

Washburn During The War Years 1939-1945—The Boys At War -16

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Daniel W. Corning was the son of Mrs. Florence Corning of Washburn. He was stationed on a navy LSM, or medium landing ship, located somewhere in the South Pacific. In a letter to his mother, in October 1945, he described the ten invasions in which he had participated between September 1944 and August 1945. "Tomorrow is our last day for painting and repairs, then we will be ready for any orders. Our captain told us today that he thinks that we may go to China. If we do, it will be someplace on the China coast between Shanghai and Hong Kong. I hope that we don't go because the water is so rough in the China Sea. We were there once before and it's the roughest water that we've ever seen in the Pacific. That trip to China would be about a seven day trip from here.

Now that the censoring has ended, I'll give you the names of all the places where we made invasions, in the order that we made them: November 15, 1944—Pegun Island; November 20—Igi Island; December 8—Ormoc, Leyte Island; February 15, 1945—Bataan, Luzon Island; February 17—Corregidor; March 10—Zamboanga, Mindanao; April 2—Sanga Sanga Island; April 9—Jollo Island; May 10—Macajalar Bay, Mindanao; July 1—Balikpapan, Borneo.

In the invasion of Ormoc we lost two LSMs, an LCI [landing craft infantry], a destroyer, and a destroyer escort. Then, on December 11 and 12, we lost a destroyer on the way to Ormoc. We picked up 38 survivors on our ship. On the trip back they knocked out another destroyer. In the Bataan invasion, an LSM hit



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a mine in front of us and blew up. We lost about five LCIs and a group of mine sweepers. At Corregidor we didn't lose any ships the day we went in, but we had a hard time fighting off the Jap machine gunners on the beach. At Zamboanga we lost a few small boats, but no large ships. They dropped lots of mortar and 75mm shells all around us while we were on the beach. We lost a plane and a few minesweepers at Sanga Sanga and they showered us with mortars while we were on the beach. Jollo was easy—we lost one plane. Macajalar Bay was easier—we didn't lose anything.

Balikpapan, Borneo, wasn't so easy. We lost planes, small craft, and they just about got our ship with some big Navy guns that they had set up inland. I'm glad that it's over with. No matter where we go now, we won't have to worry about getting shot at."

John Rantala was the son of Mr. and Mrs. William Rantala of Brule. In a letter to his sister in early

1945 he described his experiences escaping from behind German lines. "Well, Edythe, here I am in a hospital in England now. Good news, eh? Well, it won't be so bad after all—could be worse for what I went through. Yes, I got trapped behind the German lines for ten days, but finally made it back alright, but how I did it God only knows! Went all those days without a bite to eat and I didn't sleep at all and you can just imagine how weak a person I was when I got back to our own troops. I feel all right now only that I am unable to walk. But still I am trying to hobble around a little on my heels. While being trapped behind the Germans I froze my feet so bad—they were frozen at least five days before I got out of there. So that's all that is wrong with me now. That's nothing to worry about—I'm lucky that I am alive."

Eli T. Koski was the son of Mrs. Hilma Koski. He entered the army in September 1940, serving in Hawaii and Guadalcanal. During of Christmas 1942 he wrote to his sister, Mrs. Eino Eskola of Washburn. "Strange as it may seem to be celebrating Christmas on an island in the tropics, in the midst of war, it is nevertheless fitting that we give some thought to what this day means. We are privileged this Christmas Day to be at the front preparing to assist in driving the Japs from this island as the first step in our war to end the Japanese threat to our American way of life. And as we think of our beloved ones at home and ask God's blessing on them today, our pangs of absence should be softened by our knowledge that we are fighting that they may be able to live in peace, not only today, but in the years ahead."