

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

139

CS 2/9/12

The trials of an infantryman in search of slumber, weary enough to find it even in a rainfilled foxhole on Leyte or in a tomb on Okinawa, are related in the following interesting letter from Sergeant Marshall Pratt, formerly of Washburn [excerpts]: "Leyte was a picnic compared to this except for the weather. I never thought anyone actually slept in a foxhole with just their head out of water and never thought I would—but I was wrong. I was thankful for the hole, even water-filled. It could rain more there in half an hour than Washburn gets in weeks. It didn't take any time at all to fill a fox hole or slit trench. Sometimes you can bail it out with your helmet but other times it is impossible and you get disgusted and flop in water and mud and try to sleep. We had cold turkey for Thanksgiving as I was in a rather hot spot. There was a couple of inches of mud everywhere and you ate with one hand and waved flies off with the other. Christmas was spent farther up on the mountain and though still muddy, the cooks were with us and prepared a wonderful meal consisting of about fourteen different items.

To top it off we were given our issue of beer—the first since landing—and with a couple of packages from home it was a nice Christmas. We were at Catbalogan, Samar, for awhile, where we lived in a high school building that was as good in structure as many school buildings in the States. We had two boys do all our cleaning and washing for a peso per man per month. The people there were much nicer than on Leyte. They did everything they could for us and were very friendly. They were better educated and dressed



**Lars
Larson**

Guest Columnist

well. They had a dance in the auditorium of the high school. Many girls wore formals and real shoes. The others wore regular dresses and wooden sandals. The men had nice, well-kept suits. I enjoyed several fishing trips and found the best way to get fish in a hurry was to toss them (the fish) a hand grenade for "bait" and then dive for them. We had several fish fries in our room at night. It came to an end all too soon, though.

Okinawa is entirely different. The weather is generally fair and there are no natives along the road making Vs for Victory signs with their fingers and shouting "Veectorie!", nor anyone around asking to do your laundry. I have helped persuade some of them to come out of caves and they are scared and hard to get along with—as I don't know Okinawan and they don't speak English.

I landed in the fifth wave and was thankful to find myself still in good health and in one piece. "Okinawa is a pretty island, made

up of many little communities and small patches of crops. The fields look like an overgrown backyard garden. There are no large fields of only one crop. Most every garden has a dirt wall around it and it makes it hard to walk cross-country. They grow grain in these small patches, too. Many vegetables are like ours. Cabbage, carrots, onions and sweet potatoes. It makes a good vegetable stew. The houses generally have a stone or shrub fence and a tile or thatched roof. I have seen some beautiful oriental homes. Most are rather broken down at present but it's easy to visualize some of the home life of the better people. Most farmers are not so well off and have poorer homes. Most are more sturdy than those of a comparable class on Leyte.

There are many tombs on the island in which the people place the dead. They leave them in a wooden casket for three years and then deposit the bones in an urn. Some are plain pottery and others are fancy glazed china. I never thought I would care to make one my temporary home but the first barrage the Japs laid down around me changed my mind—but quick—and although I was farthest from an open one I was the second one in it. The next day I moved the coffin out of one and made it my headquarters for the next couple days.

Now a tomb is a welcome thing whenever I am near one. A tomb gives one a lot of security against most anything the Jap has. It's raining tonight and I'm writing from a pup tent by flashlight in the courtyard of a tomb. There is a movie not far away but I don't feel like sitting in this slippery mud to watch it."