



South Australians at war – transcript – PRG 369/18

Diary of Colin Kerr

Work with the US Psychological Warfare Branch, Philippines

September-October 1944

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SX 7083, Lieut C.G. Kerr A.I.F.

30 October, 1944

0800 hrs. On board U.S.S. Casa Grande (L.S.D. 13). Leaving Humboldt Bay, Dutch N. G., for Leyte in the Philippines.

Wood* and I are the only Australians on board. The Navy officers have made us very welcome. I think they'd give us the ship of we asked for it. Casa Grande is a Landing Ship Dock, used for transporting smaller craft. She is a big vessel of about 13,000 tons when fully laden & ballasted. Apart from her Navy compliment, she has about 20 officers and some 200 troops on board.

Our quarters are comfortable but cramped. There are seven of us in a small cabin built for six, so that there is some danger of our dressing each other by mistake when we get up in the mornings. Even so the cabin is reasonably cool, with an (?) fan in addition to the ordinary air ventilation system. There are hot and cold (?) water showers and a laundry service. Yesterday I had my first hot shower for four months—the length of time that I've been in N.G.

The wardroom is very smart in light and dark grey. Green baize table covers, a refrigerator, an iced-water fountain, a gadget which provides hot coffee whenever you want it, and a small library. Silver plate cutlery and sugar bowls—and real cream in the cream jugs. They told me that the U.S. Navy did itself pretty well, but I didn't expect this.

We came aboard yesterday afternoon. The (?) which brought us from the shore heaved and bumped against the hull of the L.S.D. so that it was difficult to get aboard. We formed a



human chain on the swaying gang plank, and passed our heavy gear up to the main (?). We were filthy, sweaty and smelly when we had finished. It was marvellous to bathe and put on clean clothes.

Among the shipping in the bay was the old Kanimbla. It gave me a thrill to see her. I've had a lot of fun in the days before she was painted grey. It seemed queer that Margaret and I should have been in her together, and there she is now, a very utilitarian auxiliary craft of the Royal Australian Navy. Fragment of a conversation with a ship's officer (Mr. Bemis) concerning the surprise landing on Leyte I (?)—

"Yeah, those Nips were like June brides. They knew some 'pun was comin' to 'em, but they weren't sure what."

* Lt. R. J. Woods

31 October

At sea. It has rained hard all day, and although a tarpaulin was rigged on the top deck, the rain drove in and soaked the gear of the ~~people~~ troops quarantined there. These unfortunates are the people who boarded the ship last. The cabins were assigned to the first arrivals. We have loaned our day stretchers to the top deck refugees, and they are camping in every spare bit of shortened space that they can find, throughout the ship.

We crossed the (?) at 1100. Grey, blustery (?) cool on deck.

1 November

At sea. "We're in for a bit of a storm," said Mr. Bemis, joining me at the bridge deck railing this morning. "I can feel it in my bones."

I looked with respect at this man so wise in the lore of the sea, & swept my own eyes professionally around the steel-grey horizon.

"Whats more," added Bemis with a flash of honesty, "I've just had a message about it."

I felt cheated.



We have been rolling gently through a smooth sea all the afternoon. The water has that coppery tinge peculiar to tropical oceans. The sky is hazy, and the clouds just above the skyline are of the cool, dark grey colour usually seen only in evening afterglows.

Tonight or tomorrow, the storm will hit us. The 30 footer on the mezzanine deck has been secured with cables, in addition to the beams and chocks which have so far kept her in place.

The cream in the wardroom jugs is not real cream, I learn with regret. It is made from powder, but it is food nevertheless.

2 November

A calm, sunny day. The threatened storm hasn't appeared, but there has been other excitement. This morning we altered course greatly, and headed E. and S.E. Then the word went round that we were to put into Palau instead of Leyte—

1. because of a typhon in the Leyte area.
2. because a naval engagement was about to take place in the waters ahead of us between the U.S. Fleet and such remnants of the Imperial Fleet as had not already been annihilated by our communiques.
3. because two top suicide amphibious forces were converging on Leyte—one from Luyan & the other from the Macassar Straits—with murder in their hearts.

Lt. Col. Frick called a meeting in the wardroom, and we thought that we should hear something like this. "Gentlemen, strong units of the Japanese Navy are reported to be in the vicinity, and we can expect to encounter them at any moment. You know your duties. Good luck."

Instead, it turned out that some miscreant had been taking photos of the ship, and the Captain wanted the films turned in pronto.

So we don't know whether it's to be a typhoon or Nip battleships. Perhaps we ourselves are the June brides this time.



Later: While watching a magnificent gold and rose sunset dying gracefully, we had a yarn with the skipper, who said that a 70 m.p.h. gale was raging over Leyte, and that this was probably the main reason why we had been diverted to Aalan.

Tonight I got "The Magic Mountain" from the ship's library. I haven't read it for ten years. If a day or so's delay in the voyage enables me to finish it, I'll be grateful to The Imperial Navy or The Weather Man, as the case may be.

Nature Note: Using a toothpick after meals may not be an elegant custom, but if we Australians adopted it, we should probably be saved a lot of dental trouble.

3 November

At 0800 we saw the shadowy outlines of the southern Palau group rising from a pearl grey sea. "That's it," said the skipper. "I went down to breakfast, thinking that we would be anchored off Pelelin within an hour. When I went on deck again, the islands were a smudge as (?), and we were heading west.

"Must have been ordered straight on to Leyte," we thought. Lunch time found us going east again, and by late afternoon the Palau islands once more appeared over the skyline. We were unimpressed. We had seen them before. The last time I went on deck the convoy had turned around again and was ~~sailing~~ steaming towards, and slightly north of, a vermillion sunset. A small globule bobbed by us in the dusk. It looked like the very same coconut that we had passed at breakfast time.

Doubtless there is a reason for this Marx Brothers behaviour. The only thing we can think of is that there are lively doings in the Leyte area, and that wise convoys keep moving in wartime, even though they may not seem to be getting anywhere.

I am Officer of the Day, & have to look after the guards, and see that they do their job of stopping people from setting fire to the ship, throwing trash overboard and performing similar antisocial acts.



5 November

Today we reached the Philippines. We disembarked in Leyte harbour, and this is how it was done. In the well deck of Casa Grande were some twenty L.C.M.'s, and on each L.C.M. was a (?). We carried our gear from our cabins and put it on the (?). By the time Casa Grande came to anchor, the well deck was flooded & the L.C.M.'s were afloat. Then the big ship opened her stern gates and the L.C.M.'s sailed out like so many (?) out of the whale's belly. the L.C.M.'s took us ashore & then they too lowered their gates, and the bucks ran us to Sixth Army H.Q. We had travelled in three vehicles, so to speak, and our luggage had to be handled only once.

In my (?), by the way, was two & a half million dollars in notes.

Found Sixth Army H.Q. looking rather hollow-eyed, as Jap nuisance raids, occurring at frequent intervals throughout each night, had made them lose a bit of sleep. They shifted to this site—once again a coconut grove—only yesterday. They hope it will be quieter.

Anderson & the PWB boys have set up their presses in Tacloban, about twelve miles away, I learn. I must contact him tomorrow.

6 November

A troubled night. Alerts sounded every hour or two, and at each one the chaps in my tent began to debate whether it was worthwhile getting out of bed and into the (?) trenches. Some went and some stayed, & there was much stumbling around and cursing in the dark. Only once did we hear planes, and a couple of times we heard bombs bursting in the distance, but that was all. I stayed in bed.

Drove into Tacloban this afternoon, to join the PWB outfit. The road was so dusty that by contrast the Hollandia atmosphere seemed (?) clear. All along the road, Filipinos were mending their huts, shattered in the bombardment. The damage to the tiny, ramshackle (?) ~~huts~~ dwellings was a more pathetic sight than the ruins of more substantial buildings, some were smashed completely and bomb blasts had pushed others into drunken attitudes.



The Filipinos look very nice people. Their houses are poor and bare inside, and the general appearance of Tacloban suggests that paint rationing was stringent during the Jap occupation. The people themselves, however, look clean and bright. Many of the young girls are lovely in gay flowered dresses. These are probably as cheap as can be, but they fit well on the fresh, youthful figures. They walk barefooted, and their brown legs are shapely. Their hair is glossy black, sometimes straight, sometimes with a crimp, and sometimes even with a wave. They have pleasant, snub Asiatic faces.

Found OWI boys ensconced in a two-storeyed frame house in the centre of the town. Backmeyer was working with three girl clerks, all pretty. Being filthy, I wanted to take a bath. As I had to pass the girls when going from my quarters to the shower-house, I put on my pyjamas, so as not to jar their Oriental modesty. I was well enough covered, but they giggled (?) when I appeared.

The open-air shower place was built by the Japs. The shower hangs so low that I have to stoop to get under it. I suppose it suited the dwarfish little blighters.

The house is full of shrapnel holes, and the woodwork of floors, walls and ceilings is scarred with splinter slashes. A bomb burst just across the road some time ago and killed several people, including five O.S. war correspondents.

A Filipino major came to look at the house this afternoon. He said it was his own home, and he hadn't seen it for two years. He had been fighting in the hills with the guerillas. His name is Fernandes, a spare, neat man.

7 November

Alerts throughout the night, but no bombs dropped.

Watkins has an amazing collection of souvenirs to send home. Among them is a pink merry-go-round about a foot high, which gyrates to the music of tinkling bells. Made in Nippon. Today he appeared holding a green parrot gingerly on a stick. We have called the bird Watkins Junior. It sits on its perch all day looking sour, defiling the floor, and biting everyone who comes within reach. Watkins is afraid it will lay an egg. As he has had some



connections with Hollywood, this prospect alarms him. (I understand that laying an egg means something dreadful in Hollywood—producing a film that falls flat, or something).

This afternoon PWB moved into the Catholic High School. We have a barn like upstairs office whose wooden walls are washed a faded green. The church adjoins us—a huge concrete & galvanised non erection with a more or less Spanish cupola (?).

We sleep in tents. Near us is a bomb shelter though—fully built by the Nip during his period of occupation.

8 November

A beastly day—driving rain and a 40 m.p.h. wind which laid our tent flat. We got soaking wet salvaging our belongings. Tonight we'll have to sleep in our offices on the upper floor of the school building.

There were three alerts last night, but no signs of a plane, and no AA. This weather should keep the Nips earthbound tonight.

Wrote a story about general Kruger and the Sixth Army for the "Free Philippines" newspaper.

10 November

We've had a few busy days getting ourselves installed. I've had a good look at our home, the Catholic Institute. It is situated in the Veteranos de la Revolucion Road. It is a big two storey frame building, bare & shabby but clean. The church adjoins it—flat galvanised iron on the outside and dark wooden panelling inside. There is a solid-looking wooden altar, of dignified and simple design. The whole effect is sombre & Spanish. This is enhanced by the women & girls of the congregation, who cover their heads with black shawls. The church has a fine tiled floor, but the air in its vast interior is stale. In fact the uncharitable might say it stinks.*

Went to army H.Q. and asked Col. R. how the battle was going. "We've got a big fight on our hands," he said. "The Japs are bringing in a hell of a lot of troops." They have landed three fresh divisions at Ormoc, 35 air miles from Tacloban, in the past week. The general



opinion at N.G. seems to be “We’ve got to fight ‘em somewhere, so we might as well fight ‘em here. The more we kill here, the less we’ll have to kill some place else.”

The Nips were fairly quiet over our area last night. There were several alerts, and some bombing in the distance—probably at the airstrip. We had been warned to expect a heavy raid on Tacloban, but didn’t get it. I hope the little swine keep away from the town, both because I hate to think of these nice (?) folk getting bombed, & also because this building is a good military target.

Watkins’ parrot has left him. It lept from its perch & made off by night. “Incompatibility, no doubt,” says Bickel.

We have re-erected our tents, & strengthened them in case of future typhoons. (The last was a 100 – m.p.h. wind, by the way). We have a 50 gallon drum on a framework outside the tent, and the water flows down into a porcelain hand basin, complete with taps. It was Anderson’s idea. Having been evicted from our previous house by a posse of generals, we stole the basin in revenge.

*(Closed during Jap reign. Later aired.)

11 November

Went to H.Q. again today. We are still on the offensive. Raids last night were frequent but distant. We hear the 155’s firing. They are shelling the road on the other side of the hill, along which the Japs are bringing reinforcements.

On the return journey we picked up two Filipino girls, a small boy & an old man. One of the girls sat next to me. She was sweetly pretty—brown & beautifully rounded. Her name was Virginia & she looked about 15. She told me she was 20, married with two children. I said, “really?” She spoke with a fascinating accent. Very few of the people talk like Americans. The girls here really are delicious. I hope this campaign continues to go well, for I believe the lasses in Manila are even more beautiful. “Some lovely racial blends,” said Major Ugante to me on the voyage up here, and then asked me, rather cruelly, if I were married. I said I was but that I remained full of human frailty.



12 November

Very little sleep last night. There was ~~heavy~~ firing from the heavy, medium & light AA all around us until 9 p.m. Then there were odd alerts during which nothing much happened until about 4 a.m., when Nip bombers started coming over at five minute intervals—or so it seemed. Each time they appeared, all hell broke loose. The 90-mm's just over the hill from us sound like bombs dropping, which further confuses the issue.

A bomb was dropped near G.H.Q., which was hardly cricket.

Lying in my cot in the small hours, praying for a little quiet, I made up the following verse a la Ogden Nash.

“I wish a mosquito

“Would bite Hiroshito

“And if it were malaria

“I should be simply hilarious”.

Went to 11 a.m. Mass at the Town Church. It is an old stone building so damp and crumbling in appearance on the outside that when I first saw it I thought it was a disused ruin. Inside it is also very shabby, but it is so vast (bigger than most Australian cathedrals), and so well proportioned, that one quickly forgets the shabbiness. I think it must be early eighteenth century.

The statues have real hair wigs and silken robes. One Madonna or saint, I could not tell which, wore silver earrings.

The music was magnificent. An organ with a noble tone played as it were under its breath, and the choir of men sang almost without fault.

We received General Absolution, of which I was glad.

Just after lunch, in bright sunshine, a Jap plane flew boldly over the town, crossing our building at about 4,000 feet, pursued by all the AA in the area. They didn't get him. After



this, our fighters went up & patrolled around, but every time the sky was free from them, Jap aircraft sneaked in. It was a noisy afternoon. If they were taking photos, as they probably were, we can expect a big raid pretty soon, I should think.

Good news of a big Jap convoy smashed at Ormoc.

13 November

A black day. We are to be thrown out of our building—ourselves and our 37 tons of equipment—to make room for 200 nurses. We don't know where we will go, but we have to leave soon as the women are still on board ship in the harbour, exposed to Jap bombing.

Last night was overcast and drizzling, and consequently fairly quiet.

14 November

Another quiet night, but Japs started flying in out of the sun while we were at breakfast. The AA gave them all they had, & then our fighters took over. A twin-engined bomber was shot down by the (?) ships it was about to attack. Just as we arrived back at the Institute, a Zero streaked overhead, heading for the hills, with light AA hot on his tail and the big black (?) of the 90-mm's all around him, Two P38's were stooging around in a bank of cloud, waiting. They dived down on the hapless Jap, one of them swerved courteously aside, and the other closed in and finished the Zero off in a burst of flame. The Jap didn't have a chance. The chaps in our backyard jumped & yelled as if they were at a football match.

The Japs are expected to begin their offensive in the western part of the island today or tomorrow.

21 November

Nothing of great interest has happened. We have sunshine & rain, alerts and all-clears, noisy nights & quiet ones. Three days ago, I think it was, two planes (?) us. They flew low over our building & disappeared beyond the hill. I don't think the AA got them. The noise was hellish.



23 November

Thanksgiving Day. Turkey for dinner at GHQ. Two air raids and an earth-tremor during the night. A bomb fell on the EM's mess hall at GHQ and killed eight. I dug a foxhole.

24 November

A great hullabaloo during breakfast. Six Jap planes—bombers and fighters—hell-roaring over the harbour and town. Flak everywhere. A 50-calibre bullet hit the earth near my feet, & I dived under a truck & got covered in mud. Two of the Japs were shot down.

Later, Colonel R. told me that 50 planes had set out to raid Tacloban this morning, & only those six got through.

25 November

Very wakeful night.

26 November

Learned that last night they dropped bombs on base K area, not far from us. A few men were killed outright & four men sheltering in a foxhole were incinerated by burning gasoline.

We had alerts all night & the AA was very heavy. One Jap dived in a gay burst of flame, & some time later there was a tremendous flash probably caused by a loaded bomber exploding in mid air.

27 November

Yet another night of alerts, but they didn't come directly over us. The moon is nearing the full and the nights are clear.

The Air Corps dump right next to us is getting bigger & bigger, & should provide a fine target soon. They work all night with cranes & bull-dozers, & this keeps me awake during the brief all-clears. I feel deadly tired.



For all their nuisance value, these bombings are not severe, and militarily they are quite inoffensive. We keep pouring men & material into Tacloban. The town and nearby roads are jammed with transport & I am told that this is the case throughout that part of Leyte which is under our control. The Japs, on the other hand, are poorly off for transport. When they were here they requisitioned local civilian ~~transport~~ trucks. Col. R. says that their base at Ormoc has been wrecked by our bombers.

I expect that when the bomber strips are completed on Leyte, our planes will blast Jap airfields throughout the Phillipines, & that the raids on Tacloban will become fewer. For the present, particularly while the moonlight lasts, one must put up with them.

Today I made my confession & went to Mass in the afternoon. Father Wood of the Air Corps said Mass & the congregation consisted of five men of our section, including Ogawa, the Japanese (Nisei) sergeant. Evidently we are all feeling that this was no time for mucking about with one's spiritual welfare. This sudden resorting to the Church, in my case, is a shade contemptible, but I think that may be forgiven me. The other night I sheltered between the concrete pillars of the church, & ~~f~~ when the AA shrapnel was flying through the air, & felt quite safe not because I wasn't almost as likely to get hit there as anywhere else, but because I felt somehow that if I were killed there, death would be acceptable.

The WACs have moved in to the building next door which we have evacuated. Only about 30 of them so far. White women look odd & haglike to me after the smooth brown creatures here.

In my hazy mental state I've forgotten to record that three days ago I had a letter from Margaret to say that our daughter, Elizabeth Mary, was born on November 3rd. I am longing so much to see her that I think I must have automatically shut the thought of her out of my mind. Perhaps lack of sleep has something to do with it too. I wanted our second child to be a girl.



28 November

Last night we were told that a battalion of Jap paratroops had landed in the Dulag area that afternoon, & that further landings were expected. We were ordered to keep on the alert & not to leave the area unarmed.

Eighteen infantry men were assigned to guard the 12 WACs.

This memo caused some stir in Tacloban, as there are only service troops in the town.

Jap aircraft came over after dark & dropped bombs but no paratroops. There was AA fire at intervals throughout the night. I slept in the church. "Slept" is the right word for once, as for the first time for more than a week I managed to get two hours' consecutive sleep.

The paratroops were a blessing in one respect. They kept the Air Corps on the alert & prevented them from roaring their damned machinery in our ears all night.

Father Wood told me this morning ~~was~~ that the true story on the paratroops was that two Douglas-type air-craft, carrying paratroops, crashed on the beach near Dulag. Many of the Japs were killed but a few got away. They may cause a bit of trouble but the gesture as a whole was futile.

3 December

Jap air activity has slackened off considerably. This is no doubt due partly to bad weather & partly to the fact that their airfields in the Philippines have been heavily bombed. Of course, they may be conserving their planes for heavy attack.

The print shops & offices are now completed, & we are printing our own leaflets. Between D-Day (20 Oct) and 24 Dec, 1,250,000 PWB leaflets were dropped throughout the Philippines.

Jap prisoners are arriving in increasing numbers. Those from the Ormoc sector are hungry & much less cocky.

Four BL9 raids on Tokyo within about nine days.



4 December

Our first evening with the WACs. I took ten of our boys across to their quarters, & gave them a talk on propaganda. We also arranged a comprehensive social programme of films, dances and parties—including a children's party at Christmas. (Said Capt Juanita Stryker, a warm, sleepy-looking but very acute young woman: "As you p'obably noticed, ahm f'm the South, and ah don' think Christmas is anything unless you can have children!").

So we are to help make toys for the little Philipinos.

The war seems to have taken a (?) turn, but pleasant.

When I got home I realised with some surprise that this was the first time I had met American women.

5-6 December

We visited the WACs again. Tuke brought his loudspeaker truck, which we parked outside the windows of their recreation room & played dance records, Hein played the piano, which he does very well. The WACs, however, sat out in the dark with their dates, and would not be enticed in. So our boys packed up in a huff, and today relations are rather strained.

7 December

Jap paratroop landings yesterday in several parts of Eastern Leyte. Last night a Jap transport plane was shot down smack in the middle of Tacloban airstrip. It contained commandos armed for demolition. All were killed, but their plane badly damaged several of our fighters when it landed on the crowded strip. The plane came in with its lights on, but failed to give the correct landing signals, & the AA got it.

Voct phoned me this morning to say that there is a battle royal going on around the airstrips in V Bomber Command area. The Jap paratroopers were firing into the strip.

FECO has lost its first piece of equipment to the enemy. Voct has sent in his jeep to Ordnance for repair, & and the place is now in Jap hands.



We had a hell of a night in Tacloban. Alerts all night, although it was cloudy & rather wet.

8-9 December

Overcast skies & heavy rain, and consequently quiet nights. The paratroops certainly created a scare. This morning they wouldn't let us into breakfast at Base "K" because we hadn't tin hats & arms. We had to go back for them. Sixth Army tells me that the paratroops are being mopped up.

The 77 Div. has landed at below Ormoc, cutting Yamashita's forces on Leyte in two. A Jap convoy of reinforcements, which was apparently following our troops in, was entirely destroyed—seven destroyers, four large transports of 8,500 tons each, and two freighter transports of 2,500 tons each, were sunk.

10 December

Tuke and Beard visited us. Tuke says he likes me because I am the only one of his friends left who possesses a vocabulary. Something always happens when Tuke comes, usually it is air-raids, but last night it was a terrific explosion some distance away, accompanied by a blast which nearly blew us out of bed. The story this morning is that it was a dump containing 50 tons of dynamite, at Red Beach, which was set off (a) by saboteurs, (b) by Jap commandos.

Tuke and Hein visited the WACs last night, & tell the following story. Three generals were there, rather lit up, including an engineer general. Juanita Stryker made a speech of welcome, in which she said she hoped the engineer man would provide them with a nice road. The engineer general, in his speech, replied: "We are busy building roads for the boys up at the front where they are needed. The road you've got is the road you're gonna have. I don't care if you sink in mud up to your knees, or farther, and I'm not saying how far. If you like we'll give you sandbags, and you can fill 'em."

It is reported that Juanita managed to preserve a brave smile.



11 December

~~Last night's explosion was a dump of 50 tons of dynamite at Red Beach, sabotage suspected.~~

12 December

Petrol and fuel dump near Eighth Army went up last night. We saw the glow from here, & wondered what it was.

13 December

Fall of Ormoc announced. Big Jap reinforcement & supply convoy reported smashed. Terrific air activity over Tacloban—our fighters & fighter bombers going out & returning all day.

14 December

Last night I was enjoying the cool of the evening with Father Wood and watching our fighter formations flying home from their day's work. It was the first clear night for more than a week, and the planes' lights ~~look~~ formed beautiful patterns in the velvet sky. Without warning we heard Whoosh-Crumph! Whoosh Crumph! It sounded quite close; & we heard four before we managed to (?) into (?). A Jap had sneaked in with one of our formations and dropped bombs neatly on the airstrip. After it was all over, the alert sounded & continued for about half an hour. Three other alerts between midnight & dawn, but nothing dropped. Even so, I get out of bed when an alert sounds, as we now have a gasoline dump eight yards from our tent. We are trying to get the Air Corps to shift the damned thing.

Voct reports his jeep is no longer in enemy hands.

20 December

To Palo with (?), (?) & William Winter, where we met (?) Ayres. "Dr. Kildare" is still on hospital work, but it is in the capacity of chaplain's assistant, & the hospital is the converted Palo Cathedral. Ayres has a pleasant, quiet personality & his interest in religion



seemed sincere. He told me that he intended to enter the Ministry after the war, & might try to produce films with a higher ethical tone. He cited “One Foot in Heaven” as an example. His expression & gesture are those of an actor, but his appearance is deglamorised. A short hair cut & a rather thick moustache have changed the looks of Dr. Kildare. He is much older that I had expected.

I understand that Ayres became unpopular by being a conscientious objector earlier in the war. He has evidently found his niche now.

Sketch of Palo Cathedral—shabby white square towers, flanking a brown-pink stucco facade. Inside, a big rectangular (?) filled with rows of white hospital beds. Men with amputated limbs; a negro soldier swathed in bandages, with only his eyes, nose & one black arm visible. The Stations of the Cross look down on the scene of suffering. The men are uncomplaining. Many look cheerful. I have never seen wounded troops ~~look~~ otherwise. They have courage.

Several nights of lovely sunsets followed by clear starlight. Fewer alerts. No AA “nocturnes in red & gold.” The Mindoro landings must have diverted most of the Jap air strength. Hope this keeps up.

The Air Corps has removed its gas dumps, with an apology, & is building a road for us.

Anderson has gone to ____ Army HQ. I am missing him. No mail from Australia for about two weeks. We expect some before Christmas.

An American Red Cross man gave me a package of Dunhill cigarettes. On the top was a (?) saying “Cheerio & Best Wishes from the Anzac Division of the British War Relief Society for the United States of America, Hollywood, California.” To a solitary Australian in the Philippines, this seemed an amazing coincidence.



1945

2 January

Some belated, & brief, Christmas & New Year notes.

Christmas Eve: One case of beer apiece, supplemented by a gallon of local giggle-juice. An open-air party, punctuated by frequent AA displays—occasional retirement to fox holes as 90 mms. burst overhead.*

Midnight Mass at the town church. Huge crowd of soldiers & civilians. Alert on when we arrived & only light in church was dim glow from altar candles. Smell of human's & candle grease. Priests' voice sounding clearly & courageously out of the gloom.

All clear went just after midnight, & church blazed into light, revealing gay Christmas decorations. Congregation burst into singing of "(?) (?)". Impressive & symbolical of brighter days to come. Walked home through moonlit streets. Rest of night was quiet.

Christmas day: Turkey dinner. Alerts & heavy firing at night, but no bombing.

We show nightly pictures. News reels & some good films. Local people interested.

Christmas season in Tacloban. Star decorations hung in verandas. Trees, with "snow," in the houses of people who have never known cold weather.

Nights of 30 & 31 Dec. free from alerts.

Spent New Year's Eve & New Year's night with Anderson at Sixth Army. More turkey. At midnight on the 31st, every fool in the area who had a gun (& there were many of them) fired it into the air to welcome the New Year in. Rifles cracked, automatic weapons stuttered & even the light AA joined in. Hellish noise for half an hour. Bullets ricocheted from palm trees & streamed through camp area. Many people jumped into foxholes.

By the time the mock battle had died down the Japs were over and the 90's began booming. Spent most of the night in foxhole or waiting alertly on beach.



New Year's Day: Felt deadly tired. Stretched out fully clothed on cot after supper & slept sound until eleven. Was glad of this, as once moon came up, Japs were droning over at great altitude, looking for shipping. Alerts sounded in the quiet, perfect moon-bathed night. From the blacked out bulk of a ship near the shore came the ringing of a bell & the order "Man the guns," sounding over the water. The three-shot alert barked from the shore AA, & the siren wailed like a devil rising, falling to a sob, rising, falling, & rising & falling again.

Heavy firing. Bombs drop in vicinity, crashing through the trees. Tumble into foxhole & say "Divine Praises" defiantly under my breath. This is my standby during the air-raids. If I am to be killed, I want to be praising God, not imploring His mercy, for I've neglected Him often enough, but I'm gratified for the good things He's given me.

Awake most of the night. A short alert at dawn, while Scorpion was paling away in the first delicate radiance. Dawn & sunset are always perfect in their way.

I am not enthusiastic about 1945, I feel very, very tired.

Quite apart from alerts, I find it impossible to sleep for more than two or three hours a night. Our tent is surrounded by noises that never cease—the clanking of presses; the thudding of the generator; the squeaky (?) of cranes, raising & crashing heavy crates into position; the roar of bulldozers and the restless bellowing of trucks that plough their way through the mud.

The rhythm of our bodies & minds must fall in with the pulsing of internal combustion engines. If I could adjust myself to it, I would be happy, but then I should probably sprout headlights & a set of fenders and roar off into the night. As things are, it is getting me down, & I wonder how much longer I can stand it. I would desperately like to go to bed now, but if I did I should have no hope of sleep.

No mail from home. On 23 Dec I had a letter from J. written on the 11th, telling me that she had become engaged & asking for my blessing. I gave it very willingly. I want her to be happy.

*Jap plane bursts like rocket.



4 January

A great flap. Having about 100,000 unused copies of the (?) Proclamations (“I have Returned”) in hand, & also having a deep bog where our road should be, we were struck by a bright idea. We took the leaflets, bundled as they were, and laid them as a foundation for a road, intending to put (?) metal and a layer of sand on the top.

This operation was suspended during the lunch hour, & that was the time General F. chose to call. He saw the Sacred Writings in the mud, with a Filipino citizen or two fishing them out & reading them—and, oh boy, did he raise hell! All available personnel, from the colonel down, sweated for half an hour, covering the evidence of this crime.

The Japs are getting cheeky again. From mid-night to dawn on the 3rd we had alerts at 15-minute intervals. They topped it off by bombing the airstrip at the one place where there was a concentration of aircraft. Score—thirteen (?) dive bombers and a Liberator. The latter was bombed-up, and the resulting fire & explosions were terrific. That night I had not sleep at all, as the Air Corps machinery had kept me awake throughout the early part of the night.

At lunch time I became so sick of this no-sleep business, & felt so ill, that I took three sleeping capsules—instead of the one as ordered by the medic—and lapsed into a coma. I stayed asleep for 15 blissful hours, waking refreshed for this morning’s dawn raid. They didn’t bomb the strip, but dropped fragmentation stuff on the replacement depot—harmlessly, as the boys were in their fox holes.

9 January

Several days ago I moved into quarters at GHQ. We live in barracks style—about 100 officers to a hut, but at least it is fairly quiet.

No Jap air raids for three days. Not even an alert—for obvious reasons, I fear.



10 January

Listened in to “Voice of Freedom” broadcast from Luzon. It had returned there after nearly three years. The broadcast was made from the press ship “Apache,” & came through clearly.

(Reception).

12 January

Last night was stormy, with thunder & heavy rain. The rain came down so savagely that it kept us awake. At 4.30 this morning, H. went outside the tent in the darkness, & shot himself dead. He was a fine man & intelligent, but his troubles must have overcome his reason.