

**MINDANAO, PHILIPPINE ISLANDS**



**SHIP CONVOY ON THE WAY TO MINDANAO**



### **PUTTING IN FLOATING DOCKS**

After uneventful days at sea we came ashore, 22 April 1945, at Parang and from there to Cotabato. The Army 24th Division, just ahead of us, went east to Davao, while the 31st Division went up the central part of Mindanao.



### **A TOWN THAT HAD JUST BEEN LIBERATED**

This was more like normal warfare as we had a road, the Sayre Highway, which was already there. In the other areas we were in the only roads we had were the ones our troops built. Of course, it was quite different from normal warfare in many other ways. This so-called highway was only a dirt road to begin with and after a couple of days of our vehicle traffic, it was almost nothing. With rain it was an almost impassable quagmire, then in a day or two such heavy dust that it choked up air cleaners on our trucks thereby knocking them out until the air cleaner was serviced. I remember one section of the road that was so bad our Army Engineers built something that I would describe as a bridge, except that it was flat on the ground. It was made of wood and served its purpose as it got our trucks pass this area. **With the retreating Japs blowing up about 75 bridges**, it made our advancing troops face many problems while crossing streams and ravines.



**PUSHING THE RETREATING JAPS BACK UP THE SAYRE HIGHWAY  
- NOTE THE FOOT SOLDIERS**

Getting trucks through with supplies was extremely difficult. At points we moved jeeps as well as supplies across these places on cables rigged for such purposes. At other times the "Biscuit Bombers" were used. In spite of all these difficulties and a determined enemy, the 31st Division went up the Sayre Highway, with the 124th leading the advance all the way to Malaybalay. Fierce combat was experienced in numerous points along this route, often without Artillery support. What with a terrible road and all those blown up bridges, it's no wonder the Artillery couldn't keep up with the advancing foot soldiers.



**BRIDGE OVER NOTHING**



**BRIDGE OVER WATER - THIS IS KNOWN AS A BAILEY BRIDGE -  
OUR ENGINEERS COULD RAPIDLY ERECT THESE BRIDGES**



**WE ENJOYED BATHING IN THE COOL WATERS OF THE MINDANAO RIVERS - NOTE SOLDIERS ON THE RIGHT AS WELL AS THE BAILEY BRIDGE IN THE BACKGROUND.**

The most severe loss of American lives in such a short period of time for our Regiment came at a place along the highway, which later became known as “**Colgan Woods**”. On the first day of this encounter, which began on 6 May 1945, our Regimental Chaplain, **Father Thomas A. Colgan**, was killed while rendering last rites to one of our soldiers. In his honor this area of Mindanao will be remembered always by the men of the 124th as “Colgan Woods.” The Japs were effectively dug in and determined to halt our advance at this point. Being well prepared for **combat and with such a strong position they were able to inflict heavy losses upon our attacking troops**. Our Foot Soldiers attacked these positions time and again, sustaining heavy casualties but to no avail. It would be days before the sorely missed Artillery could get up in order to lend their support. In the meantime, Marine Dive Bombers were called in and made raids for a few days but were not effective against these strong enemy positions. Our Artillery finally arrived and began shelling and in just a few hours on 12 May 1945, our troops were able to move through this area. The remaining Japs had retreated from this heavy Artillery barrage. These few days at “Colgan Woods” was a great loss to the 124th as 69 were killed and 177 wounded.



**CHAPLAIN COLGAN ON THE RIGHT WITH BILL FITZPATRICK ( HE GAVE ME THIS PHOTO) OF SERVICE COMPANY & LONG ISLAND**

After the battle at “Colgan Woods” I passed by there several times with truck convoys but never had the opportunity to stop and look at the integrated defenses the Japs had constructed there. What I’ve read about and learned from others clearly indicates that the enemy considered this a crucial point along the Sayre Highway to defend. They had prepared these positions well in advance with the intention of wreaking severe damage to any American Troops coming up this road. Thus, they were well prepared when our 124th Infantry foot soldiers arrived. **Their pillboxes were connected with tunnels, some of which ran under tree roots.** The positions were well

covered and camouflaged rendering them most difficult to recognize. Troops could pass nearby and not even be aware of these fortifications. Considering these well built defenses it's no wonder that it took the Artillery to drive them out.



**TRUCK CONVOY ON THE SAYRE HIGHWAY**

It was extremely difficult to operate truck convoys over the Sayre Highway, with treacherous hair-pin turns up and around mountains, through jungle, heavy quagmires and blown up bridges but somehow the job was accomplished. This road, even after being made passable, could deteriorate in a matter of hours. I recall once taking a convoy back for supplies in about 4 hours and it required 2 days to get back up to the advancing troops. Needless to say that, with this terrible, jungle, mountains, blown up bridges and being on constant alert for Jap snipers or an ambush, **it was often a perilous journey.**



**OTHER SECTIONS OF THE SAYRE HIGHWAY PASSED THROUGH  
DENSE JUNGLE**

Land mines were something we had to be aware of but I don't recall them being a problem for us, at least in my operations. I did see one area marked off as mined. The Japs had a mine that we referred to as a "**Yardstick Mine**" and we were warned to be on the alert for them lying in the road. From the description given us I figured it would look like a stick out there in the road. I never saw one and as far as I know neither did any of the other men in our transportation section.



**MUD ONE DAY AND DUST THE NEXT  
THAT'S THE SAYRE HIGHWAY**

Our advance continued and on 23 May 1945 we met up with another Army Regiment that had pushed down from the north coast. The entire Sayre Highway was now in American hands but you can be sure that there are straggling Jap troops in the jungle just off the road. A couple of days earlier another Regiment, the 155th Infantry also of the 31st Division, had relieved the 124th from the lead position.

**Now for the first time since being in combat, we had friendly troops between us and the enemy.** But wait, it's not time to relax. Remember the Japs that had retreated from "Colgan Woods," well they were wandering around back there somewhere and it was a sizable force. So in spite of having friendly troops between us and the enemy our 2nd Battalion was attacked early that morning by that group which was run out of "Colgan Woods." **This was a bitter fight, for a few hours** that resulted in the destruction of the Jap force. My memory is that 73 Japs were killed that morning and we lost 2 Americans,



**SOME OF THE JAPS KILLED THAT MORNING**

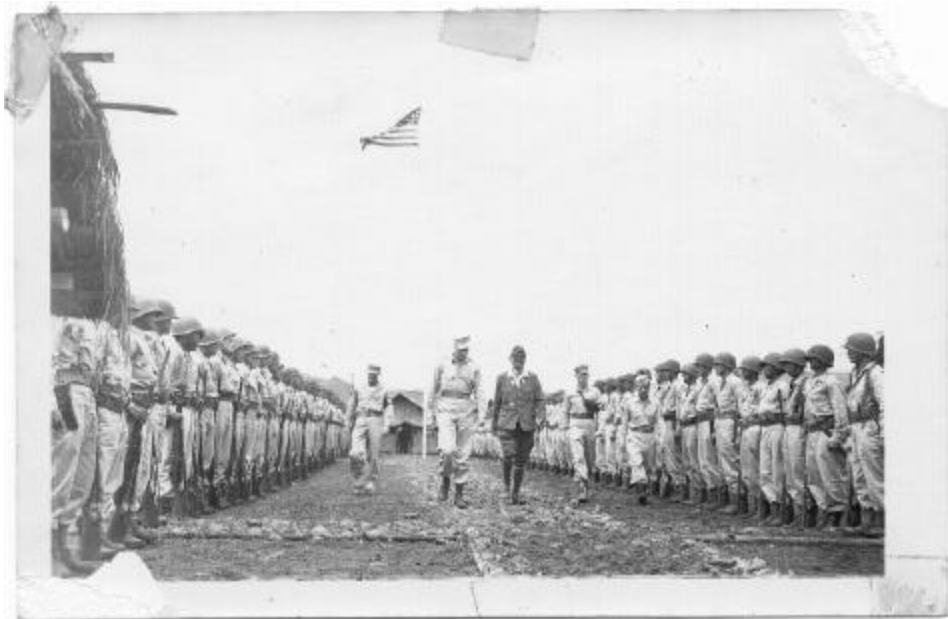
The beaten Japanese forces fled back into the remote mountain sections and now it's mopping up time. **Mopping up means you hope you see him before he sees you.** Large patrols went back into the mountains seeking out pockets of enemy soldiers and destroying them. Fighting continued until the Japanese surrender.

Our thoughts now turned to the invasion of Japan. I learned much later that the 31st Division was slated to go in north of Tokyo with the 8th Army as we invaded Japan. **I suppose the 124th would have been ordered to lead the way as we had in our other campaigns.** My personal thoughts were on the "point system" which had been devised to give those of us who had been in service for a long time the chance to go home. My points were borderline but I was gaining points right along so my hope was that I would not have to be in on the invasion of Japan.

As the Japanese government surrendered and **MacArthur** accepted it in Tokyo Bay, the 31st Division Commanding General accepted from the Japanese General surrender of all troops on Mindanao.



**OFFICIAL PHOTO  
JAPANESE LT.GENERAL GYOSAKU MOROZUMI IS BROUGHT IN BY  
ONE OF OUR PLANES TO SIGN SURRENDER PAPERS**



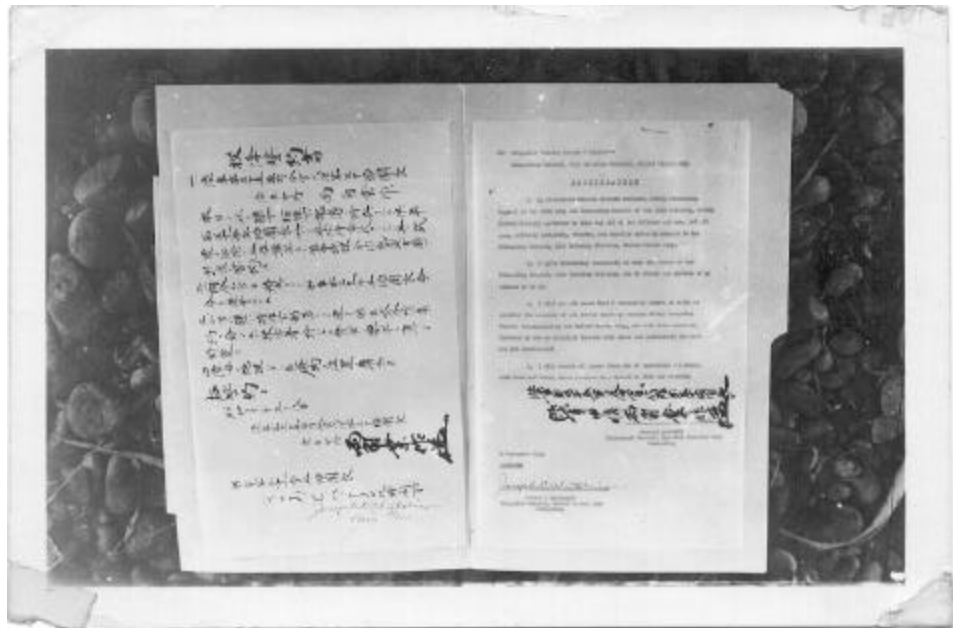
**OFFICIAL PHOTO  
LONG WALK FOR GENERAL MOROZUMI**



**OFFICIAL PHOTO  
GENERAL MOROZUMI SIGNS SURRENDER PAPER**



**OFFICIAL PHOTO  
DIXIE DIVISION GENERAL JOSEPH C. HUTCHINSON WITH HIS  
SIGNATURE ACCEPTS THE SURRENDER**



**OFFICIAL PHOTO  
ACTUAL SURRENDER DOCUMENT**

Photo of actual surrender document which reads as follows;

To: Brigadier General Joseph C. Hutchinson  
Commanding General, 31st Infantry Division, United States Army

CAPITULATION

1. I, Lieutenant General Gyosaku Morozumi Acting Commanding General of the 35th Army and Commanding General of the 30th Division, hereby unconditionally surrender on this day all the officers and men, and all arms, military equipment, records and supplies under my command to the Commanding General, 31st Infantry Division, United States Army.

2. I agree faithfully henceforth to obey the orders of the Commanding General, 31st Infantry Division, and to direct all members of my Command so to do.

3. I will use all means that I possess to secure as early as possible the assembly of all troops under my command within Reception Centers established by the United States Army, and will take action as directed by you to establish liaison with units and individuals who have not yet surrendered.

4. I will report all known locations of explosives and mines, both land and water, where presence is a hazard to life and property.

The document is signed by Gyosaku Morozumi  
Lieutenant General, Imperial Japanese Army,  
Commanding

8 September 1945

ACCEPTED

Signed by Joseph C. Hutchinson  
Brigadier General, United States Army  
Commanding

**SURRENDER DOCUMENT TYPED FOR CLARITY**

The word went out by various means to the Japanese soldiers in the remote sections of the mountains that the war was over. Through experience we had learned to be very cautious and leery of this enemy; therefore **caution was taken to be sure that there were no surprises.** The first large group was ordered to come down from the mountains and stack their arms in a designated area on the other side of a river. I was there on our side of the river with a truck convoy to take them to a compound. I noticed that we had plenty of American troops there on our side of the river - just in case. Our Army Engineers hooked up a barge on some cables stretched across the river. By tilting the barge sideways the river current would force the barge back and to across the river. This means was used to bring the Japanese soldiers across to our side. The operation went along without any hitches and they loaded on our trucks where we took them to a compound. There they awaited transportation back to Japan.



**FIRST LARGE GROUP TO SURRENDER**



**SURRENDERED JAP SOLDIERS LOADING ON TRUCKS FOR THE TRIP TO A COMPOUND**

During the next couple of months for us, it was just wait for a ship to come to the Philippines to take us home. The Filipinos began trying to bring their lives back to normal.



**FILIPINOS WITH THEIR CARTS PULLED BY CARABAO**



**JULY 4TH WAS A BIG DAY OF CELEBRATION FOR THE RECENTLY LIBERATED CITY OF MALAYBALAY, MINDANAO - POLITICAL SPEECHES AND NATIVE DANCES BY THE YOUNG LADIES WAS THE ORDER OF THE DAY FOR THIS JOYOUS OCCASSION.**



**AT EVERY OPPORTUNITY WE PLAYED BASEBALL - HERE A FEW OF US GET IN A LITTLE "PEPPER" PRACTICE WHILE WAITING FOR A SHIP TO TAKE US HOME.**

Finally on 27 November 1945 an Army troopship, the USS General Aultman, came to take us to San Francisco. Then on to Camp Stoneman, California, where we boarded trains taking us our separate ways. Mine was back to Camp Blanding, Florida where I began this part of my life. Then on 27 December 1945, after **4 years 10 months and 1 day**, I received an honorable discharge and my military service was finished.



**THE GOLDEN GATE BRIDGE - A WELCOME SIGHT FOR US**

### **PASSING THOUGHTS**

Adding up my days at sea: 37 on the way over, 2 or 3 from Goodenough Island, several days from Oro Bay to Aitape, more to Morotai then to Mindanao, and yet another time on a truck convoy up through Moro country to Illigan, where we moved by landing craft to Cagayan. Finally 18 more days from Mindanao to San Francisco. **This would all add up to somewhere around 75 to 90 days at sea.** That's certainly a lot of days at sea for an Infantryman and probably a lot more than most Sailors had.

Among our transportation vehicles was a piece of equipment that we referred to as a "Kitchen Trailer." Normally these 2- wheel trailers were needed to carry the extra kitchen equipment and supplies, as a truck couldn't hold all of it. These trailers were quite heavy and difficult to hook up to a truck trailer hitch. Because of the aggravation of hooking and towing, especially around this mountain road, the truck drivers hated them. At times these trailers were often used for purposes other than "Kitchen Trailers." **Gene Vann** tells me about one he had hooked to the back of our spare parts truck. The driver and also one of our mechanics was a guy named **Passanante**, I

believe from New York. The assistant driver of this truck was **Joe Wall**, from Iowa. Passanante was driving and on one of these hair-pin turns through the mountains on the Sayre Highway, he lost the trailer as it rolled over and down the side of a mountain. I neglected to ask Gene if he got the trailer back but I wouldn't be surprised to learn that it was still down there. By the way, **Joe Wall** the assistant driver didn't even know how to drive a truck. Gene said he didn't know that he couldn't drive until after the war was over or he would have made him learn.



**AFTER TRUCKING THE JAPS TO A COMPOUND THEY ARE UNLOADING FOOD BROUGHT TO THEM**

After the Japanese surrender, I was talking with one of the Jap soldiers whom we had trucked to a compound. He spoke excellent English and I, of course asked how he had acquired such a good command of our language. **To my surprise he related that he had lived in the United States until his early teen years** when at that time he moved to Japan with his parents. I asked that since he was possibly familiar with the industrial capacity here in the United States, did he think that Japan could win a war against such overwhelming resources. His reply was that at such a young age he was not aware of our industrial capacity. Then too the schools in Japan had a much different view point and this was the one passed on to him. It occurs to me

today that had this man remained in the United States he would have been an American soldier fighting the Axis. **Therefore he would have been an ally rather than an enemy.** As I think back to this conversation I don't recall my feeling any personal hate for this man at that time. Neither did I sense any toward me. Yet only a few days prior, had we met, **we would have been attempting to kill each other.** It's a terrible situation in our world when a few bad guys can cause millions, who don't hate each other, to be trying to kill one another. It seems that decent people have tried throughout history to oppose these hate mongers at every turn but without success. Until a better way is found **we will have to maintain a strong military force in order to preserve our way of life here in America.**

## POST-WAR THOUGHTS

There are those today who advance the thought that we were wrong to drop the atomic bombs on Japan. It would be difficult for me to believe that those who say this were ever in contact with the determination and strong will of the Japanese soldier. It was obvious to us in New Guinea, Morotai and Mindanao that surrender was not to be expected. After our bombing raids on Japan and especially raids on Tokyo, that killed more than the atomic bombs, it was obvious that Japan was beaten and the only thing for them to do was get it over with by surrendering. Of course we know that they did not surrender and as far as I know showed no signs of surrendering. An Atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and still no surrender but holding fast until another bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Even then, those in charge did not want to surrender but the Emperor stepped in and it was over. In my observations of the Japanese will and determination I firmly believe that if we had to attack their homeland we would have found ourselves fighting not only the soldiers but a well armed civilian population. This would have led to millions of lives being lost on both sides. **Finally I believe that the atomic bombs, as terrible as they were, did indeed save lives.**

As to the Americans of Japanese descent who were interred during the war. I have mixed emotions about this but at the time it seemed like a good idea. We had just seen the treachery of the Japanese with their sneak attack on Pearl Harbor while talking peace in Washington. Even today we can't discount the possibility that some of those interred may have held sympathy for their homeland and could have caused us many problems. As to the others I think they, as loyal Americans, should consider it their contribution to the war effort and forget about it. After all I would have been glad to have gone through what they did rather than what I did. **I am certain that any foot soldier in the jungles of the Southwest Pacific would have been more than happy to trade places with any of the interned Americans of Japanese descent.**

I recently received copies of several pages from a book that addresses the lack of publicity given to American and Australian troops in the Southwest Pacific Area campaigns. Many citizens recognize European as well as Central Pacific battlegrounds like Normandy, Anzio, Battle of the Bulge, Iwo Jima and Okinawa. But few have ever heard of Southwest Pacific Area battles fought at such places as Biak, Wadke, Lone Tree Hill and the Driniumor River Line. This does not set well with most Veterans who served there. These pages point out that the troops in the Southwest Pacific Area and especially at the places named, suffered equally with those who fought at the places in Europe and in the Central Pacific. Without getting into the reasons behind this lack of publicity which the book covered. My aim is to report that this book pointed out these Southwest Pacific Area troops fought some of the bloodiest battles of the Pacific War under unquestionably the most difficult conditions. Some of the most difficult terrain in the world was conquered thereby advancing the allies by thousands of miles, not to mention destroying the Japanese 18th Army. **I doubt that the general public will ever be aware of the difficulty of the Southwest Pacific Area campaign but those of us who were there will never forget it.**



**MILITARY CEMETERY IN NEW GUINEA  
I OFTEN THINK OF THE GUYS WHO DIDN'T MAKE IT BACK AND THE  
DEBT OF GRATITUDE WE OWE TO THEM.**

After my discharge (27 December 1945) I returned to Pahokee, Florida in the western part of Palm Beach County on Lake Okeechobee and to the job I took in 1937 at a truck, tractor & farm equipment dealership. In 1947 a beautiful and talented young lady named **Ruth Wroten** came into my life and six months later we were married. We have been blessed with a son, daughter, daughter-in-law and a grandson as well as a wonderful, happy and serene life. Even after 52 years of marriage, I still call Ruth by my pet name for her "sugarlips". I retired in 1984 but worked part time until 1989. We then moved to Lakeland for about a year but city life was not for us so we had a house constructed for us in Melrose, Florida where we still live. I've enjoyed fishing, golf and checking into family history but not any fishing lately. I still play golf but not as often as I once did. With the internet, family history is still very much in my life. To sum it all up, **I'm in no way a hero but I am a survivor**. I survived the "great depression" of the thirties as well as World War II. My life has been and still is a joy as I look forward to what the days will bring.



**PAUL TILLERY WITH GRANDSON WARREN TILLERY (AGE 6-1/2) IN 1994 STANDING BESIDE THE DIXIE DIVISION MEMORIAL AT CAMP BLANDING, FLORIDA.**