having made entrance under the rear flap. When we met them back at our tent, they had treasure: a carton of sealed tins marked "Planter's Peanuts." We opened a can to find we had a load of Avalon cigarettes. Served us right.

Our English friend from Sun Oil visited our camp and introduced us to an Australian Red Cross worker who was recruiting for parts in his staging of "The Merry Widow." After several weeks of rehearsals in Lautoka with some local girls (one of whom had a beautiful soprano voice) it was apparent that the show would be better called "Selections from the Merry Widow and other Operettas." Providentially, the Red Cross worker was called back to Australia and the show was taken over by the Army Special Services Group, which had its own performers. They replaced the semi-classical songs with parodies: "Spam, the illegitimate ham" and "Atabrine" to the tune of "Tangerine."

We were visited by Eleanor Roosevelt. We spent a day policing the area, straightening the line of tents, getting out our dress uniforms, shining shoes, etc., etc. Next morning we ran through a mock inspection, straightened out a few things that hadn't looked right, had a second mock inspection and then stood and waited. After about half an hour, someone yelled, "Here they come!" and we could see a parade of staff cars proceeding past our road along the main route a half mile away at the foot of our hill. As they disappeared around a curve, some wag yelled, "There they go!" Such was our visit with Eleanor.

But all good things must come to an end and so did our stay in Fiji. In late December '43 we were again on a troop ship, the USS American Legion.

Chapter 6. Bougainville

In early January '44 we went ashore on the black sand beach of Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville in the western Solomons. We were replacements for a Marine division that had made the initial landing on November 1, '43.

As replacements, we reaped the benefits of a cleared bivouac area, hard surfaced main roads, gravel side roads and walks, even a movie screen in a cleared area with wood benches. We quickly set up our six-man pyramidal tents, assembled army cots and settled in for the night after a canned ration dinner.

The next morning we set up our shop areas, unpacked tools and supplies, helped with set-up of mess area and supply tents. On the second morning the first batch of equipment for repair started rolling in and we were in business.

Something needs to be said about our spare parts situation: each month we submitted a list of parts that we expected to need. Each month our supply section had the same report: nothing came in. So we scavenged parts from equipment that was not repairable.

Within the first month at our new location the situation changed for the better. Someone had apparently recognized our needs and we received new pieces of equipment to be used for spare parts. As head of the Instrument group, I was entrusted with four 6X30 binoculars, two 7X50 binoculars, three seven jewel Elgin watches, a Battery Commander telescope and a few other such pieces.

But the real bonanza came to the Automotive group: four shiny new Jeeps! First, two of our company vehicles were traded in for newer models but we still had four Jeeps for prime trade material. The Company Commander had a quiet talk with our company carpenter and the two drove off - in a Jeep and in a truck. When they came back, the truck carried the carpenter, the CO, and a complete saw mill! We now had three Jeeps.

Our large wrecker now started hauling logs - mahogany. The saw mill buzzed and it wasn't too long before we had a wood-floored mess hall, a wood floored and sided headquarters building, and one by one, wood floored and sided pyramidal tents for the entire company.

Jeeps were a valuable commodity. Binoculars, watches, mess equipment, even riles could be "lost" or "destroyed" with impunity. But to lose a Jeep was a court-martial offense. The loser wasn't put in prison; he lost a large portion of his monthly pay until the vehicle was paid for.

How could anyone lose a Jeep? Very simple: if the Navy was in and a Jeep was parked without an armed guard, another vehicle became sea-borne and quickly lost its olive drab color under a coating of navy blue. (Much later two of our men reversed the procedure and returned to our area with one olive drab and one navy blue Jeep.)

At one time we learned that the Special Services Unit had "lost" a Jeep and were willing to trade an ice-cream making unit, complete with a goodly supply of ingredients. We had ice cream for two days before the commanding general got wind of our good fortune. He decreed that ice cream should be the delicacy of the "fighting men" rather than the lowly repair crews. So the equipment was carted off and the general and his staff had ice cream for desert. Now we were down to two spare Jeeps. And no ice cream!

Our bivouac area was near the Torokina (TORE-O-KEY-NA) River. The location could not be pinpointed near any village since there didn't seem to be any concentration of population anywhere

within several miles of our camp. Somewhere north of us, across the main highway, was the camp of the Quartermaster Corp and the open air movie theatre. One evening while we were waiting for darkness to settle in so the movie could start, we were treated to a grand display of an eruption of Mount Bagana, the active volcano. It was spectacular against the background of the island sunset.

As the usual companion to the volcanic action we had had a severe earthquake about six hours before. With the first shock we ran out of our repair tent to the open area. The first thing I noticed was our Lister Bag - a large canvas bag filled with drinking water and suspended from a pyramidal structure. The bag was swinging madly a foot off vertical. I was having a hard time keeping my feet and came very close to being sea sick on dry land.

The island airstrip was also in the Torokina River area. One day Paul, one of the instrument crew, asked me if he could get up to the airport to look up his nephew. I told him to get a Jeep and pick up our monthly allotment of glass cleaning solvent.

He came back full of excitement. His nephew was the navigator on a flying fortress bomber and had just returned from a photo mission over Truk Atoll. The bomber had been stripped of all non-essential weight and loaded with extra fuel. Truk was thought to be beyond the range of any American base. Paul's nephew had smuggled aboard a ten pound bomb and threw it out the window as they passed over the atoll. After our news release of the flight (without mention of the bomb), the Japanese reported that an American carrier-based bomber had approached the atoll and had been driven off after a bombing run which caused no damage.

I had one visit to the airstrip. A transport plane landed and there was a great flurry of excitement as the passengers disembarked and marched off the field to a command structure. My guess was confirmed that the "big lanky guy" was Col. Charles Lindbergh.

The weather was invariable. Cloudless skies throughout the day. Hot, but not unbearably so. After dinner, right on the dot, clouds would roll in with a ten minute torrent of rain. Each man owned a large tin can, about a bucket and a half capacity. When the rain came down we would collect water off the sides of the tent and this would suffice for our laundry water.

We were no where near the combat area but received frequent reports of the progress. For a long period - nearly a month - the infantry battled to take hill 260. One day a lieutenant of infantry came in with a 17 jewel Hamilton watch. "It just keeps winding but it won't run." Diagnosis: broken mainspring. "Can you fix it?" Sorry, but no spare parts. "But I gotta have a watch; I'm going back up to 260 tonight." So I pulled out one of our spare new 7 jewel Elgins for him. Overjoyed with a watch that worked, he started off. I called after him: "You forgot your Hamilton." "It's no good to me, throw it away."

About a month later, a young CB (Construction Battalion) visited our repair tent. He was a watch repairman and was set up with a dust proof trailer full of modern equipment. He was desperately in need of a balance staff for a Waltham watch. I just happened to have two GI Walthams that had his part. As he was leaving with a happy smile on his face he told me to look him up sometime. He had parts for nearly every watch made. What about a 17 jewel Hamilton mainspring? "Sure, I have loads of them."

So, following his directions, I found the CB area a few days later and picked up the repaired Hamilton that he had taken back when he left our area. I wore the watch the rest of my tenure overseas and should have brought it home. When rotation came up for me I got chicken, not wanting to answer "What are you doing with an officer's Hamilton?" They did inspect our baggage when we got on board ship but I could have gotten away with it.

One afternoon a field artillery sergeant requested repair of a spotting telescope that was set up

in their forward observation post. I assumed the observation post was on the top of a hill or somesuch. When we got to the post the battery lieutenant met me and, while guiding me to where the scope was, he asked how I felt about heights. It was then that I learned that the scope was set up on a platform near the top of a very large tree.

My elevator was a wooden cage with a rope, a pulley, and two strong artillery men to supply the lift. So up I went, never looking down and trying my best not to betray my fear of heights. I checked out the scope and found it had a bent elevating screw shaft. Nothing to do but take it back to our machine shop for repair. The scope was a very large Japanese instrument of variable 40, 60 and 75X power. It was quite heavy.

It and I got into the cage for the return trip. (The artillery spotter said the distance to ground was 85 feet.) The two men lowered me to within about 35 feet of the ground and we stopped. One of the ground men let loose with a string of cuss words. Someone had swiped 50 feet of the rope for a clothes line. I hung suspended until they found the necessary footage to get me back to earth.

We were far removed from the battle area but we were on alert for air raids. Each tent dug an air raid shelter - a hole in the ground with a roof of logs. (Our tent found two large sheets of half-inch thick iron which reinforced our roof.) When the air raid alarm sounded, we hurried into the shelter. This happened about twice a week.

In actuality, we hurried into the shelter only if the danger from dropping bombs required getting into the shelter. One night the sirens went off and we could hear a plane in the distance. Suddenly a searchlight beam shot up, immediately zeroed on the plane, there was a flash of light and a trail of sparks dropped earthward. Of course, a mighty cheer went up.

Next morning, our usual assembly had an added touch. After the First Sergeant reported to the Company Commander: "All present and accounted for, sir.", instead of the C.C. instructing that the company should be dismissed, he told us that what we had seen the night before was not what we thought we had seen. Actually, he said, one of our PBY (flying boat) had been caught in the search beam and dropped a flare to warn us not to fire. If anyone had told us that an anti-aircraft director, guided by radar, had guided the search light and the new six inch AA rifles had fired a proximity fused shell, no-one would have understood what was being said. There was some discussion next morning, mostly on the line of "It sure looked like..." but if we'd have been told the truth the comment would have been "Do you believe that bull? That's Buck Rogers stuff."

We had a Swede in the outfit - Swen (pronounced Sven). He was a student of Astrology and gave us the lowdown on the coming bombing raids. One afternoon he announced that we'd have a raid just before dinner but no-one would be hurt. Just as we were about to walk down to the mess hall we heard the siren and at the same time a low flying plane. Everyone dived for what protection they could find. The plane passed over and shortly after we heard two explosions. The bombs had fallen across the road in the Quartermaster area. Two men were lost.

As Swen crawled out from under a pickup truck, one of the fellows said: "I thought you said no-one would be hurt. Why did you duck under that truck? No faith in your "shtars" say?" To which Swen sagely replied: "There's no use in being a damned fool about it."

As background for the following: We had a garbage incinerator near the kitchen - mess hall. It was two 55 gallon drums welded together, front open and rear end half open. It was set on dirt so that it inclined at about a 15 to 20 degree angle. Garbage was stuffed into it, gasoline was added to each bucket of garbage and when all the present batch of garbage was in, it was ignited.

One day an unsuspecting K.P. was doing a sloppy job getting it ready. He opened the cap of one of the six drums of gasoline which were stored near the incinerator, tilted the drum until he had a pool on top of the drum, poured an extra can into the incinerator and with his clothes well spotted with fuel, stood in front of the incinerator and threw the burning torch in. It blew out at him and with his shirt on fire he turned and ran into the open drum of gasoline.

I happened to be walking up the path nearby. I heard the boom and turned to see what caused the noise when one of the automotive mechanics ran up, gave me a shove, yelled "Grab a shovel" and ran toward the fire, me close behind. He picked up a flat rock and pushed it over the open bung and the two of us shoveled dirt on top of the barrel. In a short time (though it didn't seem short to me), the fire was smothered on top of the barrel. In an even shorter time, the flames around the barrels were knocked down. We could hear a sizzling sound: the gasoline in the first drum was actually boiling. The cooks cooled the drums with buckets of water. The cooks had also rolled the K.P. into a ditch and beat out the flames on his clothes. He escaped with minor burns.

Before we could leave, the 1st Sergeant had to write up an "incident report." We answered his questions briefly since we "didn't see it happen but only saw the results." As we were leaving the Sergeant made a remark about "heroes of the day." The auto mechanic who gave me the shove (he was a husky red-head) addressed the sergeant: "There aren't many heroes but there's a heck of a lot of people who do things like we did because they don't want to be called cowards." He turned on his heel and we left. He was one of the most sour, anti-social persons I ever met.

Sometime near the end of February the company was assembled for an unusual afternoon information session. A Japanese courier had been captured and he was carrying a briefcase which contained the complete plans for a coordinated counter-attack: the American forces would be subjected to a heavy bombardment by Japanese battleships and cruisers and simultaneous bombing by hundreds of aircraft. The Jap forces on Bougainville would follow this up with artillery fire to sweep all sectors of the American held area. Japanese ground forces would sweep in to drive us into the sea.

We were told to be on alert but to have no fear because:

1. No Japanese naval units were near the area and our fleet stood ready to fend off any attack that would be a suicide mission.
2. Japanese air force had suffered heavy losses and could not afford anything near a substantial sortie.
3. The nearest enemy artillery capable of reaching our area were far out of range and could only be brought into range by lowering the heavy weapons down a cliff, getting them across a large river, raising them up another cliff and emplacing them (and a large supply of heavy shells) several miles beyond the river. This, obviously, was an impossible task.
4. Japanese ground forces were far outnumbered by our force.

On the morning of the day when the attack was to happen, we woke to the sound of heavy artillery fire. Most of it was recognizable as out 105 howitzers or 155 rifles, but every once in a while we heard a "kerump" that didn't sound right. At our morning assembly this was noted and explained to be our 90mm anti-aircraft guns being used a field artillery pieces. So off we went to breakfast.

I was standing in chow line next to Art, the artillery repair section chief. Suddenly there was a very loud KERUMP and something whizzed about a foot away from my head and imbedded in one of the wooden mess hall supports. The support started smoking where the shrapnel piece

had hit. Art yelled, "Incoming Fire!" and we both took off with deliberate speed. In fact, everyone evacuated. There were several reports of near shrapnel misses but luckily no-one was hit. Everyone settled down in the air raid shelter, dark and damp as they were.

I guess we stayed in the shelter for an hour or an hour and a half. We had a big hulk of a fellow who, when it sounded as though the incoming fire was getting close, would alternate a string of cuss words with prayers. When things settled down for a prolonged interval, Hank, the big hulk, entertained us with a story of an incident in his life in Peoria, Illinois. Hank (name was Carl Hankins) was walking home from work in the early afternoon when a fellow stopped him and asked if he'd like to earn twenty bucks. This, at that time, was a week's wages for Hank. It seems there was a prize fight scheduled for that night and one of the preliminary participants couldn't make it. At first, Hank had grave misgivings but thoughts of twenty dollars and the promoter's assurance that the opponent would pull his punches and all Hank had to do was duck and hold on, the deal was made. Besides, it was only three rounds.

The bottom line to the story was that Hank lasted three rounds but it took about ten days to get rid of the sore spots on his stomach, ribs and jaw. And he got his \$20.00 "but it wasn't worth it."

We spent most of the day in and out of the shelter. By mid-afternoon we were able to leave it for the last time for the incoming fire had ended. This was the sum of the day's events:

1. No Japanese naval forces showed up.
2. Two Japanese aircraft flew over but were driven off by heavy anti-aircraft fire.
3. In one night the Japanese had disassembled four large artillery pieces, lowered them down a cliff, rafted them across the river and raised them up the opposite cliff, all with a supply of shells. Reassembled, the artillery was dragged to spots where it could cover most of our area.
4. Japanese ground forces attacked in force and retook some strategic areas but never really effected a break through. In sum total they were no longer a threat to retake the island. Their heavy artillery, repositioned on our side of the river, had been destroyed by counter battery fire.

The Japanese lost heavily in manpoWer and supplies in the perimeter attack which lasted, actually, for several months. None of their losses could be replaced since they were completely cut off from the outside world.

It was not a quick, easy victory. Our forces were three reinforced divisions - the Americal, the 37th (Ohio National Guard) and the 24th (the first black division to see action in the Pacific), plus a reinforced company of Fiji infantry. We were facing the Japanese 17th Army. To our advantage, we had tank battalions supporting the troops, several Navy destroyers shelling enemy positions, Air Force and Navy bombers dropping tons of explosives. The enemy had none of these advantages but they were well trained and fanatically disciplined. It needed the full month of March of heavy, furious fighting to drive them back to positions where our perimeter was secure. It needed another eight months of constant combat to secure the island.

In addition to the ever present mosquitoes we also had centipedes (five to six inches long) and scorpions. Both could deliver a very painful but not life threatening sting. We had a tent mate who had a fatalistic fear that he'd never make it home (he did). If a bomb wouldn't get him, any one of the tropical diseases was sure to lay him low. One afternoon he was dressing after his shower, pulled on his army shoe and uttered an ungodly scream. He pulled off the shoe and turned it over. Sure enough, a centipede fell out and scrambled across the floor. Someone got a Jeep and we took him to the aid station.

He came back with a supply of pain killers, a very swelled leg and a note that he was to strictly stay off the leg and repose in his cot for four days. The doctor assured him that it wasn't a fatal bite. We cooperated by bringing him meals and someone got him a pair of crutches to get to the latrine.

About this time, a few months after the perimeter attack, air raids completely stopped. So an order went out that each tent should destroy the bomb shelter and return the area to what it had been. So the next morning we stripped to the waist and started shoveling the dirt off the mound until we uncovered the coconut logs. I pulled the first log off, saw a flash of yellow and felt something run up my arm and over my shoulder. Someone yelled, "Scorpion!"

I dropped the log and we all put on fatigue jackets and leather gloves. We also armed ourselves with "bug squashers" - a machete, a slab of wood, or anything flat and easy to handle. Piece by piece we removed the logs which had become scorpion homes. Someone started a count as we squashed. We were actually at one hundred before we stopped the count as the last log came off. We had been sharing the shelter with these beasts!

We had a shower set-up consisting of a framework of logs which supported four 55 gallon drums. A system of plumbing interconnected the drums and, in turn, was connected to a pump that was fed by a trailer filled with water. When the level in the tanks reached a low level, the pump automatically was set in motion and filled the drums. The pump and level sensor were powered by a truck battery. Each drum had a shower head which was turned on by yanking on a rope. A wood floor extended under the showers.

One afternoon I was sharing the shower with three others. Just as I started rinsing, the pump went on. Just as I finished and was stepping out a terrible crash occurred and as the structure collapsed a cross bar caught me behind the right ear and threw me clear into a pool of black mud and soapy water. I could hear two of the fellows yelling, "Help me!" and I saw the fourth occupant walking around in circles. My thought was to get out of the muck and help where I could. Though I was completely conscious to what had happened, I couldn't, try as I might, move a muscle. It was probably a matter of seconds but it seemed like an interminable time before I found I could wiggle my foot and then move my legs. I was just finding that my arms were working again and I was getting to my feet when a dozen fellows ran in and started pulling the structure off the two injured. One had a broken knee; the other had a spike penetrate his Achilles tendon. Both were evacuated to New Zealand.

Someone got a bucket of water and swabbed the mud off me. They handed me a pair of shorts (modesty), put me in a Jeep and took me to the nearest aid station. Though I didn't know it, the right side of my back from shoulder to thigh was scraped and bleeding. Apparently the crossbeam did it as I was thrown out. The doctor and the aide swabbed it clean, applied several bandages. As I was ready to go, he doctor told me I had blood near my mouth. "Open up; you put a tooth through your tongue. Do you want me to stitch it?" "Not unless necessary," was my reply. The doctor laughed and sent me back to camp.

The unhurt fellow (Stan) was a big, muscular 200+ pounds. He had no memory of the shower collapse. He remembers being in the aid station where the doctor found no cuts, bumps, or bruises. From all appearances, the structure completely missed him as it collapsed. A week later he fell asleep while driving a truck and went into a ditch. Again, no apparent injuries. He started complaining that he must have been hurt and would never get back home to his girlfriend. He was sent back to the hospital where they did a spinal tap, which was negative. He was sure, however, that the spinal tap was faulty and he would die overseas.

He was thoroughly examined with negative results and referred to a psychiatrist. Diagnosis: He wants to go home. He had been overseas, as were many of us, for 2 1/2 plus years. He was

losing weight rapidly. Nevertheless, neither the MDs or the Psychiatrists would certify that he should be sent home. When his weight dropped under 130 pounds, our company commander made a special case for him to be shipped home on rotation, bypassing the lottery.

One of the other fellows in that rotation group wrote a letter on the end of the story. He had gone back to visit Stan, found that he had married, was discharged, had a defense job with big bucks and had gained all his lost weight.

When we had arrived in Fiji, it was decided that the division would be taken off Atabrine to "see what would happen." Quite a few cases of malaria showed up, so many, in fact, that only the severe cases went to the hospital. The less severe were dosed with quinine and put on bed rest. This was my first case of malaria. The Atabrine pills were restarted.

In early January, 1945, our company was put through a "landing drill." We assembled on the black sand beach and waited in the hot sun for an hour. Then, aboard LSTs and out to HMS Battleaxe, a dirty British troopship. We were told we would go down to the waiting landing craft by climbing down cargo nets. But not yet. So we waited and I suddenly realized that I had a good fever. They put me in a bunk and the fever changed to a chill. The doctor was called and he diagnosed malaria - "Get him to the base hospital." They radioed in and I was taken on top deck until a boat came to pick me up. The British officer deemed that I was able to walk down the catwalk on the side of the ship. The doctor said no so they lowered me to the water in a lifeboat. The waiting boat took me to shore where an ambulance was waiting. I wasn't really feeling bad at all.

As I walked up the beach, two men came running down with a stretcher. "Where's the casualty?" I told them "it's OK I can walk." They started laughing; one of them said: "Someone's gonna get smoked." Then, explanation: They had received a garbled radio message and the word went out to the ambulance to head for the beach and pick up a soldier who fell through an open hatch and down two decks. I was told, jokingly, that they'd have to beat me up a bit since it was right at dinner time and an emergency crew was waiting: an X-ray unit, a team of surgeons, a whole blood transfusion unit, etc.

When we got to the base hospital and I was introduced as the casualty (actually just a malaria patient), everyone was so happy that they wouldn't miss dinner that there were no repercussions.

I was put into a bed, examined, given quinine and told to sleep it off. Next morning I felt better but was told that I'd be there for four or five days. In mid afternoon a doctor came around, inquired how I felt. "All right, ready to go back to my unit." I didn't know I was being set up. In a little while, a sergeant came around: "Doc says you're feeling pretty good. We're awful short in the mess hall. Follow me." Actually, all I had to do was dish out the food for the chow line and put away a couple stacks of food trays. It was my first KP duty since Guadalcanal.

The next morning, the sergeant came around again, but this time to announce a visitor: Captain Benjamin Rabin, our company commander. "How are you feeling?" "Fine." "the answer to the question I'm going to ask is strictly up to you. We received orders to pack up and get on board ship for the Philippines by tomorrow afternoon. I've cleared it with your doctor to take you back to the company if you feel well enough and want to go. If you want to stay here, it's strictly your decision and will be understandable." By this time I was out of bed and getting into my fatigues.

Chapter 7, Leyte

We were on shipboard by the next afternoon. When I got back to the company area on the preceding morning, most of the packing had been finished.

One day on board ship, our chief chaplain, Lt. Colonel Jim Dunford visited our group and related some of his war experiences. Walking the dock area of New Caledonia and nosing around the stacked cases of supplies he found two crates: Contents: canned spinach. Att: Major General A. Patch. Knowing full well that our commanding general didn't need both cases, he lifted one into his Jeep and told the driver to take off. Back at his tent he found, as suspected, that the crate contained Johnny Walker Scotch spinach. He said he couldn't stomach the taste of scotch so he distributed it among the wounded on Guadalcanal.

He told, too, of celebrating his first Mass on Guadalcanal. He wondered where he would find altar boys. Heaven sent, two marines volunteered. The chaplain noted that they were a bit inept but considered that they were probably out of practice. After Mass had ended, he took off his vestments and went out to thank the servers. They were gone and so were all of the candles from the altar.

This reminds me of a human interest chaplain story that happened on Bougainville. Bob Griffin, a tent mate, asked one day if I ever got any binoculars that couldn't be fixed but were still useable. His good buddy, the Methodist chaplain, had made the request, since he had wanted binoculars since he was a kid. Bob and I went to the repair tent where I had a new 7X50 instrument. We stuffed the binoculars into a moldy, torn case and took it to the young chaplain. When he opened the case and pulled the contents out, his eyes got as big as saucers. He handed them back to me: "these are brand new. I can't accept these. I just wouldn't feel right." Nevertheless, we convinced him that he should have them (it didn't take much talking), and we traded a new case for the old beat-up one. Every time I met him after that, he told me how great the "spy glasses" were.

We had boarded ship in mid-January. We stayed in the bay for several days. We seemed to be steaming ahead at good speed but each morning when we got out on deck we could see nothing but endless ocean. Finally, on one of the last days of January we sighted land and disembarked at Leyte in the Philippines. Our landing point was near Tacloban (TACK-LOW-BUN) on the eastern coast. Since the initial beachhead had been established in this area on October 20 and present combat operations were confined to the western part of the island, we were in a lull. Celebrations for liberation by the local inhabitants were long forgotten and battle areas were far enough removed that they had no effect on us.

Things had taken a strange turn. Supplies came in! Spare parts, replacements, supplies of all sorts. We were told to turn in our M-1 rifles and pick up new carbines. I had been back ordering watch oil since New Caledonia, meanwhile watching our single one ounce bottle dwindle to the last few drops. Our supplies contained a twelve bottle case of watch oil! New tools for all sections. It was unbelievable after years of making do.

The third day on Leyte we were put to work digging a 20 ft X 20 ft square foundation on which a cement floor was to be laid. It took us three days to complete the job but we had a good solid base for one of our repair shops. This was permanence!

We were quartered in circus tents - twenty four men to a tent. One day a Philippine shrimp fisherman came in with a proposal: for six dollars (twenty five cents per man) he would supply french fried shrimp for breakfast. The next morning, bright and early, he showed up with his basket of steaming shrimp. Delicious and plenty for everyone. We agreed it was a good deal. But then she showed up again the next morning and we found out that the six dollars covered

six days. Unfortunately, he wasn't looking for repeat business.

We were paid on the last day of January - in Philippine pesos! The exchange rate was two pesos to one dollar. We did not receive paper currency. The pesos were silver coins larger than our American silver dollars. Quite a load to carry around.

We couldn't figure out what was going on. We were kept busy doing nothing. Our shops were not set up and daily, just about, we passed the concrete slab which we had constructed a week before. It was still there with no structure over it. No one seemed to know what its function would be or when, if ever.

One morning the supply officer came around and told me we were going to the medical supply at the airport to pick up our monthly allotment of grain alcohol which we used for cleaning optics. Each month, as regular as clockwork, we drew an allotment of two quarts and that amount was just enough to last the month. Usually the medical supply clerk handed over the two bottles and I signed a receipt, which I never read.

This time the clerk said I'd have to wait. The medical supply officer wanted to talk to me. I thought I noticed a quick wink as a high sign. The officer came in and, with apologies, explained that grain alcohol was in short supply and, if we could handle it, he would cut our allotment from four to three quarts per month. I agreed to give it a try, but "if I find we're running low near the end of the month I'll have to ask for enough to tide over." Agreed. I left, knowing what the wink was: each month I got two bottles and the clerk's entertainment supply got two bottles. But don't let him know.

It was a very strange period. Busy every day but actually seeing no results. Orders and countermanding orders. For example: One week we were told that the fighting men didn't get days off for the week-end. So for two weeks we worked a seven day week. But there was really nothing to do. At the end of the second week an order came down from headquarters that all service groups should have ample time for recreation. So we were organized into four softball teams and a company tournament was set in motion. I was left fielder or short stop for the most inept team in the group. We won the tournament!

More supplies arrived: Navy T-shirts, so no more sleeveless undershirts. Our company was allocated three double barreled shotguns with three ammunition vests and boxes of shells. The supply sergeant took off and came back with a duck. We were given more tools of every variety. On and on and on, it was a real bonanza after 2 1/2 years of famine.

We knew that our three infantry regiments and the artillery groups were on the western side of Leyte fighting tough battles. But there was not a thought that we should be doing something to help. We were busy every day, but seemingly with no aim.

Chapter 8, Cebu

Suddenly, in the last week of March, we found out what we had been doing. The 182nd and 132nd regiments were relieved at the front and arrived at Tacloban to join us in a trip to the southern islands: Cebu (SEB-OO') and Bohol (BOW'-HOLE).

On Marh 25, 1945 we boarded a LST (Landing Ship Tank). All our personal supplies had been stuffed into individual barracks bags which, with a blanket roll, were carried over our shoulder. The troop area on ship was a very large, cavernous room that, for some reason, reminded me of a ballroom. The floor was the steel deck. We spread our blanket for a bed. There was a large metal pulley suspended from the ceiling of the room and as this swung with the roll of the ship it banged against the steel wall and made an ungodly loud noise. With only a double thickness of blanket for a mattress and the constant clang of metal on metal, my last thought was: "No sleep tonite." Next thing I know someone was telling me (and all of us) to "wake up, Cebu's in sight and the action's ready to begin."

We all ran up to the deck. We were about a quarter mile off shore and all around us assorted landing craft, mine sweepers and destroyers were slowly circling. Of a sudden a destroyer (and I swore it must have been at least a heavy cruiser) cut in front of us and sent a salvo of shells shoreward. They were joined by the other destroyers and the bombardment continued for quite some time.

At one point someone yelled that a torpedo was coming in on the starboard side. To a man (including me) everyone ran to the starboard rail to see the torpedo. It passed in front of us, a good ship-length off. Two midget submarines had been sighted while the landings were being made and a shore platform that could possibly have launched the torpedo was found.

The shoreline was completely obliterated by smoke and dust from the explosions. The destroyers turned away from their firing positions and a large number of LCI (Landing Craft, Infantry) ran parallel to the shore discharging a constant barrage of rockets.

Meanwhile there were flights of medium bombers over the island dropping parabombs. There were flying low and close enough that I could recognize the Cross of Lorraine insignia on the tail. My brother's (Dick) outfit. I found out later that he had been there.

I must digress for a moment but you will see that this is in chronological order: The army had a rule against pets but the rule was ignored. On New Caledonia someone had a pet goose that beat the daylights out of someone's pet shepherd dog. Someone else had a pet rooster and hen. The rule was once enforced when one of the boys brought home, at 2 A.M., a pig tethered to a length of rope. "But he followed me home!" Finally, one of the men bought a pet monkey in Tacloban. The animal made the trip with us. The fellow was sure that cigarettes would be hard to come by on Cebu, so he bought five extra cartons and stored them in his duffle bag. During the bombardment he ran out of cigarettes and went down into the hold to replenish his supply.

He came back on deck swearing a blue streak and dragging the monkey on a leash. We walked over to the ship's rail and threw the monkey overboard. The animal was a good swimmer and probably was the first to make the beachhead. The monkey had opened the duffle bag, opened the five cartons, opened the ten packs in each carton for a total of fifty and opened, split apart and scattered each of the thousand cigarettes.

Soon after the incident we were ordered to get our gear together and assemble on the deck. The landing craft moved into position to form a single file with the LCI (Landing Craft Infantry) in the front and our LST (Landing Ship Tank) near the rear. We approached the shore and the landing ramp was dropped with a louder than expected noise. We had hit a land mine with only minor

damage done to the craft and one minor casualty. One of the ordnance men got a piece of shrapnel in his buttock, for which he received the Purple Heart medal.

We waded a short distance in to dry land and marched to a palm grove, designated as the Ordnance area. Mine fields had been cleared before we landed. Our area was dry, shaded by palm trees and had a farm pump. The water had been tested and was drinkable. Best of all, the well was covered with a wooden platform, dry but just a bit wobbly.

The well had been in use for about an hour and many canteens were filled before one of our officers suggested that the platform be made steady. When the platform was removed they found a 100 pound aerial bomb set on end with the platform resting just above the detonating pin. Our bomb disposal lieutenant was called. He unscrewed the firing mechanism and had the bomb pulled out. He explained that when the Japanese set the booby trap they had pushed the platform against the firing pin and bent it so it would not depress and set off the bomb.

The bomb disposal officer hadn't left when someone pointed to one of the palm trees and noticed a "neat little parachute." The officer cleared the area and told us we had a parafrag bomb swinging in the breeze above us.

The parafrag (daisy cutter) was a small bomb, attached to a parachute. Around the outside of the bomb was wound a one inch thick iron spring under tension. The spring was serrated at one-inch intervals. It had a very sensitive fuse that would explode the bomb (they said) if it touched a tree leaf. On detonation the one-inch cubes of spring were thrown in all directions and could clear a field of vegetation within a fifty foot radius circle. This device had been dropped, with hundreds of others, by the Cross of Lorraine group. It had somehow failed to touch a thing on its descent before a palm tree limb snagged it.

The bomb disposal group came in. One of them dipped into a can and pulled out a handful of putty-like stuff. He rolled it between his hands until it looked like a piece of one-inch rope. It was positioned around the tree, two wires were inserted and everyone was told to take cover. There were two rapid, loud booms, the parachute was gone and the tree was cut neatly in half.

We had landed near Talisay and the next morning we were herded into trucks to be taken to Cebu city, the capitol. On the way (and it was over a paved road) we saw some of the results of the previous day: several shell holes, a few burned-out houses and two dead Japanese, one sailor and one soldier.

We departed from the trucks at a pleasant, grass-covered field. This was to be our home. We set to work erecting our pyramidal tents (six man) at designated spots and it wasn't long before we were a thriving community, complete with Philippine camp followers - laundry girls, handy men, fruit & vegetable sellers - you name it. No ladies of the evening, though. They had to stay outside the camp area.

After we were settled in we had a mid-afternoon assembly which turned out to be an information session: We were in a relatively safe area and our shops would be in Cebu City which was secure. We should nevertheless be on the alert for enemy infiltrators or possible counterattacks. Mine disposal squads had swept the area and considered it safe but we should be suspicious of anything that could be a booby trap.

We were thus told what could be but not a word of what to look for or how these dangers could be recognized or what to do or not do if they occurred.

The next day my group was taken to Cebu City and we saw our instrument repair shop. It was a large room with windows on three sides, benches and tables in place. One of the windows near the rear wall was open, held in that position by a small knife wedged between the frame and the

sill. One of the crew went over, yelled: "Look at the neat knife." And grabbed it. All I could see was booby-trap and yelled "Don't" as he pulled the knife out. There was a loud crash as the window dropped but no explosion. Our section officer gave the group a long lecture.

The next day things were relatively quiet. Mid-morning a bulldozer started pushing dirt and knocking down brush across the street. Suddenly the dozer stopped and the operator started pushing the brush and tall weeds aside. The operator, a young CB, stuck his head in the shop door and told us we'd have to evacuate. He cleared the whole neighborhood for a block around. We went back to our bivouac area.

Next day, explanation: The dozer operator saw what could have been a hastily concealed path through the brush. He followed it to the end and found a large drum. The bomb squad came in [and] removed the drum of high explosive, fused by a very sensitive chemical fuse. A slight nudge by the bulldozer would have pretty much taken out the whole block.

Several Philipinos were given jobs in our shops: auto mechanics, gunsmiths for our small arms section and a watch repairman for our group. He was a very good worker and knew the watch repair business. We also hired a large crew of workers to keep our bivouac area clean, to take over the KP duties, to dig necessary ditches and such less technical work.

The people in the shops received three times the pay of the workers in the company area. It came as quite a surprise, then, that my watch repairman told me we wanted to leave and get a job in the company area. He wouldn't give a reason; assured me that he had been treated well, liked his job and still wanted to take the job that would pay only one-third. Finally, I learned the truth: he had friends who were working in the company area and though the pay was less, the chance to steal blankets, clothing, food, and probably much more didn't exist in the shop. He left and got his blankets, etc.

The windows in our shop gave us a panoramic view of the hills beyond the city. Every day, weather permitting, a squadron of our planes made a bombing run over the hills. The hills were honeycombed with caves, held by the Japanese. These caves were the main targets.

One day there was a report that a Japanese artillery piece, probably a 4-inch rifle, was positioned in one of the caves. It would be wheeled out, fired, and wheeled back in. Two light tanks were sent out to neutralize it. One took position and the other was backup. The first tank was parallel to the hill, directly in front of the cave, probably about 70 to 80 yards away. They fired the tank cannon at the cave, the shell went in the cave, there was a terrific explosion, the tank was lifted into the air, rolled completely over and landed about forty yards away in an upright position. None of the crew survived. Apparently their shell had hit an explosives dump in the cave, the cave acted as a big cannon and the concussive force of the blast picked up the several ton tank as though it was a toy. I was sent out two days later to salvage any of the sighting equipment. The medics had pretty well cleaned out the inside but I was glad I hadn't been in it.

There were many, many caves, either natural or man-made or enlarged. They were utilized for storage, for gun emplacements, for fortresses. The biggest use was storage - everything from uniforms, blankets, cots to arms and ammunition. As they retreated after the invasion, they took as much ordnance as possible and left the rest there. Some of the remainder was booby-trapped. Our infantry and bomb disposal groups cleaned most of that up.

Although our forces tried to keep the Philippine civilians out of the cave areas it was a hopeless task. The caves were too numerous for the available manpower, the locals knew the area too well so they could "sneak in the back door" and they had dreams of the treasures hidden there - clothing, bed clothes, etc. One family went deep into a cave and it became too dark to see what was hidden there. One of the group found a box of "candles," the father lit the "wick" and in a

short time the dynamite exploded killing all but one.

Our chaplain heard that there were several crates in one cave which had a cross painted on the lid. With the possibility that it was loot from one of the cathedrals, he went to the cave with Military Police and bomb disposal personnel. They found two wooden crates about six feet long by two feet wide by two feet deep. They were filled to the top with silver pesos! They were carted out and shipped to the Bank of Manila.

Rotation of long term personnel was in effect. Names drawn out of a hat each month. Our Commanding Officer - Captain Rabin was sent back soon after we got to Cebu. Everyone regretted his going; he had been an excellent chief. One of the enlisted men that went with him went to visit him about two months after his discharge (they had both lived in Kentucky). He wrote back that his visit had sad consequences. Captain "Benny" and his fiance had been killed in a car crash two weeks after he got home. Everyone was saddened.

One day, one of our sergeants lost his Jeep. Left it unguarded for a short few minutes and it wasn't there when he got back to the parking spot. (Score another for the Navy). We could have replaced it with one of our spares but the sergeant had reported the loss to the Military Police. It was, therefore, a court martial offense and the sergeant would be required to pay for it, so much per month. Our first sergeant was put on the next rotation list. The sergeant was jumped three grades and made first sergeant with the proviso that he would give up the grade when the debt was fully paid off. He lost the difference between first sergeant and buck sergeant [pay] each month so he came out even.

One day a very polite Philippine man visited our shop. When the Japs had landed, he packed all his tools and supplies in a water tight tin box (he was a jeweler - watch repairman). When it was safe, after our landing, he had dug up the box. All was in good shape except that his bottle of watch oil had broken. Could we spare a little bit - a few drops even - of watch oil until he could get more from Australia by mail? Having eleven spare bottles (enough for eleven years) I gave him two bottles. Profuse thanks and what was my name?

Two days later I went back to my tent after a shower and was met by a half dozen man delegation. What a sly dog I was! A young maiden (they all agreed she was much more shapely and better looking than the usual) had come to the area looking for "Sergeant three grade Jose' Reetz." She and her younger sister were carrying a tremendous stalk of bananas. "My father says thank you for the oil. Tell Mr. Reetz." She left the bananas - a deep green color - under my cot. One of the delegation pulled a green banana off the stalk and peeled it. We all told him they were too green to eat. He proved otherwise by downing it with a remark about "you guys are too used to grocery stores." The fruit was at the peak of perfect ripeness. Everyone in the area helped me to get rid of the fruit. And they all agreed that I missed something by not being there to accept in person from the "real doll." She never came around again.

Another day a local native came into the shop and asked if we had any broken truck springs. I couldn't understand what he wanted them for but I took him to our automotive repair section. They had a large pile of junk parts, told him to help himself. He filled a canvas bag, shook hands with and smiled at everyone, mumbling something unintelligible except for the word "Thanks!" often repeated.

About a week later he was back and presented me with a bolo knife in a hand-carved wooden case. The knife handle was topped with a carved head. The blade was one of the car springs. The chief of the automotive section was similarly rewarded. He told me several weeks later that a Colonel was in his shop, saw the knife, and offered him fifty dollars for it. No sale.

There was a big, skinny fellow with one of the artillery batteries that came in quite often and dumped a load of instruments for repair. One day he also brought in a heavy, wool blanket -

Japanese Navy issue - "for the good service you've given me." With profuse thanks I told him I'd have something to take home when my name came up for rotation. He had found the blanket and many more in one of the caves and said that next time he'd bring a couple more "good ones."

Several weeks went by and he didn't show up. One day another fellow from the same outfit brought in the material for repair. I asked him when the "big skinny kid" would be coming in. A terse: "He won't be coming in." I didn't ask questions.

One night Art (head of the Artillery repair section) and I were given guard duty on a Cebu street corner. We spent the two hours talking of many things. He was a volunteer. His father had pulled strings to get him a job in Alcoa (in Cleveland). Art had just walked into the melt room when a pot of molten magnesium metal exploded and killed two men. All employees were sent home for the day. The next morning Art left home at the regular time, walked past Alcoa, straight to the Army recruiter when he gave up his strategic occupation exemption and joined the Army.

Our guard post was in the center of Cebu City, completely deserted at that time of night. Suddenly there was a muffled "pop" and Art yelled, "Hit the deck!" We were both lying flat when we heard a "swish, swish" and a thud. Whether accidental or on purpose, a rifle had been discharged some distance off. It hit the front of the building about nine or ten feet above the ground.

Chapter 9, Homecoming

Rotation of personnel had been going on since Bougainville. Four or five from our company end of each month. Names pulled out of a hat. In mid-month, one of the four remaining original 6814 task force members came into the shop, a bit angry. He was loud about the fact that we were still overseas. Our Lieutenant came in and joined the conversation. He assured us that it was all a matter of chance, that he had seen the names pulled out of a hat at the end of each month lottery.

The irate fellow - Bill Reardon - let it be known in no uncertain terms that the thing was a hoax and crooked. Lt. Bernstein was equally vehement that it was on the up and up. So Bill sat down and wrote - six names. Handed it to the Lieutenant and said here's the ones who are on the April list. The Lieutenant said, "We'll see, but we've never had more than five men on a monthly list."

At the end of April, the six names were posted. The Lieutenant got Bill and me aside, apologized, told us he had asked for a transfer out of the company. Joe Ritz and Bill Reardon made the May list, two of three men.

We were hurried through a clothing and equipment check, told what to take and what to leave behind. (It was here that I left the Army issue Hamilton watch. The new section head got it, though he tried to convince me to keep it.) In a day and a half we were on board our transport.

We had about three hours before sailing. First order of business was to open our barracks bags for inspection. The corporal doing the check notified me that I was short three T-shirts, a couple pair of socks and "that bath towel looks pretty ratty." I got a stack of replacements.

Behind me was a medic sergeant. At his inspection he nervously mentioned that he had a signal corps compass, never issued to him but given as a gift by a soldier whose leg wound he had treated. The corporal doing the checking told him to put it in his pocket. "If you turn it in to me I'll go home with a compass." It was then that I wished I had kept the Hamilton.

On May 30, 1945 we steamed out of Cebu harbor. We had no escort and were alone in the Pacific, heading East. We stopped at Pearl Harbor but couldn't leave ship, though we were there two days. One of the ship's crew laughingly explained they were afraid we'd desert and stow away on a tub going back to "your beloved Philippines." We arrived at San Francisco on June 27. We got off the train in New Jersey and were trucked to Fort Dix. A day or two there and on July 9 I received my separation papers, one hundred dollars (part of my mustering out pay), and \$22.90 travel pay.

Jane had met me at Fort Dix on the first day. We had several hours together and I would have had ample opportunity to pass contraband (again the Hamilton watch) to her. On the last morning before discharge we were all taken into one room, told to strip naked and put any personal belongings into a box with our name on it. The box was carried to the next room and we followed it, still stripped. In the next room we received a complete set of clothes, top to bottom, with extras and were bid "Goodbye" after claiming our box contents.