WHISTLE THE DEVIL

By

David I. Garrett, Jr.

To my children

Nancy and David III

and

To the good and brave men

with whom I have served.

At the urging of friends and family, I am setting out herein an outline of my military service during World War II and notes on some of my more memorable combat experiences.

Then, as now, the Good Lord protected and guided me and those with whom I served. Although my unit suffered as high as fifty percent casualties in one operation, not one of my men was killed in combat.

"Beyond the path of the outmost sun through utter
darkness hurled –
Farther than ever comet flared or vagrant star-dust
swirled –
Live such as fought and sailed and ruled and loved
and made our world.

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They take their mirth in the joy of the Earth - they
dare not grieve for her pain.
They know of toil and the end of toil; they know God's
Law is plain;
So they whistle the Devil to make them sport who know
that Sin is vain.

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'*Barrack – Room Ballads*', by Rudyard Kipling

Preamble

With the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and the entry of the United States into World War II, our role in the scheme of world affairs, both in war and in peace, was forever changed. The lifestyles of my generation became just a memory - "*the way we were*".

At the time, I was a sophomore at LSU, a member of the ROTC and preparing to go into the Advanced program, leading to an Army commission. As part of this program, in April 1942, we were enlisted in the Army Enlisted Reserve, as Privates. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, I and several of my classmates had attempted to enlist in one or more of the active services, but were turned down for lack of parental consent, our being only eighteen years old. Enlistment in the Reserves got us "signed up".

We began the Advanced program in June 1942, and were to go straight through to completion, without breaks or vacations. By September, I knew that this was going to be a long haul and that I would not see active duty for a long time. I left school and volunteered for active duty as a Private, with the hope of getting a chance to go to Officer Candidate School and get my commission ahead of my class. Also, though it may sound idealistic, I felt that I could be a better officer if I had personal knowledge of the life and problems of an enlisted man. I feel that this proved true, but admit that, at the time, I probably did not fully appreciate the odds of accomplishing my plan.

Some of my friends and my family have suggested and requested that I record some of my World War II experiences. Set forth herein is a chronological record, general and specific, of some of these experiences which are thought will be of interest to the reader. Some combat experiences are detailed. Others are reviewed in general.

96th Division October, 1942

My orders to active duty came in late September, 1942, I reported to Camp Beauregard, near Alexandria, in October and in due course was assigned, along with a troop train load of other recruits and inductees, to the 96th Division, newly activated, stationed at Camp Adair, Oregon, just south of Salem. Our troop train traveled across the southwestern United States and up the West Coast, arriving at Camp Adair in about a week.

On arrival, I was assigned to Company F, 382nd Infantry, a rifle company. The Company commander was a Captain Waggoner, from South Carolina, and when he interviewed me, he asked me what a man with my training, education and IQ score was doing volunteering as a Private. I told him of my plan, that I was there to learn about the Army, and looked forward to being among the first selected from the Division to go to Officer Candidate School.

He designated me as an Acting Corporal and assigned me to the Second Platoon. As an "Acting Gadget", I took a lot of verbal hazing from the Regular Army cadre. However, it was my good fortune to be associated with these experienced Non-Comms , and once I had time and a chance to prove myself, all went very well. In a month or so I made Corporal for real, then Sergeant, at age nineteen and the youngest man in the outfit, and was Platoon Sergeant of the Second Platoon thereafter. My Platoon was made up of good men who respected me and were good to work with and train. There were some memorable characters.

Private Howard had been drafted out of the mountains of Kentucky and really had never been out of his home area before. He was perhaps thirty-five years old, very shy and the outside world was a compete mystery to him. A slow but willing learner, he often needed help with rolling his full field pack, getting his gear ready for inspection and the like, and I always tried to help him myself. A lot of people laughed at Howard, but after

we went to the rifle range, they quit laughing. He was a crack shot with the M-1 and made music with the Browning Automatic Rifle.

Sooner or later, the Regimental Commander would come around to inspect the troops in training, an event which placed everybody front and center. Sure enough, the Colonel stopped in front of Howard. Captain Waggoner went cold. The Colonel asked Howard who his Battalion Commander was. "Sergeant Garrett," replied Howard. The Colonel got the same reply to inquiries as to the names of his Regimental Commander and Division Commander.

Finishing his inspection, The Colonel complimented Captain Waggonner on the status of the training and the appearance of the troops. Relieved, the Captain asked if the Colonel would like to inspect any other areas. The Colonel replied, "No, but I sure would like to meet Sergeant Garrett."

Medelin was a draftee from Texas or New Mexico, not too fluent in the English language, more than somewhat unhappy with Army life and, as a result, often having a hard time and giving others a hard time. After one of his misdeeds, I used my best halting Spanish to firmly head him off. We had no more trouble, and he became a good soldier. He probably just needed someone he could relate to.

We had a man who had been a traveling preacher, out of Tennessee or Kentucky, perhaps thirty to thirty-five years old, who was a real woodsman and outdoorsman. I learned a lot about living in the outdoors from him, making a bed out of tree boughs, getting a fire with wet wood, staying warm under winter conditions and other most useful skills. He also introduced me to the 91st Psalm, which he called the "Soldier's Psalm".

"Tex" English was a happy–go-lucky, blond headed young man who took to the light machine gun like a duck to water. His favorite expression was "Heaven is my home. I'm just passing through." I later learned that Tex was killed in the Leyte Island invasion

The weather in that part of Oregon in the winter of 1942-1943 was awful. Every day brought more rain. We lived in the rain and it was not at all uncommon for us to spend the night in the field, sleeping in the rain. It was all part of the training.

We had some snow. One particularly heavy snowfall came while we were out in the field on what was originally intended as a three or four day exercise. The snow got about knee-high in the flats and we couldn't get back to camp and supplies and food couldn't get to us from camp. We had an interesting week.

Basic Training continued until about the end of January, and by then we were beginning to shape up to expectations, but continued with advance training in various areas.

In early 1943, I made application for Officer Candidate School and in due time appeared before a Board of Review of Officers for an interview and evaluation. One of the officers on the Board was Jerry Hightower, who had played football at LSU. He was kind enough to compliment me on my appearance before the Board and my sense of humor. This was most encouraging.

In early May, the 96th was transferred to Ft. Lewis, Washington, near Tacoma. What a change! We moved into permanent barracks, a great improvement over the temporary buildings we had at Camp Adair, the weather was perfect, cool and clear, with snow covered Mount Rainier in full view, and a small beer garden right next to the Company area. The hills were covered with fir and spruce and, all in all, it was very nice.

In late May, my orders came through to report to Officer Candidate School at Ft. Benning, Georgia the first week in June. My plan was working. My time as an enlisted man, particularly my experience as a Non-commissioned Officer, was invaluable to me. When you have men under your command, they are entrusted to your care in every respect. It is your responsibility to see that they are properly trained and qualified to do the job they are called upon to do, and, as an essential quality of a leader, you must never

call upon one of them to do anything you would not do or attempt to do yourself. In the last verse of his poem *The 'Eathen*, Rudyard Kipling states a truism - "but the backbone of the Army is the non-commissioned man."

Fort Benning Columbus, Georgia June, 1943

In late May, having received orders to report to Officers Candidate School the first week in June, I asked for a short leave, to allow me to stop off at home in Monroe for a few days, turned in my gear to the Company Supply Room and left Fort Lewis for the South.

Rather than wait around a couple of days for Army authorized transportation, I went to the railroad station and asked for a ticket to take me as far as possible without changing. Due to wartime travel, I was not able to get a ticket all the way through but went from Tacoma to Portland, Oregon, to Denver on the Portland Rose. Our chair car was somewhat aged, as was much of the rolling stock pressed into service by the railroads, with plush maroon upholstery and hanging lamps which were probably oil burners at one time. From Denver to Dallas I rode the Texas Zephyr, a very modern train at the time, getting aboard just as it was pulling out of the station. From Dallas, I changed trains again for Shreveport, all of this with several close connections and additional ticket purchases along the way. Fortunately, I came straight through, without any layovers. From Shreveport, the best I could do was a bus to Monroe, but I was home for a few days.

When I left Fort Lewis, we were in winter uniforms and wearing our overcoats at night to walk the two or three blocks to the Post Theater. Coming to the South brought a change in the weather. After a few very happy days in Monroe with my family and friends, and acquiring some summer uniforms, I took the train again, this time for Columbus, Georgia and Fort Benning.

I reported to Fort Benning a few days before my twentieth birthday, was assigned to an Officer Candidate Company which was being formed, drew some bedding from the supply room, moved into the barracks and began to check out the set-up.

Our barracks, like others in the Training Area, were of the usual temporary design, two story wooden structures, with a large, open squad room on each floor, but well kept, clean and airy. They were painted white on the outside, which served to reflect the heat in the Georgia climate, as contrasted to the olive drab exteriors in Oregon, and unpainted on the inside. Beds were standard army cots, lined up along each long wall of the squad room, heads to the wall, a small double shelf with hanging rod at the head of each and footlockers at the foot of each. Rifle racks stood on the floor down the center of the room. I chose a spot about midway of the room on the first floor.

All of the candidates to make up our company did not arrive at the same time, and we did not complete our roster for a few days, during which time we remained on post. The company mess hall was not open, but we had access to the post exchange and to a nearby cafeteria. We took the time to relax and get to know each other.

At about this time, *LIFE* magazine carried a good pictorial article on the officer candidate training program at Fort Benning. It documented the thoroughness and toughness of the course, both physical and mental. When our group was complete, we were divided into platoons, introduced to our training officers, issued equipment and supplies and the work began.

Our days were long and full. We rose early, fell out for roll call, had breakfast, got the barracks in order and fell out again for the beginning of the day's training. Training was both in theory and in practice, classroom instruction, demonstrations, field exercises, day and night, lots of vigorous physical exercise, not the least of which was the obstacle course, familiarization firing of all the basic infantry weapons and instruction in and practical application of command responsibilities.

Field demonstrations included live firing of artillery and mortars, as well as demonstrations by school troops of infantry tactical formations and operations. On one of our night exercises, they hit us with tear gas, to test us on the use of our gas masks. In that heat, it was not much fun, but quite realistic.

After supper each day, we had classroom instruction in such subjects as map reading or study hall for a couple of hours. A joke went around that a student dropped his pencil in a map reading class, leaned over to pick it up and missed two years of trigonometry.

An attempt to mention all of the areas of instruction would be impractical, but suffice it to say that the program was most well planned and organized and that the instruction was top notch. Much of the instruction would seem to have required more formal education than some of the students had, but the instructors imparted the necessary in every case.

Our group included an ROTC class from California, of which Bob Waterfield, a well known football star and married to Jane Russell, the movie star, was a member. She came to Fort Benning with him, lived in town and occasionally came out to visit Bob or go to the movies. She spent a good deal of time at the Officers' Club on the main post. We usually had Saturday afternoon and Sunday off, so Bob did get to spend some time with his wife.

After about two months, my class from LSU showed up and was billeted in an area close to our company area. I got to visit with them and found that, while our course was three months, changes had been made and their course was to be four months. That meant that I would be commissioned some four months ahead of them. My plan had worked. The odds must have been terrific, but, with the help of the Good Lord, I did it.

We graduated the first week in September, were commissioned second lieutenants and ordered to Camp Stewart, at Macon, Georgia for orientation and assignment. We

were also given about a week's leave before reporting to Stewart, so I got in another visit home. Although I had no word of it at the time, Tom Terry Milliken, from Bastrop, a member of my class at LSU, came home with the information that I had finished first in my class at Benning. I had the opportunity to stay on as an Instructor, or to attend the Advanced course, but I wanted to get back to the troops.

As I recall, some twenty-five percent of the men who started out in our class did not make it through the course. It was about as tough as it could get, but we were prepared as best we could be for what lay ahead.

31st "Dixie" Division October, 1943

Quite a few of the members of my class from Fort Benning reported to Camp Stewart for "orientation" and assignment. Orientation was, I believe, another term for giving us time to get used to being brand new second lieutenants.

A number of us were assigned to the 31st Division, stationed at Camp Pickett, near Blackstone, Virginia. The 31st had been a National Guard division, which had been activated early on, and was made up in large part of men from Louisiana, Mississippi, Georgia and Florida.

One of our group had a car, a 1937 Chevrolet sedan, and at the end of our two weeks at Stewart, four of us pooled our travel allowance funds and took off for Virginia in early October. Arriving at the 31st, I was assigned to the Anti-Tank Company of the 167th Infantry Regiment as a Platoon Leader and reported in.

The officer compliment consisted of the Company Commander, a Captain, an Executive Officer, a First Lieutenant, and four Platoon Leaders, two First Lieutenants and two Second Lieutenants. Lt. Bruce, the Exec, and I wound up rooming together in the Bachelor Officers Quarters while we were at Pickett.

We were equipped with 57 mm Anti-Tank guns, with three-quarter ton trucks as prime movers. These guns fired a six-pound projectile at a muzzle velocity of twenty-nine hundred feet per second, compared to the muzzle velocity of a round fired from an M-1 rifle, twenty-seven hundred fifty feet per second. They were of course crew served and were quite effective.

I commanded the Second Platoon and had as my Platoon Sergeant one of the finest soldiers I encountered in my entire service, Sergeant Johnny Robertson. As soon as I took over the Platoon, I explained to him that I had in fact just been a Platoon Sergeant in a Rifle Company, told him of my background and we became very close from the start. This was pay-off on my prior experience, as I had hoped for.

The 31st was at this time being brought up to full strength and undergoing additional training to top off its readiness for moving to an active Theater of Operations.

The weather in Virginia was wonderful. The air was clear and cool, there was relatively little rain and we had a few light snowfalls. It was quite a contrast to the winter weather in Oregon.

Lynchburg, Virginia was some seventy miles from Pickett and my first cousin, Mary Moss Madison, was attending Sweetbrier College there. Whenever I could get a long weekend, I rode the Norfolk and Western over for a little civilization.

We undertook extensive training in map reading, compass courses, nighttime operations, weapons firing, in special areas such as handling land mines and booby traps and in other special skills we might be called upon to use. Realism was introduced by such exercises as crawling on our stomachs through the mud for some one hundred feet, while live machine gun fire was directed some four or five feet over our heads. Safety precautions were of course enforced, but we did get the effect and feeling of the real thing. It should be noted that a bullet coming close to you, unless it is a ricochet, makes a cracking sound, rather than whining.

In November, we began amphibious training, first on dry land, climbing up and down wooden towers, simulating the side of a ship, on cargo nets and chain ladders. We would climb up some thirty feet, while a couple of men took hold of the bottom of the net and shook it, to simulate action of the waves.

We then moved to the Little Creek training area near the Norfolk Navy Base for actual amphibious training. This was a well planned program and included loading and unloading operations with various types of landing craft, large and small, as well as getting wet up to our necks in Chesapeake Bay, a rather cool experience in November.

The Navy had positioned a ship out in Chesapeake Bay for use in instruction in loading personnel and equipment on and off landing craft. Here we got the first real experience with cargo nets and chain ladders.

Our final exercise was a mock invasion of the Maryland shore of the Bay. We went aboard this ship one day, with all our gear, spent the night on board, got up the next morning well before first light and had breakfast and a briefing on the operation. We slept, ate and were briefed under red lights, which allowed us to see better when we went out into the dark.

At the scheduled time, we went over the side, down the cargo nets and into the LCVPs (Landing Craft Vehicle/Personnel), rendezvoused with the other landing craft and made the run for the beach. When the landing craft got to the beach, the ramp was dropped and we went ashore with plenty of rebel yells and fanfare. Once ashore, we assembled our vehicles, equipment and personnel, loaded up and drove back to Camp Pickett.

Knowing that we would be shipping out soon, I took a short leave in early December and came back to Monroe for a few days. No mention was made of it, of

course, but we all knew that I would not get back again before going overseas. This did not dim our enjoyment of my time home.

In early February, we were ordered to the Port of Embarkation, Hampton Roads, Virginia. We spent a few days there and then went aboard a Dutch merchant marine ship, the Kota Inten, bound for we knew not where. Once under way, we learned that our destination was New Guinea, by way of the Panama Canal and a lot of the Pacific Ocean.

Oro Bay, New Guinea March, 1944

We sailed from Hampton Roads, Virginia, down the East Coast of the United States, through the Caribbean, through the Panama Canal and out into the Pacific. The weather was cool at first, but once we reached the Pacific, the heat set in. Sleeping in a little "stateroom" of some eight by fourteen feet with eight other officers, with nine bunks, six stacked on one side and three on the other, became quite uncomfortable. The ship was of course blacked out, with no air coming in the portholes. We wound up most nights sleeping on deck, with our mattress pads and ponchos. Days were not bad, as there was always a good breeze blowing and we would be outside.

Enlisted men bunked below decks, in rows of bunks stacked four and five high. Many of them chose to sleep topside also. The "comforts of home" did not exist. Only two meals a day were served. The officers ate in the ship's ward room and the food was fairly good. The troops were fed by way of chow lines and this food was also as good as could be expected.

We did our best to keep all hands active, mentally and physically, with classes such as map reading, aircraft identification and other skills, and with daily calisthenics. The days grew long and somewhat boring, but we had some reading material and a lot of tall tales were swapped. When we crossed the International Date Line, we had a big ceremony and initiation and all hands became "Shellbacks" and received identification cards as such. The Kota Inten was not escorted, but sailed alone the whole trip after

leaving the Panama Canal. After a non-stop trip of forty-three days, we reached New Guinea.

Our original destination was Goodenough Island, off the northeast coast of New Guinea, but, due to an outbreak of scrub typhus there, we were diverted to Oro Bay, farther up the coast to the North and West, the area in which the Battle of Buna had taken place earlier.

The troops which had come over on the Kota Inten, together with other elements of the Division as they arrived, were deployed to an area several miles inland, near the village of Dobadura. We set up in a site which had earlier been occupied by elements of the First Cavalry Division, which had moved on North. The terrain here was flat and we were in a large open, grassy area, bordered by light jungle growth.

We established our Company area near Regimental Headquarters, set up pyramidal tents for the troops and the officers and began to get settled into what would be our base camp for our stay in this staging area.

The Division was spread out over a rather large area. By the time we arrived, Oro Bay had become a "melting pot" of American and Australian forces. A good network of decent roads had been built and there were a couple of airstrips. Some supply facilities had been established, as well as communication networks.

Oro Bay was at that time part of British New Guinea, and we were paid in Australian currency. An Australian pound was worth one dollar and sixty cents.

We were not located very near any active native settlements, but a few natives passed along the roads each day, going about their business. Most wore a minimum of clothing and very few of the women wore anything above the waist.

Our training continued and we spent a lot of time on physical conditioning, getting used to the climate and getting the feel of the jungle.

About this time, I got word of a special unit being formed by MacArthur, the Alamo Scouts, whose job it would be to go in on islands prior to an invasion, to scout out the situation on the ground. When I expressed an interest in this unit and sought some information from the Regimental Intelligence Officer and gave him some more information on my background and training, he told me that he couldn't let me go. Instead, at age twenty, I was selected to recruit, train and lead a unit of Regimental Scouts, to act as a special strike force and intelligence gathering group behind Japanese lines.

I was given my pick of any twenty men in the Regiment and a free hand in equipping and training the unit. After interviewing men from all the various units who volunteered, I took two or three from Anti-Tank Company, including Sergeant Robertson, and filled out the quota with a fine group of men. We were affectionately, dubbed the "Jungle Platoon".

Before actually transferring these men and assembling the Jungle Platoon, I had the opportunity to attend a jungle warfare and survival school conducted by the Australians at Higatura Government Station, in the foothills of the Owen Stanley Mountains. In addition to the school, the Station operated a penal colony for native prisoners convicted of serious felony and capital crimes.

The Australian officer in charge was a Leftenant Ireland, formerly of the 39th Australian, which had come over the Owen Stanleys to relieve MacArthur's forces at the Battle of Buna. A contingent of Native Police was quartered at the Station, including a Sergeant Sonobe, who had led the 39th out of a complete encirclement by the Japanese two days in succession. For this he was awarded the Victoria Cross, the highest decoration given by the Australian government.

These “Police Boys”, as they were known, wore short sleeve “T shirts” and knee length shorts of light weight wool, piped with reddish orange bands at the neck and cuffs. They carried Enfield rifles and sidearms and were barefooted at all times.

They were of course experts at tracking, jungle lore, stealth and all related skills. Often when we would be sitting around the fire at night, or talking near our tents, you would glance around and find one of them squatting within a foot of you and you would not have heard a sound as he came up. One of the exercises held by the school involved our being given one hour to hide and then having the Police Boys find us. It took them less than ten minutes to find all of us. They then took ten minutes to hide and we never found one of them.

Each afternoon at sundown the Police Boys would hold a retreat ceremony, lower the flag and march back to their quarters in a column of twos, with rifles “at the slope”, the only sound as they passed being the rustle of bare feet in the dust, It was an impressive sight.

Our training was directed at skills that we would need to survive under combat conditions in a jungle environment, both offensive and defensive, at dealing with the natives and generally to familiarize us with conditions we could expect to encounter as we moved up into the combat areas. We also learned a little “Pidgin English”, to allow us to communicate to some degree with the natives.

We learned what wild fruits, nuts and plants were edible and which ones to avoid. We learned something of poisonous insects and reptiles and what to do if these were encountered. The water in most of the streams was naturally purified by passing over rocky stream beds and through sunlight, but we what learned what precautions to take.

To simulate combat conditions, one exercise involved our passing through a valley between two hills and having percussion grenades thrown down towards us, but not close enough to harm us, to get the feel of fire and explosions in the jungle.

All in all, the course offered at the school was quite vigorous and most helpful in preparing us for what we were to later face. On returning to the regiment, I began transferring the members of the Jungle Platoon and assembling and equipping the unit. We were quartered near regimental headquarters and shared its mess and other facilities. After getting everybody together and a week or so of "shake down" time, we began our specialized training.

Just about the time we got started, Sergeant Robertson was accepted for Officer Candidate School in Australia and left us. We hated to lose him, but this was good for him. Emphasis was placed on weapons, "hand to hand" fighting, map reading, including some instruction in Japanese map symbols and interpretation, jungle living, amphibious operations and other specialized skills we might need.

For one training period, we set up camp on the beach near where part of the Battle of Buna had taken place. As part of this exercise, we conducted familiarization training in the use of rubber boats for putting men ashore in small groups. One night when we were coming in to the beach in practice, I swung my leg over the side to drop into the water just as a fluorescent streak cut past me. At first I thought my paddle had made the streak, but realized that a shark had made a pass at my leg! We had to go in to knee deep water before we could shake him.

By the time we moved up the coast to our first combat area, we had accomplished a lot. In July, we got the word that we were moving up the Maffin Bay region, on the northwest coast of New Guinea. There was still some activity in the area, but our position was to be defensive as well as offensive, the latter consisting mainly of combat and intelligence gathering patrols.

Maffin Bay, New Guinea July, 1944

Leaving Oro Bay in convoy with other ships and landing craft carrying other units and personnel, we moved up the northwest coast for some three days. The trip up to Maffin Bay was by way of LSI's (Landing Ship Infantry), which we boarded on the beach near Buna. As I was wading out into the surf to go up the boarding ladder, someone behind me yelled out "Sonny ….. Sonny Garrett!" That had to be somebody from home. I turned around and there stood Jack Masur, the first man I had seen from Monroe. He had on a bathing suit made from an old G.I. towel and was sunburned dark brown. We were able to visit for a few minutes before I boarded. He had been stationed farther up the coast, had seen Bobby Oliver and was now temporarily at Oro Bay with the Quartermasters. We embarked for Maffin Bay, in what was then Dutch New Guinea.

Reaching Maffin Bay without incident, we made a dry landing and set up our Regimental Base Camp in a cleared area some distance back from the beach. Things were very primitive at first, but in due course we received tents and folding cots and bettered or position.

The beach at this point was clean, perhaps fifty yards in depth, and terminated in a sharp rise of about six feet to a level clearing between the beach and the jungle. Mud was a problem. Logs cut and placed in the road for footing simply disappeared. We finally overcame the mud and developed a fairly decent base camp.

We were located just east of the mouth of a small stream, which ran down from some point inland to the ocean. This area was fairly secure, and I do not recall encountering any Japs east of this stream. West of this stream lay an old Japanese airstrip, running parallel to the beach and lying between the jungle and the beach, and such enemy troops and supplies as remained in the area were on this side of the stream.

Just across this stream, on the west side, we established a static line of defense, consisting of a long line of "pillboxes", dug into the high bank of the stream, some one hundred yards away. These were constructed by digging rectangular holes in the backside of the high bank and roofing these over with logs, branches and dirt, with observation and firing openings about one foot high across the front. At one point the Jungle Platoon manned the last five pillboxes on the "dead end" of the line at night for some thirty days and ran patrols off and on during the daytime.

We ran regular patrols out into the area still held by the Japanese, some of which were mostly routine, to keep up with any new developments. Three of our patrols are worth mentioning. Our first patrol on which we came under fire began as a routine exploratory sweep through the edge of the jungle along the inland side of the old airstrip. We had had some rain earlier and the grass in the clearings, about five to six inches high, was still wet. As we came into one clearing, we picked up some footprints in the wet grass in which the grass was still rising. Whoever made those footprints was not far ahead!

Rounding a corner in the trail we had been following, we saw another clearing ahead and came to a vine tied across the trail. On patrol, you normally put two scouts out ahead and the rest of the patrol is close behind. I always took my place right behind the scouts. You can't lead from the rear. The vine alerted me and when I next looked up, the scouts were not there. I signaled those in the rear and hit the ground.

Just as I hit the ground, the dirt exploded in front of me. We had walked right into an ambush. A machine gun, dug in at the base of a tree, was firing at us point blank from about fifty yards. As I went down, I saw a log to my right, just off the trail, and I rolled over behind it. That Japanese machine gunner had us thoroughly pinned down and he ate up the top of that log for thirty minutes before he had to reload.

When he did stop to reload, I and a couple of others dropped over into a shallow swale to our right, flanked him and managed to take him out with grenades. No casualties

were incurred and we completed our patrol and returned by way of the beach without further incident. The other two well-remembered patrols were connected, the third growing out of the second.

Some while after the patrol described above, we were again scouting out the jungle and terrain just inland from the airstrip when we found a small thatched roof hut, apparently used for shelter by the Japanese, and a larger one, built in a small clearing, which was filled with equipment and supplies of all sorts, ordnance, medical and miscellaneous items. All of this seemed to be in first class condition, indicating that it had not been abandoned. After briefly checking out the contents of this hut, we pulled out, completed our patrol and returned to headquarters to report our findings.

On receiving our report, the Intelligence Section, very interested in our discovery, came up from somewhere with a couple of junior-grade lieutenants from the Navy, purported to be ordnance experts, and asked if we could take them back out to that storage site the next day. I pointed out that we only knew one way to get back to the site and would run a pretty good chance of being detected and possibly encountering trouble, but that we would try.

The next day the Navy "experts" came in and we got ready to go. Since we were going into the area, we were given two additional missions, one to disarm a booby trap under a small wooden bridge, a one hundred pound aerial bomb set to blow when a vehicle rolled over the bridge, and the other to check out a reported listening post between the airstrip and the beach. Our boat was loaded.

The booby-trapped bridge was more or less on the way to the supply dump, so I decided to take it on first. This was a short wooden bridge over a small streambed, along a little used road in the vicinity of the airstrip. A plank in one of the runners at the far end had been removed, a large hole dug in the ground underneath and the bomb placed in the hole, nose and fuse up. The plank had then been replaced, concealing the bomb, and a vehicle rolling over the plank would have exploded the bomb.

We removed the plank, exposing the bomb, and one of the Navy ordnance men and I sat on either side of the bomb, with our legs in the hole. The large conical fuse, about five inches in diameter at its base, was brass, with all sorts of Japanese symbols and characters on it. When I asked him how we were to go about getting the fuse out and thus disarming the bomb, he said he had never seen one before! This was not much help.

The bomb appeared to be the same as on shown in the movie *Destination Tokyo*, in a scene where an unexploded bomb lodged in the deck of a submarine. In the movie, the decision was whether to unscrew the fuse clockwise or counterclockwise, to avoid setting it off. While this may not seem much authority, we had nothing else. I decided to try unscrewing it counterclockwise. Holding it with my handkerchief to get a good grip, I unscrewed the fuse and removed it.

My Navy companion then got all enthused about taking the fuse apart, but I told him to by no means try to handle it in any way, but to throw it as far as he could into the brush and get rid of it. He did and it went off like a hand grenade. The Navy did not argue with any of my decisions after that and we continued our mission to the supply dump.

Making our way through to the supply dump, we paused short of the clearing to look and listen for any activity in the vicinity of the hut. I went forward to have a look and saw no movement and heard nothing. The path across the clearing led through grass about knee high and I signaled the patrol to hold up and cover me while I walked the path to the hut.

Crossing the clearing, I passed a wooden box to the side of the trail. This box had been there yesterday, but today a small abacus lay on top of it. We had company! I picked up the abacus and put it in the pocket of my coveralls. Being out in the open, I could see that it was not a booby trap.

Moving on in to the hut without incident, I signaled the patrol to come on in, but told the Navy officers not to tarry, because we were probably being watched. I spread my

men out around the area to protect against any surprise attack from the residents. The ordnance men went to work checking out the supply dump.

Before they really had satisfied all of their curiosity, a few shots broke out outside and I got them out, signaled the patrol and we headed for the beach, before we incurred any casualties. We made it without further incident and proceeded to the area where the listening post had been reported.

The listening post was located on the high bank between the airstrip and the beach, and consisted of a couple of open-sided, thatched roof huts. We watched a while for signs of life, but whoever was occupying them had taken off when we approached.

In one of these we found a large brass plotting table, obviously long since out of use, but probably used for plotting positions on maps and charts, along with some writing and mapping materials and chart paper. The other appeared to serve as living quarters for two or three people, with cots, rustic chairs and tables and some personal items scattered about. These huts and the listening post were occupied, but we found nothing of any real intelligence value and saw nothing that indicated any possible danger to our position. Our position far down the beach could be observed to a degree, but these two or three Japs, probably left behind long ago, offered no problem to us.

As we went through the living quarters, I spotted a couple of cases of tall green bottles packed in straw. Here was my chance to take back some saki, Japanese wine. I stuck a bottle inside my coveralls as we left, we headed back for headquarters by way of the beach and arrived in due course, without ever encountering the occupants of the listening post.

While we were waiting outside of headquarters for de-briefing, hot and exhausted from our patrol, I decided to try the saki. I took the cork out, took a good mouthful and spit it ten feet! A Japanese interpreter was nearby and I asked him to read the fancy label on the bottle. He read the label, grinned and replied “mosquito repellant”!

The heat and humidity in New Guinea produced a really bothersome form of dermatitis, dubbed "jungle rot" in GI parlance. Enough of it could be disabling. In late August or early September, I wound up in the field hospital, located on the beach, stretched out on a cot letting the air get to my skin, the only thing that seemed to do any good. My main concern was the fact that we were scheduled to go into Morotai, in the Netherlands East Indies, and they would not let me out to go back to my unit. While there, I made a couple of good friends among my fellow patients, one being Chaplain Loutit, an Episcopal Chaplain, who had my same problem, and the other Captain P.E. Long, commanding the 31st Cavalry Recon Troop.

Late one afternoon, I looked out towards the beach and saw a man wading out into the surf, apparently not in control of his senses. I jumped off my cot and ran down the beach to try to head him off, but he got out into deeper water before I could reach him. I swam out, pulled him in and the orderlies took him over. To make a long story short, the hospital authorities decided I might be fit for duty after all and discharged me. Interestingly enough, this incident was reported by one of the wire services back home and made the papers under the by-line "Garrett Proves He's Still Able".

When I reported back to Regimental Headquarters, bad news greeted me. Having been told I was not coming back for duty, and being the only officer for the Jungle Platoon, my unit had been dissolved, the men sent back to their original units and I was about to be reassigned. I needed to find a home fast! We were just a few days away from the Morotai operation.

I contacted Captain Long, who had gone back to the Recon Troop, and asked him if he had a spot for me. He said he did have a spot, would really like to have me and started the wheels rolling to get me transferred. He stood in good with the Division G-2, a former commander of the Recon Troop, and I was soon a Trooper.

From the day I reported to the Recon Troop, I knew I was in the right place, and was well received. The Morotai invasion was set and I had a lot to learn about our role and my particular job in the operation. Also, as best the time allowed, I had to get to know my men and they had to get to know me.

Our role in the invasion was to spearhead the amphibious landing, going in in Amphibious Tanks some one-half hour ahead of the first assault wave, establish a foothold and work our way through to and secure Pitoe Airstrip. D-Day for Morotai was September 15, 1944, and a few days ahead of time we loaded on LST's (Landing ShipTanks) and prepared to form up the convoy.

Morotai Island, Netherlands East Indies September 15, 1944

When we left Maffin Bay, we joined a large convoy of ships and landing craft, bound for Morotai Island, lying northwest of the western tip of New Guinea, just off the larger island of Halamahera, in the southern portion of the Netherlands East Indies, and located right on the Equator.

As we moved up he coast, we were joined by other ships and we were some three days or so enroute. We arrived at Morotai before dawn on D-Day and the Amphibious Tanks of the Recon Troop were launched from the LST's well out from the beach, some forty-five minutes before H-Hour, and we headed for the beach to get a foothold for the first wave of the assault force.

As we headed in, we were supported by LCI Rocket Ships, firing banks of rockets over our heads at the beach, lifting their fire just as we reached the beach. There had not been much pre-landing bombing activity by the Air Force, due to the fact that Morotai was fairly heavily populated by friendly natives.

All three of the platoons of the Recon Troop got to the beach and headed for the airstrip. At the point where we came ashore, a grove of coconut trees lay between the beach and the airstrip and we proceeded through this grove, firing canister rounds in the 37 mm cannon mounted in the turret of the amphib and spraying the overhead branches with machine gun fire from the waist guns.

All at once we had a backfire from the breach of the cannon in the turret. A canister round had stuck in the barrel. Being new to the amphibs, I asked what had to be done to clear it. Someone had to get outside, on the front of the tank, in an exposed position, and use a big ramrod, similar to a gun cleaning rod used on shotguns, to clear the barrel. This procedure offered some hazards, under the circumstances.

This was something I could do. I told a couple of the crew to put the ramrod together and hand it out the hatch to me when I got outside. From the front of the tank, I rammed the loose round out through the breach, we were in business again and I scrambled back into the amphib.

When you have the opportunity to lead a group of men in combat, there is a period of feeling each other out and developing mutual respect and trust. This action on my part cemented this relationship. I was then and there completely accepted as their leader. If a leader has to depend on rank or designated authority to get the job done, he is in tough shape. The trust and respect of your men, and your trust and respect for them, is the answer to successful leadership, in combat or otherwise.

We made it to Pitoe Airstrip without further incident. Resistance at this point was very light, most of the Japanese having taken to the hills. The airstrip was shortly secured, with the Recon Troop spread out along the near edge.

While we were waiting for the other rest of the landing force to catch up to us, a startling, but humorous thing happened. A Japanese plane, apparently unaware of the

change in management, tried to land on the airstrip and almost made it down before the pilot saw his mistake.

The Troop Headquarters personnel, coming in a little later, had talked the Navy out of a quantity of boneless steaks, and we had quite a feast when things quieted down. The Navy always thought the men in the Troop were crazy to do what we did, and were very gracious and hospitable in sharing what they had with us.

The Morotai invasion was the first move by MacArthur's forces above the equator. On this same date, the First Marine Division, supported by sea and air elements of the Fifth Fleet, under command of Admiral Chester Nimitz, struck Peleliu Island. That operation involved a great number of casualties and the island was not so readily secured as was Morotai. Roy Johns participated in the Peleliu operation.

After securing the beachhead and after the Division had established a perimeter, we moved up the coast a few miles to the site where we would establish our base camp, located on the beach in a large coconut grove, not too far from Division Headquarters. We were told that the coconut groves on the island had belonged to the Colgate soap company. It was a fine site for what turned out to be a long term base camp for the Troop. The perimeter line, a small stream coming down to the ocean, was just beyond our Troop area. In due course, we had pyramidal tents for all the troops, an open air mess hall, a couple of wide troop streets running back from the beach to the rear of the Troop area and, all in all, a very nice base camp.

Having no immediate further use for the amphibs, we set up a tank park in the rear of the area and parked them there until needed. Our patrols and missions now were to involve small groups of ten to twelve men, put ashore from landing craft behind the Japanese, or worked out on foot from our established positions. When we were put ashore from the sea, we would usually be picked up later at a pre-arranged point and time on the coast. When we went out on foot, we usually worked our way back the same way. Most

of our missions involved some three or four days behind the Japanese, but we made a couple of longer ones, in greater force, which will be discussed herein.

The terrain on Morotai was fairly level along the coast, rising to high hills and ridges as you moved inland. Numerous small streams and rivers flowed from the higher ground and hills, between the high ridges, to the coast. Our usual procedure was to patrol up one of these streams from the coast to some point in the foothills, then cross over the intervening ridge to the next river or stream and follow it back to the coast. We would then follow and scout out the coast to the next stream and repeat the process, until we had covered the desired area.

On a couple of occasions, when we had a large or unfamiliar area to patrol, I had one of the artillery spotter planes fly me over the route, to get a look at the terrain before we set out. On our normal missions, we carried light field packs, with a poncho, change of socks, a "jungle sweater", a light fatigue type pullover, to sleep in, canteen, and personal weapons of individual choice. Most chose the lightweight M-1 Carbine, as it was very accurate, easy to handle and a good supply of ammunition did not offer a weight problem. A couple of the men would carry machetes for cutting our way through underbrush and jungle growth when required. We wore fatigue caps instead of helmets. In our work, helmets were too heavy and adversely affected your ability to hear in the jungle. We also carried such maps as were available, but most of the time we were in unmapped areas, one of our purposes being to find out what was beyond the mapped terrain.

We were equipped with "jungle boots", actually high top tennis shoes, light green in color, with tops that came up over the calf. Most of us cut down the tops to about ten inches, as this was much more comfortable and cooler. This was good footgear, provided good traction, both on land and in crossing streams and rivers, and dried in fairly short order when wet. The Japanese had jungle boots also, theirs having a squared toe, with the big toe separated from the other four toes, to accommodate feet that had toes spread from

years of wearing sandals. The footprint from these boots was distinctive and easily distinguishable.

For food, we carried K and D rations. The K ration was a dry ration, packaged in a heavily waxed box about the size and shape of a box of Crackerjack, with an outer cardboard cover. This made for a lot of jokes about finding a whistle or toy inside the box. The breakfast ration had a small can of scrambled eggs with bacon, crackers, instant coffee, sugar, cigarettes, and toilet paper. The lunch ration had a small can of cheddar cheese, crackers, lemonade powder, candy and cigarettes. Supper brought a small can of meat, crackers, bouillon powder, candy and cigarettes. The D ration was a dark, thick chocolate bar, highly nutritious, which specially formulated to resist melting at temperatures up to one hundred twenty degrees and to not deteriorate when under water for several hours. It was a very good ration and could be eaten on the run without preparation or being overly filling.

Through experience, we found that the wax carton of the K ration could be torn into strips and burned a strip at a time, without giving off any smoke, generating enough heat to boil water in a canteen cup for coffee or bouillon. Fire without smoke was a big advantage to us.

On many occasions, we were able to supplement our rations with native corn and taro, a native potato, shaped like a sweet potato, with a purple skin and white meat, which we picked up out of native gardens in the patrol area. From natives in villages along the coast, we were usually able to trade for fresh fish, cigarettes being the accepted medium of exchange. All of these items were roasted in coals, the corn in its shucks and the taro and fish wrapped in banana leaves. Bouillon powder from the K rations flavored the fish for a real treat. When we would come across a Japanese supply dump, we would sometimes pick up raw rice and green tea, packaged in rolls of cloth, similar to a roll of sausage. Both were very good fare.

On extended patrols into new areas, we would go into the nearest village and engage a native guide. In time, we learned to speak enough of the Malayan dialect to make our selves understood. “Jalon American patrolee?” meant, “Do you want to go on an American patrol?” “Tita bagoose!” meant, “No good!” Before taking on a guide, you always, with appropriate emphasis, made sure that all agreed “Japanese tita bagoose!” We never found a dissenter.

Security precautions when bedding down at night on patrol was a consideration that we recognized at the outset, but experience was our best teacher and we gradually worked out systems that allowed us to get the rest we needed.

We would normally attempt to time our progress to put us either inland at a point from which we would the next day cross over the hills and ridges from one river or stream to the next, or at a point on the coast, preferably at or near a native village. Security along the coast really did not offer too many problems, as the Japanese were mostly inland and the natives took good care of us. Safety at night inland called for greater precautions.

At first, we followed the normal procedure of posting guards inland. However, we would always be on the bank of a stream or river and the bank, normally covered with thick undergrowth, usually rose quickly a short way back from the water. We found that, just before dark, after we had washed up, gotten rid of the leeches which we always picked up in the streams, and eaten our evening meal, we could cut our way into the brush on the stream bank, pull the brush in behind us and all go to sleep, with a good chance of not being surprised by the Japanese. It worked.

Most of patrols on Morotai were made up twelve to fourteen men and were information gathering or intelligence patrols, as opposed to purely combat patrols. We were always subject to combat, of course, but we were there to “see and not be seen”, if possible. That size patrol was just not big enough to attack a large force. One patrol, however, did have as its mission the seeking out and evaluating what had been reported

as a Japanese strong point in the hilly country up one of the rivers, about a one-day's run inland.

For this patrol, we took the better part of two of the Recon platoons, with my platoon, as usual, leading. Our plan was to get close to the reported position the first day, then move in fresh the next day.

One the way in, I had the misfortune to step in a hole while making a river crossing and twisted my knee rather painfully. I continued on, but was not in much shape for what we had planned for the second day. We did not plan to send the whole patrol forward the next morning and when I woke up, I knew it would slow everybody down for me to try to forward with the smaller group, so I stayed to the rear to await developments.

In the late afternoon, the men who had gone forward came back, reporting that they had been engaged in a fire fight and had one man, a Sergeant Guidry, with an arm wound. The Japanese position had been too strong for that size group and they had broken off the engagement and brought Guidry out to our position on the river. Our position was relatively secure, but Guidry had to be evacuated without delay.

Choosing six of my men, we improvised a stretcher out of two bamboo poles and a couple of blankets put Guidry on it and started down the river to the coast. I felt that I could make it with my twisted knee and that my patrol experience gave us a better chance of making it. When we had made it a short way down the river, which was fortunately shallow at that point, a spotter plane, in response to a radio message, dropped a one-man rubber raft to us. Unfortunately, the raft landed on some rocks and sustained a small puncture, but we were able to plug the hole with a repair kit that was in the raft. We put the stretcher on the raft and proceeded down river, sometimes walking and sometimes swimming, depending on the depth of the water.

Daylight faded before we had gone too far, and we were moving down the river through territory that we did not hold and with which we were not too familiar. The river

was our only hope, however, so we kept going, being very cautious and making a s little noise as possible.

After some eight hours in the river, we made it to the coast just about mid-night and to an outpost of one of the American units in the area. Here we were able to get help in getting Guidry to the field hospital to the rear. His wound got him a ticket home; he recovered in good shape.

This story somehow came to the attention of the national press and my folks got copies of newspaper write-ups from all over the country, telling about this particular adventure. In November, my platoon was assigned the mission of spearheading the invasion of the Mapia Islands, located some one thousand miles to the southeast of Mototai, by a Regimental Task Force of the 167th Infantry Regiment of the 31st Division.

Mapia Islands Operation November 15, 1944

The Mapia Islands are a very small, three island atoll located some one thousand miles southeast of Morotai and the Netherlands East Indies. They were at the time of this operation garrisoned by what was believed to be the remnants of a Japanese battalion, and the US Navy wanted to take the atoll, for the purpose of establishing a rescue base. The task of taking the atoll by an amphibious operation was assigned to the 167th Infantry Regiment of the 31st Division, which was then occupying Morotai. My Platoon of the 31st Calvary Recon Troop was selected to spearhead the invasion.

When we were first briefed on the plans for the operation, it appeared that we might not be able to take all of my men, due to constrictions of space on the ships which would transport us and from which we would operate. When this word got around, the reaction of my men was immediate. One by one and in small groups, every man came to me to say that they were not to be left behind and that every one of them was going with me, one way or another.

One comment I will always remember and cherish was made by Sergeant Stanley "Stash" Labensky, a burly trooper with a black moustache, who had a son my own age and enough rotation points to go back to the States. When I told him he ought to stay back and wait orders to go home, instead of going off with me to get shot at, he quickly replied, "Listen, boy, I've been wiping your ass all over the Pacific, and if I let you go off there without me and you get hurt, I'll never forgive myself." He went. They all went.

We took the Regimental Task Force in on this operation, going in some half hour ahead of the first assault wave with three amphibious tanks. Our arrival had been preceded by several days of bombing. We were supported the first day by LCI Rocket Ships, which fired a curtain of rockets over our heads at the beach and lifting their fire just as we came ashore.

The first day's landing was on Pegun Island and resistance was fairly light, most of the Japanese defenders having crossed over to Bras Island, across a coral reef. In making this landing on the first day, we launched off the LSMs some distance from the beach and my amphib hit the water hard, throwing me forward against the knife-edge of the turret, smashing my nose and knocking all my front teeth loose. While I was draped over the breach of the 37 mm cannon, my Sergeant, not seeing me, fired and I was racked up against the back of the turret. I later got some help from the Field Hospital with my nose, set my teeth back in place with my fingers and stayed with it

After taking in the first wave, we wheeled to the right end of the island, to cut off any Japanese attempting to escape across the reef. Some dozen or so were cut off and they blew themselves up with explosives in the edge of the jungle in front of the recon position. It was not a pretty sight.

On the morning of the second day, the Recon Platoon led the assault on Bras Island, crossing over about a mile of coral reef in full view of the Japanese defenders. We were not supported by the rocket ships on the second day, as we made the landing from

the lagoon side of the island and they could not come into the lagoon. When abreast of the designated beach landing area, the three amphibs drew fire from the shore, performed a right flank maneuver and hit the beach ahead of the assault wave.

My amphib, which had led and went in on the left flank, overran the forward Japanese position, took some rounds in the gear box and was knocked out, with Japanese in front and in back, between us and the landing force. Corporal Gulledge, my tank driver, and I got out of the tank to try to get things going. While we were standing side by side, among foxholes full of dead Japanese, I faced left and he faced right and took a bullet through the chest. I went back after him, got him out to the beach and was giving him first aid, when a Japanese machine gunner picked us up from about twenty-five yards across the open beach. Just as the bullets were eating up the sand by my head, the Japanese ran out of ammunition and had to reload. The waist gunner in the tank took out the machine gun, and Gulledge was eventually evacuated to the rear and survived. Down to the right, one of the other two tanks had also been knocked out and additional casualties incurred among the Recon men.

Bras Island was the end of the operation, and no landing in force was necessary on the third island in the atoll. My Recon Platoon took about fifty percent casualties and lost two of its three amphibious tanks, but lost no one killed. I was awarded my second Bronze Star Medal and the Purple Heart for this operation and received a combat promotion. My men had recommended me for the Silver Star and a combat promotion.

A couple of footnotes remembered: Two British Lt. Colonels from the Middlesex Regiment were sent from New Delhi, India to go in with us and observe our methods of operation and tactics. They somehow failed to let us know of their plans ahead of time and wound up on one of the infantry landing craft the first day, but then got with us. We enjoyed their company and they got some first hand experience.

When we were able to get Gulledge evacuated back over to Pegun Island, Bob Lesure, my other driver and radio operator, and I took our mess kits and got in a chow line that had been set up near the beach.

We were standing behind a young infantryman who was obviously tired, scared and hungry. When he asked the Mess Sergeant if he could have a little more to eat, he got a turndown, with a few unnecessary profanities. This got to me and I told the Mess Sergeant to give that man all he wanted or I would take his serving ladle and shove it where the sun didn't shine. In the Recon Troop, we did not wear any insignia of rank in combat and always used first names or nicknames. I looked pretty beat up and my coveralls had blood all over the front - mine and Gulledge's - and the Mess Sergeant figured I meant it.

Bob and I went over and sat down on a log to eat and this young fellow joined us. He introduced himself and I replied that I was Dave and this was Bob. "Man," he said, "nobody ever spoke up for me like that. Our officers don't look out for us like they ought to. What kind of officers do y'all have?"

Bob, tough and tough-looking himself, grinned, pointed at me with his fork and said, "You just met him."

Morotai Island, Netherlands East Indies Late November, 1944

On returning to Morotai after the Mapia Islands operation, we set about getting personnel and equipment in order. We had brought back the two tanks which had been knocked out and turned them in to Ordnance for salvage and all of our casualties had rejoined the Troop, happily recovered or recovering, except Corporal Gulledge. We took a couple of weeks off from patrols for a well-deserved rest.

I took the opportunity to recommend a number of my men for decorations and two for combat commissions, Sergeant Johnny Johnson and Sergeant Clarence Curb. Johnson got his commission, but Curb's was turned down. Most of the recommendations for decorations were granted. At the request of my men, I was recommended for the Silver Star and a combat promotion. I was awarded the Bronze Star with "V" device and a combat promotion to First Lieutenant.

Things went along in fairly routine fashion for the next few weeks, with a few short patrols and numerous early morning one plane air raids by the Japanese air force stationed on Halmahera. Their main target was our airstrip, at which by now were based a rather large force of long range bombers and fighters, flying daily missions to the north.

In late December, someone at headquarters decided it would be a good idea to try to clear the remaining Japanese from the interior of the island by making a drive from our end of the island to the north and east and setting up a large ambushing force at the other end of the island. The Recon Troop got the job of setting up the ambush.

The plan was for us to patrol in force ahead of the "drive" and catch the Japanese at some point inland. We felt that this plan was not likely to succeed, as driving the Japanese through the jungle and hills was going to be like picking up water with a fork, but we got ready to try it. As it turned out, we were right, but we had an interesting adventure. On Christmas Day, 1944, we packed up for a patrol of some sixteen days an1d pulled out the next morning as planned, starting just beyond the perimeter line and moving towards the far end of the island.

After some fourteen days of patrolling from the beach into the hills and back, moving towards the far end of the island, we reached a point on the beach just below the village which was our destination and rendezvous point for pick-up by sea. During this period, we had been supplied with rations, and sometimes mail, by airdrop, and had also lived off the land in some cases, where we found corn and taro, the native potato, in the

natives'gardens. In one airdrop, I got word that my combat promotion to First Lieutenant had come through. This was good news.

From this point, we could see the village, perhaps three-quarters of a mile up the beach. The beach was about seventy-five yards wide, with a high bank on the inland side. We saw no suspicious activity, but I felt that we should not start the whole patrol up the open beach until we verified the safety of the situation and new that all in the village was friendly.

The Troop Commander was with us on this patrol, but, being the most experienced, I was leading and calling the shots. Directing the patrol to remain under cover, I told the group that I was going to walk up the open beach alone and make contact with the village, and that if I did not encounter a problem, they should follow. As I stepped out onto the beach, "Whitey" Durst, one of my best men and a very good friend, who had been with me in the Anti-Tank Company and the Jungle Platoon, and somehow managed to follow me to the Recon Troop, said "I'm going with you Dave". We made the walk up the beach together.

The approach to the village was uneventful and the villagers came out to meet us as we got closer. We soon verified that all was well and signaled the patrol to come on in.

When Whitey and I reached the first group of villagers, we were escorted over to big wicker chairs, of the type found on inter-island ships, and given little cups of sagoaire, a native wine made from the berries of the sago palm. The taste was like that of a fine sauterne, but it was much more potent. An ancient crank phonograph was brought and the music produced seemed vaguely familiar. I suddenly realized it was *"Red Sails In The Sunset"* sung in the Malay language!

After the rest of the patrol joined us, we all went on into the village, where we were warmly greeted. This particular village seemed to enjoy a higher standard of living than most we had seen and all of the people appeared healthy and well fed. The huts were

well constructed and clean and the Chief and one or two others had dwellings, which could really qualify as small houses.

We had reached our pick-up point some two days ahead of time, and the natives took the occasion to give us a big feast, with all sorts of food laid out on tables in the village street. There was chicken, taro potatoes, cut in strips and fried in coconut oil, a cheese dip of goat's milk cheese, various native fruits, fish, bananas and some other items we couldn't identify. They had no tea, but served little china cups of hot water with the food.

At night, they entertained us with native dances, under the light of coconut oil lamps made of conch shells, hung in the trees and on posts. The women, small stature, were dressed in long skirts that came down to the ground and long sleeved blouses with high collars. All very proper and chaste. Some of the men took us out for rides in their outrigger canoes and showed us how they could hit the water beside the canoe with paddles and cause fish to jump into nets spread on the outrigger. All in all, it was a storybook experience.

Several amphibious craft picked us up the second day, and returned us to our base camp. Patrol activities for the next couple of months were routine, intended only to keep track of what was going on in the areas nearby the perimeter, and, in early 1945, we turned in the amphibious tanks and were equipped with armored cars and jeeps, three armored cars and six jeeps to each platoon.

We knew that we would in due course move on up to the Philippines, and would be involved with land warfare, instead of the amphibious operations with which we had been involved so far. The armored car was a six-wheel vehicle, heavy, with a powerful engine, open, rotating turret manually operated, and mounted a 37 mm cannon, with a coaxial mounted 30 caliber machine gun. The driver and radio operator were up front, behind armor plate.

Training in the armored cars, with maneuvering exercises and firing of weaponry, with additional attention to related basics, such as map reading, continued through about March, when we learned that our next destination was Mindanao Island in the Philippines. We prepared for moving up in early April.

MINDANA0 PHILIPPINE ISLANDS APRIL, 1945

Planning for the move up to Mindanao was well under way in early April. The Troop was to move up aboard an LST and I got the duty of working out detailed plans for the loading of all our vehicles and cargo. This turned out to be a real job. A spot for each vehicle had to be assigned ahead of time on both the tank and weather decks. Loading would involve backing each vehicle into place and then chaining it down, so it could come off forward at the time of landing.

After about a week of working with scale templates of the vehicles and a scale diagram of the LST which had been assigned to us, I had a fair idea of what had to be done. The various landing craft and other ships which would make up the convoy began arriving and anchoring offshore, I got the number of our particular LST from the Harbor Master and secured a small amphibious craft to take me out to make contact with our ship and go aboard to make preliminary plans with its Commanding Officer. As we rode around the harbor, looking for our LST, I suddenly noticed that all of the ships were bringing their flags down to half-mast. What was going on?

About this time, we found our ship, came alongside and I went aboard, after the usual Navy formalities. Then I learned what was going on. The date was April 12, 1945. President Roosevelt had just died. Loading the LST for real was a lot different than on paper. It took us about a day and a half, but we got it done. The skipper of the LST was making his first combat operation and had pulled up too far on the beach. We were loaded and couldn't get off the beach!

In the middle of the night, with the convoy waiting on us, we had to unload the tank deck, pull off the beach and reload the whole tank deck. We made it and joined the convoy, but it was tough! Our landing on Mindanao was uneventful. We approached the West-Central coast of the island through Moro Bay and landed near the village of Cotabato.

Cotabato and Davo

This was not an assault landing, and we came ashore on ramps prepared for the purpose by troops which preceded us. Our skipper, new at the game, got off into the harbor with six of our men still aboard. I had to go find them the next day.

We moved inland a short distance to assemble and to get ready to proceed to the interior of the island. The day we moved towards the interior, we got word that Germany had surrendered. This was of course wonderful news, but we were too busy to celebrate at the time. Arriving at a point towards the center of the island, we learned that the 31st Division would move north, up the center of the island, and that the 24th Division would move East, towards Davo.

Both divisions had to cross the Palangi River, and we had only one pontoon bridge. We had quite a confused situation and experienced a considerable delay, our people not getting across until after dark. It took us until almost morning to find the troops we were to lead up the island.

When we did find our troops, we learned that our mission was to precede the lead units up the Sayre Highway, which proved to be a one-lane dirt road. We were to leave at noon, accompanied by a few engineers, mounted, with the main body of our troops following some six hours later, walking. We were to "establish and maintain contact with the main Japanese force", which was retreating north, up the island.

Moving up the island on schedule, we soon picked up evidence that we were not too far behind the Japs. Small wooden bridges over creeks and streams had been burned that afternoon and other signs showed that we were getting close. Just before dark, we accomplished our mission. We "established contact". "Maintaining" it would be no problem. Actually, we rode through a rather large ambush force and then managed to back out. That was really a close one. The Japanese wanted the larger contingent and we were certainly not of strength to take on the main force. We drew back, deployed on the side of a large hill an awaited our main force. Sometime after midnight, our troops caught up with us and we turned the job over to them.

The lead unit moved on up the road a short way before encountering resistance, at about the point where we had been through the ambush. The firefight that followed lasted several days, but we were unable to utilize our armored cars, because the bridges had been destroyed and we couldn't move up. One of the bridges had spanned a deep gorge at the corner of a hairpin turn in the road and it took several days to overcome this problem.

Once we were able to move, we made our way up the island, but were not really able to properly utilize our equipment. Progress was slow and resistance varied in intensity. The infantry troops were having a tougher time than we were at this point.

The terrain had become semi-mountainous, with large grass fields, and the weather in the daytime was hot in the daytime and cold at night. Movement was a little faster now, but we were still somewhat restricted in the use of our equipment. At about this time, I developed a serious sinus infection and had to check into the hospital. They told me there that it was dangerous for me to try to continue on as I was doing and evacuated me to Leyte to a field hospital, over my objections.

In the field hospital, they told me I couldn't stay in that climate without an operation and that was something that they were not properly equipped to handle. The result was that I wound up headed for home, again over my objections. My next move was aboard a Navy transport ship, bound for the States.

THE VOYAGE HOME JULY- AUGUST, 1945

The Navy transport set out from Leyte, bound for the States, on what would turn out to be a voyage of some forty-five days and take us back through the Panama Canal to New York.

We had a fine trip, with lots of good food and fine accommodations. We stopped over at Ultihi Harbor and were able to get off the ship for exercise and GI beer. By the time we got to New York, my sinus infection was gone! Just before we went through the Canal, we got word of the atomic bomb.

We arrived in New York on the morning of V-J Day, got leave to go to town and stepped up into Times Square just as the lights came around the Times building.

Mary Moss Madison, Clarice Slagle, June Bacon and Herbert Land met us.
We had a fine evening. After a three-day trip to Ft. Sam, I checked into Brooke General.
Here I was given a clean bill on counts and returned to full duty. My next stop was Army Ground Forces Redistribution Center, Ft. Sam Houston. Along with a number of other young officers, we stayed here until mustered out. I got out in January, 1946, returned home and entered Law School in February.