

Mr. Lee Allen

May 4, 2009

Dear Lee -

Thank you for sending me the Frank article. It has helped me recall some of the experiences with Captain Botcher throughout the New Guinea (Aitape, Pagan) and Leyte campaigns.

I've not forgotten your request for information. I believe I mentioned that my belongings were stolen three times between 1947-1960. They included military and civilian documents that I should have kept in a safe deposit box.

I located the enclosed articles that may be helpful to you. It is not exactly accurate regarding my injuries. I was fighting three enemy soldiers. My man killed two - but not before he shot me and

He stabbed me with a bayonet. Both were superficial. However I was between my men and a Japanese officer who tried to decapitate me with his saber. He missed my neck but his saber struck my left shoulder.

After driving off the enemy troops and patching our wounds - I led the patrol back through a mine field to our lines. I was hospitalized for a year - then recuperated for a year - then returned to my military career until retiring in 1960.

As for the Yank article - it accurately describes our actions for inside enemy lines. Our patrol lasted 1½ to 2 months - the longest conducted by any Division in any theater during WWII.

On Christmas day, just before joining Captain Botcher, my patrol

shared a Christmas dinner - a 6 oz can of planters peanuts. I gave each man 3 or 4 peanuts. We had run out of food.

We were watching many enemy troops in our immediate vicinity. Of course as the campaign wound down our situation became more dangerous. We were in the midst of many enemy troops that were being pushed toward our location. Under such extreme tension one or two of my men hallucinated - imagining seeing enemy troops where there were none.

We moved on and joined Captain Batcher on high ground. We watched enemy troops at a distance going in and out of a native building. Some were bandaged.

Captain Batcher had noticed several native huts at a lower level in the valley. He wanted to shelter the men from the elements.

We discussed the matter and the Captain decided to move down to the huts.

Our combined patrols did not exceed 30 men, not the 90 mentioned in the Yank article.

My patrol captured the Japanese Captain mentioned in the article. I captured the Japanese private and assigned him to work our electric generator. As I questioned him I learned that his family were professional people - pharmacists, I believe. He also mentioned that he spoke Spanish. I had limited Spanish language ability - but was able to communicate with him.

The night Captain Botcher was fatally wounded the Japanese private was on my left and the Captain was on my right. We could hear Japanese shouting instructions. Our prisoner told me, in Spanish, what they were saying - and I passed

the information to the Captain.

Then a mortar round exploded near him. I removed my belt and tightened a tourniquet on his leg - but in the darkness we could not see any of his other wounds.

It was an intense, vicious firefight - involving our approximately 30 men against far more than 300 enemy troops. The ORMOC Valley remains seared in my memory as my 'valley of the shadows' in my daily contemplation of the 23rd Psalm.

I noticed the enemy had us almost surrounded. Before they could close the gap I ordered the men to withdraw. We carried the Captain to safety and additional care that would help him survive. But it was not to be.

I advised headquarters informing them of those KIA. I was told to return to Division Headquarters and prepare to move on to the Luzon campaign.

Our return was another unforgettable experience. Three KIA were wrapped in canvas and placed aboard an LST.

We reached our destination late at night - but the LST could not move to the shoreline. We could see lights flickering in the darkness.

We had to step into chest high water and carry these KIA on our shoulders to the shore. The night was dark, black and had a purplish hue.

I will continue to look for additional information that may be useful in your endeavor. However, I'm not certain that I understand the scope of your effort - or your time line for completion.

Captain Botcher was very calm under extreme pressure, generally, a quiet person who

earned the respect and loyalty of his men. The last chapter of his life began with my arrival for the New Guinea Retape Campaign.

I was not injured during the New Guinea campaigns. But it was close. I found bullet holes through my fatigue pockets.

However, with every succeeding patrol I incurred injuries - all increasing in severity - until I was wounded by a Japanese officer who struck me with a saber.

Almost seventy years later I feel the effect of much close combat and the intense concentration needed to survive. I seldom write or speak - but have a global view and am very much aware of what is transpiring in many fields.

Well, Lee, I hope my comments have been helpful. I do need a better understanding of the scope of your project and your timeline for completion.

Please tell Stephen Martin that I very much appreciated his comments. I wish you both success in your endeavor and will send you whatever additional information I locate.

Sincerely,

R. L. Steele

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