

## The Combat

Near the end of June 1944 the 112<sup>th</sup> was ordered to move out. They boarded LCIs and headed up New Guinea coast again. They had a full destroyer escort this time. They were to travel some 400 miles. After three days they arrived at their destination, which was the area near a coastal village named Aitape. This was an established beachhead so there would be no resistance when disembarking. The troopers may or may not have known this. The 112<sup>th</sup> arrived at Aitape on June 27, 1944.

The initial Aitape landing had been on April 22. It was part of a two pronged assault. Another assault occurred at Hollandia 200 miles or so further up the coast from Aitape.

There were airfields at Hollandia that could support a push north of New Guinea as the Allies prepared to liberate the Philippines. The reason for landing at Aitape was, as I understand it, twofold. One reason there were also airfields there. They were known as Tadj Airfields. These fields could be instrumental in actions in the area including the main assaults in the Hollandia area.

The other reason for landing was to contain the Japanese 18<sup>th</sup> Army. After being squeezed out of the Buna-Gona area the 18<sup>th</sup> Army had gradually pushed further and further west along the New Guinea coast. They were believed to be somewhere near the coastal village of Wewak, which was about 100 miles back down the coast from Aitape. The concern was that 18<sup>th</sup> would try to hook up with the Japanese 2<sup>nd</sup> Army which was operating in the area surrounding Hollandia.

The task for those forces around Aitape was to create and defend a perimeter that would protect Tadj airfields. The fields were just inland from the coast. The terrain further inland (south) from the airfields was heavily jungled and spotted with swamps. To the east, the direction in which it was believed the 18<sup>th</sup> army was, there was a series of rivers. At about 2 miles distance from Tadj fields was the Nigia River. About 5 miles beyond that was the X-Ray River. Then about 2 or 3 miles past the x-ray river was the Driniumor River. Each of these rivers generally runs north and south. They come out of the mountains from the south and run north into the ocean. By the time the 112<sup>th</sup> arrived at Aitape the Driniumor River was the established line of the defense.

That first night the 112<sup>th</sup> bivouacked just inland from the beach. They dug foxholes and set up their perimeter. Some slept in their foxholes. Some slept in hammocks that had been issued complete with mosquito netting. The next morning it had been discovered that one of the soldiers in a hammock had been hacked to death presumably with a machete. Orders were given for everyone to discard and bury their hammocks. They were never used again.

That same night around ten or eleven dad and Tony had felt huge reverberations. The ground was shaking almost like an earthquake. Then they noticed the sound of explosions to the east. It was surmised Allied Naval guns were bombarding suspected enemy positions. Dad and Tony also talked about the fact that they would be heading into a combat zone. Tony admitted that he was somewhat fearful. Dad recalled that for whatever reason, maybe his youth, he was not anticipating too much what might happen.

The next morning they moved out through the Jungle. They had to march single file. They crossed a river and they crossed through a minefield. The minefield had a safe path running through it, marked with tape. They then caught up to an overland trail that went east to west. They headed east towards the Driniumor River.

Dad later tried to describe what it was like to head out along the trail. First there is the feeling of being “completely engulfed” by the jungle. During the day it’s light but you don’t really see the sun shining. Even so it’s stifling hot. Often there are intense rainsqualls. The rain just pours down on you. You are “virtually smothered in water.” After the rain passes the sun beats down on the jungle again and steam rises off the ground. It’s forever humid. Consequently the plant life grows back rapidly. Dad said how you could clear an area of vegetation and a week later it’s completely grown back.

You are made aware of the fact that besides malaria and typhus carrying bugs there are a number of poisonous snakes all over. There were also parasites in the creeks and streams where they would need to fill their canteens. Besides the Atabrine they carried for Malaria they were also issued water purification pills. They would put one in their canteen whenever they filled them up.

That second night the column bivouacked at a native village known as Chinapelli. Dad and Tony dug a foxhole under one of the grass huts in Chinapelli. They wondered why the huts were raised six or seven feet off the ground. They figured it was to keep the snakes out. The next morning they woke up half covered in water. “It was like sleeping in a bathtub,” dad recalled.

They continued eastward along the trail. They would be crossing the X-Ray River then to the Driniumor River where they would take up their position on the line. After they had been going along for a while all of a sudden the entire column was held up. After a while General Cunningham Commanding Officer of the 112<sup>th</sup>, passed by on the trail. He gave the men words of encouragement, “Hi soldier”, etc. Some of the seasoned troopers were amazed that he still insisted on wearing his Officer insignia on his lapel. They knew Japanese snipers often tried to target Officers to reduce the leadership value of a unit.

As they waited there dad and those with him could hear two different kinds of machine gun fire and sporadic rifle fire. After a few hours they were told to move out again. The word was that the lead squad had

come up to a Japanese machine gun nest adjacent to the trail. Orders were given and the nest was soon neutralized. As they headed down the trail, after about half an hour, sure enough off to the side was a Japanese machine gun with 2 or 3 dead Japanese soldiers near it.

They soon reached the X-Ray River. 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron halted there. They would stand here in reserve. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron, including Troop E, proceeded the extra 3 or 4 miles to the Driniumor. They arrived at the jungle village of Afua, which was directly adjacent to the river. Afua consisted of a few native huts. They now relieved the infantry unit that was there, which would now move back down the river (north) to fill in the line.

The men of 2<sup>nd</sup> squadron were ordered to take positions along the river. Dad dug a quick foxhole. He was the furthestmost point of his Troop, armed with only his M-1 rifle. He watched for any movement on the other side of the river. At some point he dozed off. Early in the morning he was awakened by someone saying, "Don't move. Don't move." Before dad really knew what was happening another trooper came up beside him to flick a snake off of him. It was, as far as they knew, of the poisonous variety. It had crawled up to his body for warmth. As dad later put it, "That was my first morning on the Line."

Next 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron could eat a quick breakfast then they would need to set about reorganizing their positions. On the line they were eating k-rations. There were k-rations and c-rations. Dad recalled that c-rations were more filling but they usually contained something you would need to heat, like a can of stew or beans. K-rations contained a little compressed can about an inch high and two inches wide. These cans might contain something like eggs and bacon, cheese and bacon, corned beef and potatoes. K-rations might also include some kind of a fruit bar. There would also be a powder mix for cocoa, or lemonade. Or there may be instant coffee. Dad personally felt k-rations were much more handy than c-rations you could fit 6 or 7 easily in your pack.

After breakfast they set about the business of reorganizing. Foxholes were improved i.e. made deeper and/or given better cover perhaps with logs or sandbags. Machine guns were sighted for maximum effect. They would arrange the machine guns to shoot in crossfire. Every third bullet or so was a tracer so you could follow it's path when in combat. Unfortunately this would also give away your position which was usually well concealed in the jungle.

Telephone wire would be laid down to keep in contact with other positions and the CP (Command Post), which at this time was behind them, west of Afua. Dad mentioned he remembered there being "miles and miles" of telephone cable all over the jungle. One ongoing problem was the Japanese would often sneak around and cut the wires. There were of course short wave radios in those days but I suspect they were not very effective in the jungle.

There was one interesting aspect of the village of Afua that dad noted. Natives did not inhabit the village at this time. The women and children had been relocated to a Ferguson Island and many of the men acted as litter bearers for the wounded all along the line and to the rear. Anyway, although the village was uninhabited, there was a little runt pig that was always wandering around the village apparently oblivious there was a war going on. Even when Afua traded hands a few times in the weeks to come the pig was always there.

By the end of June and the beginning of July the positions along the west bank of the Driniumor were for the most part in place. The 128<sup>th</sup> Infantry was closest to the mouth of the river. The 127<sup>th</sup> Infantry held the center position. Up stream at the end of the line was the 112<sup>th</sup>. They were the right flank as it were. Afua was, at that time, the furthest position south. There were two artillery units in place on the beach just west of the Driniumor.

On July 6, 1944 dad scratched out a v-mail to try to let his family know he was now in a combat zone. He wrote a sort of code so that it would get by the censors. He hoped his family would figure it out. He wrote, "I met some friends of Lincoln's cheer leader, back in 1939. You can find his picture in the annual. I'm fine, everything is o.k. so don't worry." As it turned out one of Lincoln High School's cheerleaders in 1939 was of Japanese descent. Apparently dad's sister Peggy figured out his message.

For several days patrols were sent across the river to reconnoiter. One patrol had made contact with the enemy. The rumor that went around was that they had discovered a Japanese machine gun nest. The officer in charge had ordered his men to charge uphill with their pistols. As dad put it this may have fit in nicely in the civil war but it didn't make sense here. At any rate two of the troopers were killed. They were both replacements so dad and Tony knew them both. This kind of hit home for he and Tony.

Further up the chain of command there was concern that the 18<sup>th</sup> Army was beginning to move into the area in great Strength. To try to determine if this was in any way true the order was given to execute a Reconnaissance in force. On July 10, 1944 at the northern end of the line a battalion of the 128<sup>th</sup> was sent across the Driniumor, along the coast to try to find and engage the enemy. On the southern end, 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron of the 112<sup>th</sup> was pulled up from reserve to occupy the positions around Afua. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron, dad's Squadron, was sent across the river to also try to find and engage the enemy.

Dad described how when they crossed they would go single file. Since they were quite exposed, while out in the river, each man would run across quickly to catch up with those already on the other side. Once across they headed east. There was no path at the point where they entered the jungle. They hacked away at the

overgrown vegetation with their machetes. They did not get very far, maybe a mile, when nightfall was approaching. They dug in setting up in a defensive circle.

As it turn out the Japanese had massed 3 full regiments just east of the Driniumor. They had also moved in artillery to support them. The Japanese objective was to capture and secure the Tadji airfields.

At midnight July 10-11 the Japanese offensive began. 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron 112<sup>th</sup> held their defensive position. The main activity was going on downstream, northwest of their position. Dad described how he could hear the Japanese cannon shells going over their position then exploding downstream. He also heard all kinds of gunfire and mortars exploding.

In the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> squadron still held their position east of the river. They ate their k-rations while awaiting orders. Around 10:00 a.m. they were given the order to fall back to the other side of the Driniumor. As they reached Afua the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron was pulling back to the X-Ray River to take up defensive positions there. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron was to also fall back. Troop E was the rearguard during this retreat.

As they looked across the river, Japanese troops were approaching the river and crossing it. As Troop E began pulling out one platoon would take a position with machine guns set up. They would then fall back a ways passing through the other platoon that had set up to give them covering fire. They repeated this procedure several times until they seemed a safe distance from any oncoming Japanese.

Troop E was now in a foot race to catch up with the rest of the 112<sup>th</sup>. Right at this time a torrential rainstorm had begun. This created a muddy quagmire. Dad recounted how the mud was so thick that his boot got stuck. It was so stuck he had to pull his foot out of the boot and leave it behind. He raced all the way back to the X-Ray River, one boot on and one boot off.

After about 5 or 6 hours they got to the X-Ray. Positions were being hastily set up. Almost immediately the order was given asking for volunteers to form patrols. They wanted patrols to reconnoiter between the X-Ray and the Driniumor to try and ascertain the enemy's strength and location. Dad joined a squad of ten. He traded in his M-1 for a sub-machine gun. As they patrolled they discovered several Americans who had been killed during the initial onslaught. They did not engage any Japanese units but they did determine the positions of some units. They returned to the X-Ray before nightfall. They re-supplied. Dad got a new boot.

The next morning the order came to try and recapture Afua. Elements of the 112<sup>th</sup> engaged pockets of resistance as they moved on Afua. They were able to overtake these positions and move on. As they arrived at Afua there was some Japanese in the village but they were easily pushed out and Afua was secured. Apparently that runt pig will still roaming around the village.

After recapturing Afua three troops were sent south of the village to occupy that area. Two troops dug in at Afua and the areas just north of it. Troop E was held in reserve on a hill west of Afua. Dad said that while in reserve he and some other members of Troop E fashioned a very nice “lean to” to shelter them from the incessant rain. At the time it brought back childhood memories of the farm when he built similar shelters, playing war. It was a little different now. From where they were they heard constant rifle, machine gun, mortar and artillery fire. As dad seemed to remember they stayed there in reserve for at least one or two nights.

On around July 14 Troop E was pulled out of reserve. They were to go north, downstream, to help fill in a gap in the line along the Driniumor. They were to hook up with the 124<sup>th</sup> infantry, which had been pulled up out of reserve to serve on the line. To get to the point on the line, where they were ordered to, Troop E would have to go through enemy held positions. When they first got to the river dad remembers seeing hundreds of dead Japanese soldiers. They were probably killed on the first night of the offensive.

Dad recalled an interesting thing that happened as they moved north through the jungle. There were a couple of soldiers in their outfit of Mexican descent. He said, with beards they looked Japanese. With this in mind they were put in front of the column. As it turned out they were spotted by a Japanese patrol that in fact seemed to take them for Japanese and continued on down the trail. At that time someone from Troop E yelled “on the ground.” The Troopers all got down on the ground and started firing. Several Japanese were killed and the others scattered into the jungle. Troop E got up and moved on.

Next they came to a series of pillboxes. These were basically foxholes covered and fortified with logs. They may have in fact been built by Americans but abandoned after the initial assault. There were slots where the Japanese could stick out their machine guns. These faced east towards the river.

When they first encountered these pillboxes everyone took cover behind logs or whatever they could. Almost immediately a couple of the more experienced troopers grabbed some sub-machine guns and sprayed the surrounding treetops. Sure enough Japanese snipers fell out of a couple of trees. They would have been able to pick off those Americans lying on the ground.

Now they had to take care of the pillboxes. They were prepared to try a bazooka that had been brought along. As it turned out no one had brought the two flashlight sized batteries they needed to make it operational. Dad remembered the feeling of disgust that they had packed that thing all over the jungle for no good reason. They tried barraging the pillboxes with point blank rifle and machine gun fire. That was ineffective.

Then it was decided that they should try to approach from its blind side, the back, and throw a grenade in. Dad either volunteered or was chosen. With suppressing fire being put on the pillbox he crawled around to the

back. Then he moved up towards one of the slots where a gun stuck out and threw a phosphorus grenade in the pillbox. (Phosphorus grenades created a veritable fireball when it exploded.) He heard some panicked voices and then an explosion. Immediately a squad of Americans rushed up and pried open a trap door in the back ready to fire. There were nine or ten dead Japanese in there. Moving further downstream they had to use the same method on a couple more pillboxes. Whether dad did it again or not, I don't know.

Eventually Troop E made it to a clearing where they hooked up with elements of the 124<sup>th</sup>. They were known as the Dixie Division. The 124<sup>th</sup> had just joined the line the night before. They were very glad to see some clearly experienced troops. Dad remembers Troop E probably looked the worse for wear, but at the same time they came in with a bit of confidence. He also remembers the Dixie Division looking very "GI." All infantry divisions were under orders to shave every morning even in combat. The cavalry, the 112<sup>th</sup> anyway, were allowed to grow beards if they wanted too. This was the only time dad ever grew a beard. Apparently he had a pretty full one.

That night it was decided that since Troop E was more experienced one or two of them should share a foxhole with the infantrymen. Apparently the night before some of the 124<sup>th</sup> mistakenly killed some of their own men in a panic. So dad shared a foxhole with two or three of the infantrymen. He said they were indeed pretty jumpy. They kept wanting to shoot their guns but he told them "no." He admitted he wasn't always sure there wasn't something or someone out there but he restrained himself.

In the morning the first thing the troopers did was spray the trees and snipers fell out a few of the trees. After breakfast they began to move out. Troop E was going to escort the 124<sup>th</sup> down the line to where they were to fill in the gap. The lead infantry platoon headed across the clearing to get to the path. Just then there was all kinds of machine gun, rifle fire even mortar fire. Dad saw one of the soldiers get his head basically cut off by machine gun fire. Four or five of the infantrymen were bleeding on the ground. Everyone was stunned. Troop E grabbed cover and started returning fire. Dad, still an ammo carrier, started firing a machine gun until the real gunner got there. Troop E was short on ammo so they kept getting it from men of the 124<sup>th</sup>. (Later on there was apparently a big stink about this.) Dad grabbed his M-1 and moved over to the far end of the perimeter. As he was going over he walked right by a couple of men from the 124<sup>th</sup>. He noticed they were about to load a mortar shell down the tube the wrong way. The tips were designed to explode on contact. He immediately grabbed it. If he hadn't probably they all would have died. Then he helped them adjust their tube. They had it pointed almost straight up. It would have come right back down on them.

Just then a colonel came upon the scene. He barked, “What the hell’s going on here? Who’s doing all that firing?” One of the infantrymen told him it was the Cavalry. It was easy to see dad was Cavalry, since he had a full beard. The colonel turned to dad and asked what they were firing at. Dad said they were firing at the Japanese. The colonel said, “Well I don’t see any Japanese and I want this firing to stop.” Dad said he wasn’t in charge. The colonel said to dad, “Do you have any idea who you’re talking to soldier?” Dad said, “No I don’t.” “I’m Lieutenant Colonel Smith, West Point ‘33!” “Oh, well I’m Tom Sheehan, Lincoln High ‘43.” The colonel just glared at him and stomped away. After the firefight subsided Troop E led the 124<sup>th</sup> to their designated position up the river, fighting all the way.

When Troop E returned to the Afua area they discovered that the Japanese had retaken the village. 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron and the other two Troops of 2<sup>nd</sup> Squadron had been pushed into to the surrounding hills. Soon a counter-attack was mounted. This included Troop E.

The 112<sup>th</sup> slowly gained ground. Dad recalled the scene as they were prepared for the final push on Afua. There were about 200 Troopers spread out in a line behind logs and whatever else could provide cover. About 30 yards a way the Japanese were in a similar formation. The American position was given the order to prepare to attack. When the order to charge came Troop E charged through Troop F, firing at the enemy position. Then Troop F charged through Troop E, doing the same. Dad remembered this charge vividly. He saw the man next to him die instantly. As dad described it, as the man fell “the blood ran out of him and he turned absolutely pale.” The charge continued and the Japanese were on the run. Afua was in American hands again. The pig was still there.

After this Troop E was put in reserve once again. They were given a detail though. To keep Americans supplied (some of the 112<sup>th</sup> had not eaten for 2 or 3 days) C-47 cargo plane would parachute food, ammunition and other supplies in a clearing just northwest of Afua. Troop E was sent to retrieve the supplies they needed, without incident.

Dad did recall a story, he had heard, of a re-supply detail involving another unit. This was at a point further north, down the river. The only place supplies could be dropped was on an island in the middle of the Driniumor. Americans on the west side of the river lay down their weapons and ran out to retrieve some of the crates. At the same time a Japanese detail on the other side of the river, thinking they could use some of the supplies, also but their weapons down and ran out to the island. Both parties looked at each other and then ran back to their respective riverbanks. The Americans eventually drove the Japanese off and got re-supplied.



Even though Afua had been retaken and the line restored, as dad put it, “confusion was the order of the day.” There were still considerable enemy forces west of the Driniumor, behind American lines. Also the Japanese had made a new jungle trail south of Afua, up in the mountain foothills. They were using this to swing around the American’s right flank, at Afua. As dad put it the line in their area was very “fluid” at this time.

Dad recalled with some amusement, how units would be marched this way and that way. One time he could not restrain his sarcasm. He called out to a unit they just passed for a second time, “Hey, fancy seeing you out here. Are you out for a stroll?”

Another time he was amazed when a Japanese column, four abreast, came through their area “like they were on parade.” They were allowed to pass on the trail, where an American ambush had been set. After they passed the Americans opened up from both sides of the trail with machine gun fire, rifle fire and grenades. They killed 20 to 30 Japanese and sent the rest of them scattering through the jungles.

One other time Troop E was pulled out of reserve again to try to relieve a stranded Cavalry unit. Troop C had been surrounded and completely cut off by enemy forces, on a hill west of Afua. Several unsuccessful attempts had been made to break through to the beleaguered Troop. It was now Troop E’s turn to try.

They approached through dense jungle, crawling low, single file. As the point man was crawling over a log enemy machine gun fire poured down on the column. The lead man, now alone on the other side of the log, had been shot. They were able to talk to him but could not reach him to help. They also could not determine through the thick undergrowth exactly where the enemy positions were.

A soldier next to dad, “the nervous type” as he described him, jumped up and started firing his M-1 at a suspected machine gun nest. Dad reached up and grabbed him yelling. “down, down!” He knew standing up like that would draw enemy fire on them, which indeed it did. They were immediately barraged with machine gun fire, rifle fire and grenades. Bullets were whizzing everywhere. Dad later said, “This was probably the closet call I ever had.” A Trooper near dad called out, “That’s it. I’ve been hit. It’s my butt. I can feel the blood.” Dad crawled over to take a look. What he saw was that the top of the other guy’s canteen had been blown off. It was water he felt dripping. Even in the middle of this melee he and dad had a good laugh about this. Just then a bullet ricocheted into the inside of dad’s helmet. It spun all the way around and dropped right in front of his face.

Troop E could hear Troop C up on the hill, but could not see them. It was clear they would not be able to get to them. The Lieutenant got on the phone to HQ. He said they would have to fall back. They crawled out the same way they came in. They dragged five wounded out with them. They had not been able to get to the

man on the other side of the log. He subsequently died of his wounds. Troop C was eventually relieved a couple of days later. This was probably due mostly to the fact that the Japanese were unable to stay re-supplied.

Gradually the situation on the American right flank improved. This was partly because of the Japanese re-supply issue. But, this was also because of the superior firepower of the Allies. American artillery had become more and more effective. There was also Australian air support from planes using Tadji Airfield. Dad said there were a few mishaps though.

On one occasion American 155 howitzers were finding their range. As it turned out they were shelling American positions. Someone got on the phone and this was soon corrected. On another occasion when dad was on a re-supply detail, they were strafed by Australian fighter planes in an open field. The Troopers tried to wave them off. When the Australians kept strafing some of the Americans actually started firing back at them. They took cover and made some calls to rectify the situation.

As resistance began to weaken along the southern flank, the 112<sup>th</sup> prepared for a big push across the Driniumor south of Afua. They were to link up with American forces, which were coming upstream from the north along the eastern side of the river, in a move to envelop any remaining Japanese along the line. It was not confirmed but it appeared that Japanese units were beginning to withdraw from the entire Driniumor River area.

Around this same time dad noticed Tony did not seem to feel well. There was a general rule if you had a fever of 103 or more you would be pulled off the line. Tony didn't necessarily want to abandon his comrades but he was sick enough to go to the field hospital where it was decided he should be relieved of his duty for now.

As elements of the 112<sup>th</sup> prepared for the big push across the Driniumor their strength was considerably depleted. (Later when the 112<sup>th</sup> was finally pulled off the line, Troop E had 23 out of 150 that had gone in. This included killed, wounded or medically unfit.)

On the morning they were to advance across the river, there were 3 Troopers in dad's machine gun squad, where there would normally be 10. He was now a gunner. He recalled by this time he had lost a lot of weight and that, "four square cornered, 45 pound machine gun" would dig into your shoulders and was something to lug around. The other gunner with dad was a replacement. Dad had to show him how to operate his weapon. They had to enlist infantrymen to help carry ammo and the tri-pods. After they crossed the river dad would sight both guns. This would be repeated as they advanced forward.

Dad recalled a great irony he observed during this assault. As he held his position off to his side he observed an American bayoneting a Japanese soldier. Soon he saw an American medic rushing to the scene.

The medic examined the Japanese soldier lying there. The medic began administering blood to the Japanese prisoner. It just seemed a little odd to dad.

As dad was setting up his gun after advancing once more he noticed two Japanese bodies to his side. When he looked closer he noticed they were still very much alive. He pulled out his side arm from its holster and motioned for them to raise their hands. This they did. He searched them for weapons keeping in mind that they might be booby-trapped. It would not be unheard of.

In other campaigns in the Pacific wounded or dying Japanese were booby trapped with grenades so that if an enemy was examining them they might be blown up with them. This could be dangerous for souvenir hunters. Dad said there were a couple of guys in his outfit who had pouches of gold fillings that they had taken out of the mouths of dead Japanese.

As dad put it, his capturing those two prisoners was pretty much the culmination of the campaign for him. Soon after that the forces coming up from the north and those around Afua linked completing there envelopment.

Dad and the other members of Troop E who were still in combat were allowed to “congregate” back in Afua. Dad said he talked with a Japanese prisoner who spoke English. He had actually attended the University of California. He had heard rumors that San Francisco had been bombed and wanted to know if this were true. Dad informed him that it was not true.

By mid August 1944 the Driniumor River Campaign was considered over. 6 by 6 trucks arrived to take the 112<sup>th</sup> back to Aitape. They were being relieved. Engineers had bulldozed a road all the way up to Afua alongside the Driniumor’s riverbank. Each truck carried a separate Troop. As dad remember, with only 23 left in Troop E it was pretty comfortable. They drove down towards the ocean they hadn’t seen in 44 days. Past the pillboxes and no doubt countless other reminders of what they had been through.

They turned left at the mouth of the river and headed down the beach.

Dad fondly remembered their approach to the Aitape area. As the trucks slowed down one of the other outfits regimental band serenaded them with the tune “Gary Owen.” Gary Owen is one of the official songs of the 7<sup>th</sup> cavalry. Of course it was also significant to dad because of its Irish background. Dad said it was almost surreal and certainly very moving.

Dad had not written home since his letter of July 6 about the cheerleader. He sent them a six page, up beat, almost lighthearted letter dated August 13, 1944. He opened it with, “Well once again the mail is on its way. I was a little indisposed awhile...” He let them know he was getting a well deserved rest and that he was

being treated very well. He went on, "Tonight I enjoyed a double helping of strawberry shortcake, boy was it good! Tomorrow we are going swimming in the afternoon, or rather in the ocean. (joke) I still have a sense of humor. I've seen two shows in two nights so entertainment is good too."

He got a little serious and sentimental as well. When he wrote to his parents about sister Peggy he said, "I hope she misses me I know I miss her. I think more every day I have the most wonderful family in the world." He also wrote soberly, "Tomorrow I get to mass again, however I have said and read more prayers lately, than any priest ever said, it's really a great consolation in the jungle." He closed his letter showing both humor and compassion, "This has been a long letter and hard on the censor also I'm tired so I'll sign off until tomorrow."

Also enclosed was a letter from the CO of the 112<sup>th</sup>. It was a copy and obviously went to all the men. The censor had to cut out the name of the campaign:

Headquarters, 112<sup>TH</sup> CAV RGT

Apo 705

Subject: 112<sup>th</sup> Cavalry.

To : The Officers and men of the regiment.

1. Today marks the close of the successful \_\_\_\_\_ campaign against the enemy during the period June 28, 1944 to August 11, 1944.
2. Again I address you with appreciation and respect for your loyalty, courage and devotion to duty shown in this short but severe campaign.
3. Since leaving the United States the regiment has accomplished in full measure all assigned tasks. It is a record to be proud of and has been made possible through your discipline and esprit de corps.
4. You have lived up to the best traditions of United States Army and the Cavalry, reflecting credit upon yourselves, your families and your state.
5. Let us never forget our comrades now lying in the jungles of New Britain and New Guinea and with their example before us carry on to the end of the road.

Julian W. Cunningham

Brigadier General U.S. Army commanding

The 112<sup>th</sup> remained at Aitape for the time being. They would refit and regroup once again. Just as all throughout training dad had come through this ordeal with flying colors. There was talk of him becoming a corporal or at the very least a Squad leader. Tony had gotten well enough to rejoin the outfit. They were allowed to rest for the most part. They were able to swim in the ocean almost every day. Armed sentries would be out in boats to watch for sharks.

Dad had developed a bad case of jungle Rot. This was a condition caused by being constantly wet in the humid jungles. He had sores on his leg that would not heal. He had been given different remedies, but nothing seemed to help. He recalled that, when he was still up near Afua, he went to the field hospital to have his leg

looked at. There were two lines, one for purple hearts and one for sulfa. Someone handed him a Purple Heart request form. He handed it back saying he didn't think that that was a real wound and got in the sulfa line.

The sulfa never really helped. What dad found most helpful was soaking his leg in the salt water of the ocean. So, he really looked forward to this, besides the fact that the 70-degree water was quite relaxing. One day as they were marching down to ocean dad collapsed. He completely blacked out.