CECIL'S STORY

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It would seem like only minutes before we would be awakened and ordered to fall out, all our possessions packed in one barracks bag. In the bag we would have all issue clothing, both summer and winter. I will never know why we were sent to the South Pacific with winter, wool clothing. We would also have two pair of shoes, underwear, blankets, mattress cover, and any or all of our personal items. We would be carrying along with this large bag, a full-field pack containing a gas mask, mess gear, poncho, bayonet, and one-half of a pup-tent. We would be wearing our field uniform, canvas leggings, and our steel helmet and liner. We would also be carrying our rifle and ammunition belt. We would be "brought to attention" and inspected. Two or three of the men had purposely dressed improper (such as putting their leggings on their arms, instead of on their legs, putting their field jacket on backwards, etc). This was done in hopes of being taken out of formation and reassigned, rather than go overseas now. It would only delay us for about a half-hour, while separate sergeants were assigned to each of them, to be taken back into the barracks to assist them to re-dress properly. We were then given a pack lunch and loaded onto awaiting trucks to be driven to Pittsburg, and to a boat landing site, on a body of water where a large ferry was waiting. This ferry had a large open deck where we would be marched onto and dismissed to sit for the trip to **San Francisco Bay**. We would be unloaded at the Shipping Docks. This trip had taken approximately three or four hours.

After debarking and awaiting further orders, a truck drove up and some ladies appeared with white uniforms with a red cross on the uniforms. They would set up small tables with coffee and doughnuts to give out. We were then marched by where we would receive a cup of coffee and a doughnut. As I walked through I refused the coffee (telling the lady I did not drink coffee) but took the doughnut. When the soldier behind me heard me refuse the coffee, he asked if I would get one and give it to him. I then asked the lady if she would give me the coffee? She told me **no**, I had already refused it. This gave me a **sour stomach** for the Red Cross. (I would see the Red Cross in many camps later in both **New Guinea** and the **Philippines**).

We would embark onto a large troop ship, along with many other soldiers. To the best of my memory the name of the ship was the **Sea Bass**. We would walk up a narrow, forty-five degree angled walk-way, of which was very hard to walk, while carrying all

the equipment belonging to each of us. We were then led to a steel stairway, going down to the foremost bottom sleeping quarters. Our company was the only one to occupy this section of the ship. The bunks were steel frames with canvas stretched tight, using rope lacing. I believe the bunks were three high, with just enough room between each to allow a person to lay on the bunk, but not to sit up in it. It was so close, that when I would try to pull my legs up toward my body while laying on my back, my knees would hit the person lying above me. As we came into the area where all the bunks were, each person was trying to figure out which would be better, the one on the bottom or the upper bunks. Many waited too long and were unable to claim the one they would later regret not getting. I grabbed a bottom bunk, Robert Pannell got the one right above me. As soon as we claimed our bunks we would have to tie our field packs to the foot of the bunk frame, also strapping our steel helmet, mess-gear and rifle and placing our barracks bag as near as possible and putting on our life vest (of which we had picked up when boarding the ship).

As soon as we were able to secure our bunk and arrange our gear near it, we rushed back up to the upper deck to view the **Golden Gate Bridge**, and to watch the last sight of the **good old U. S. A** I had seen the Golden Gate Bridge from a far distance while being on some training boat when stationed at Camp John T. Knight. Although I had no idea how large it would look, and continue to look as we would get near it, especially as we would go beneath it while heading out to sea. There was little talk going on as we began getting farther and farther from all the tall buildings and land. We had taken a course south to south-west, loosing sight of the Golden Gate Bridge before loosing sight of land. I think most of us were feeling pretty blue, thinking of all our loved ones, and wondering **how long will it be, and if we will ever see this land again**.

It was getting late afternoon and we were getting pretty hungry. It was easy to locate the galley, as a line had formed, stretching as far as we could see with soldiers holding their mess gear. We had been advised to have our life preserver on, or in reach of, at all times while on deck. My friends and I had our life vest on, but we would have to go down six flights of stairs in order to get our mess gear. We would soon learn (when the water was calm and most people were eating) it was necessary to get right back in line for the next meal, after finishing the present meal.

The sea would stay fairly calm for the first few days and we would get into the routine of staying top-side most of the day sitting on our life preserver, playing cards, talking, or just looking out at the ocean. Some of the troops would sleep a lot, staying in their bunks. Some had been smart enough to bring a few books to read. **Before the trip would end,** some of the men put blankets on the deck (in an aisle between bunks), to shoot dice on. As a matter of fact, the ones who played dice got to the point where only a few had won most of the money, of which the others had. It continued to the point that one soldier "**George Stathus**" had won all the money from the other dice players, who had continued to play.

About the third day I would begin to get sea sick, and this would continue most of the trip, which would amount to **forty five days**. Many times I would feel well enough to get in line for food, which could take two to three hours. Then, after reaching the food line inside the galley I would maybe smell the food or see on the floor before me where someone had just lost his meal. I would hurriedly put one hand on my mouth and run toward the open door, trying to make it to the side railing before throwing-up. This would also happen many times when I was three decks below in bed. Then I would try running up six flights of steel stair-wells trying to make it to top side in order to reach the head, or the main deck side rail. This would happen many times during this trip.

After about three weeks into the trip, we had been instructed to read the bulletin board each day, and I noticed where I was listed for "Corporal of the head" duties. It meant that I would be responsible for seeing that the head was cleaned and ready for inspection, for a certain number of days and at a given time. I thought to myself, how am I going to do this, especially as sick as I usually was? I was a T4, or corporal at the time, so I reported to the head at the required time to find out what it consisted of doing. To my surprise there was a captain there, who was the officer in charge. He gave me a list of the privates who were assigned to do the cleaning and how he wanted it cleaned. He would also pitch in and assist the men in the work, which was mostly washing down the floor with a salt water hose, from top to bottom, then the floor was mopped dry. After I saw the Captain doing this, then I felt much better, and I think the other men did too. This captain would be the officer who would inspect after the cleaning, which made it all the better. I guess I was lucky, the weather had been pretty calm, for the week I had this duty, and I had not been nearly as sick as I would be later.

The next, and the last duty I would be assigned, was "Guard Duty". When I reported for duty the ship was pitching up and down, side-ways, and the wind was blowing so hard I would have to hold onto the side railing in order to stand up. I told the Captain of the Guard how sick I felt, he told me most of the entire crew felt the same way, and someone had to do it. My assigned area was the forward bow area where the deck angled upward. It would rise upward and fall lower than the rest of the ship when it would go through the swells. It would also pitch from side to side, especially as it would hit some of the very high waves. I would only have this duty for a few days, each day consisting of two hours. (This was due to the many soldiers aboard to share these duties). It was just as hard to sleep at night as it was to stay on deck during the daytime. Our company, being in the bottom hole, would be pitched around so much, we would also hear the bow of the ship hitting the waves and hear the propeller as it sometimes rose out of the water when the stern would raise, due to the bow falling downward. Many nights I would try to sleep while holding on to the bunk post.

Many of my friends never got sick during the entire trip, especially Robert Pannell, Warren Breneman, and Joe McAleer. Many days they would sit on the main deck near the side rail playing cards. At the same time during many of these days I would lay next to them, with my head under the rail, and over the side of the deck, too sick to sit up,

play cards, or talk. Some times I would heave so much that one of them would grab me by my belt, to make sure I did not fall over-board.
During this period of the war many cargo ships and troop ships were getting sunk by **Japanese U-boats**. This is probably the reason our ship was changing course so often, and traveling so many miles to avoid normally traveled shipping lanes. At the time we did not know this, although we would notice while on deck how we were changing course by looking at the sun. We had already gone through a couple of **emergency drills** to see how fast the troops could reach the main deck, and how fast the crew could **man** their battle stations. One night when most of the troops were sleeping, we were awakened when sirens and horns started blasting, and commands came over the loud speakers for all troops on deck and all crew members to man their battle stations. Everyone started jumping out of bed, getting their clothes and shoes on, and grabbing their life jackets. Some of the troops were hard to awaken, though other troops sleeping near them were shaking them awake, or sergeants were running around to make sure everyone was complying with the orders. We had six flights of steel stairways to run up before reaching the top deck. The steps were not smooth, they had jagged saw-like runners to give better footing. Someone had vomited on the stairs prior to this, and when I got to this spot while running, trying to keep from being run over by the many other troops, my foot slipped off the step, causing my shin on the right leg to slide on this jagged rough edge of the step. Skin and blood were left on the step.

It hurt so bad I did not feel like getting up, yet there were so many soldiers trying to get around me, or over me, that I had to stumble on up until I reached the main deck. As soon as I reached the main deck I sat down and examined the leg. My pants on my right leg were bloody and torn, I pulled the pants leg up and could see where the skin had been peeled off for about one and one-half inches. I had lost my fright, my mission, and my reason for being there. I was in so much pain I could not think of anything other than my leg. It would take a long time for my leg to heal. (To this day, fifty-three years later, I still have the scar on my right shin).

One day while on deck we heard the clang, clang of general quarters sounding for all hands to man their stations, and for all passengers to report topside. As most of my friends and I were already on topside we put our life jackets on and began to wonder if this was another drill, or if something was really happening. We noticed the ship turning, or changing course very sharply, we could also see a lot of soldiers pointing off the left bow. Some of the troops and I started moving as near to the left railing as we could to see what these soldiers were looking at. By observing the direction they were looking, I could see the wake of something moving through the water at a high rate of speed. It was traveling in a direction to approach our bow, we could also tell that the ship was turning course again and was also slowing down. As it continued to move we would lose sight of the object due to all the other troops further forward toward the bow. It was confirmed later to be a **torpedo**. We would hear rumors later that three attacks had been made on us by enemy U-boats before reaching **New Guinea**. We would also hear that the ship had zigzagged so much due to taking evasive actions after U-boat

detection.

As I write this, I am trying to remember how we cleaned our clothes. I know there were no laundry facilities, and we were on this ship for forty-five days. I seem to remember washing underwear in the head, using salt water and salt water soap. I also remember tying some dungarees to a line, letting it down into the ocean water, and then tying the line to the side railing, allowing the clothing to drag through the water as we steamed along. To dry the things that I would wash, I can remember hanging clothes at the foot and at the head of my bunk.

As the weather would get worse and I would get sicker, I would spend most of my time on deck, lying down with my head on my life vest, when I wasn't leaning over the side, trying to throw-up. Due to eating so little, and throwing up most of what I did eat, I would lose about thirty pounds during this forty-five day trip. I remember thinking "Whatever the circumstances are when I touch land, it can't be worse than a troop-ship". I know now that I was lucky, as it could have been worse. (Too many were drowned, or killed aboard ship, or died on the beaches after landing).