



Historic Bakersfield & Kern County, California

www.HistoricBakersfieldAndKernCounty.com

WWII AND THE 32nd DIVISION

Philippines and Japan, 1944-1946, v3

A Remembrance

By Don Suverkrop¹ with Gilbert P. Gia

Copyright © Gilbert P. Gia, 2010, Bakersfield, California

This paper is free to educators for classroom use.

Others interests email Gilbert P. Gia: ggiaggia@gmail.com

My story story actually starts at 109 H Street in Bakersfield, California in 1939, which was a couple of years before I joined the Army. By that time my dad had already added a building on the driveway next to our garage and set up a well-outfitted machine shop for himself. Shortly after December 7, 1941 that shop got us a war contract and at one point we had 30 to 40 employees -- seven

¹ Don Suverkrop, PE, SME, holds 35 patents in the fields of construction, mining, and agricultural design. He and his son Ron Suverkrop developed and market WINBELT, a belt-conveyor design and estimating program and WINBUILDIT, a software package that rapidly determine cost and internal rates of return for diverse investments. Don Suverkrop is President of *Creative Engineering, USA*, Bakersfield, California.
<http://www.suverkrop.com/>, <http://www.beltconveyor.com/>,
<http://www.winbuildit.com/> (661) 872-4763

machinists, who were men, and the others were housewives from the neighborhood who deburred and polished the parts we made for Uncle Sam.



Eighteen Year-Old Don Suverkrop

I was in the class of 1943 at Bakersfield High, but during my senior year I attended only the first semester; in January 1944 I went to work full-time at our shop. My high school class was the first one that was shortened to help fill the need for civilian workers. I had a military deferment, but in the spring many of my classmates were inducted into the service -- either that, or they were accepted into Officer Candidate schools such as the V12 or the V5 programs.

Those fellows basically stayed on the high school campus. They just moved across the street to Bakersfield Junior College for their first year of college classes. After finishing there they continued on with the military at USC, Stanford, or UC Berkeley. Their college courses sometimes took many months, and for a few of them the war was over before they finished school. As for me, my six-month deferment ended in mid-1944 when the government pulled our defense contract. I think they saw the war coming to an end.

I'd joined the High School Cadet program back in 1939 when I was a freshman, and I stayed with it for three and one half years. In April 1944, after I volunteered for the Army Infantry, I applied for Officer Candidate School. I was turned down. Given the casualty rate of second lieutenants I later saw in the Pacific, that rejection turned out to be a favor to me.

My army career started with my enlistment at Sacramento followed by a bus ride to the Presidio at Monterey for induction and medical shots. A fast train then took me south to Camp Roberts and 17-weeks of Army basic training with Company D. The emphasis was on kill or be killed. Our group was then sent to Fort Ord for six more weeks of training. The emphasis again was on kill or be killed.

Every other weekend I got a pass that started at 12 Noon on Saturday and ended at reveille on Monday morning. At this stage of my training I was still not allowed to have a car, so from Camp Roberts I caught the 12:31 PM Southern Pacific train. It was always pulled by a hissing, tooting steam locomotive that acted as though it would explode at any moment. In locomotive parlance, its four drive-axles gave it the designation 4-8-4, but the numbers say nothing about comfort. Those coach seats were upright and hard, and they were even more upright and hard on the way back from Berkeley late Sunday night.

My stop at San Francisco was the Third and Townsend Station, and my connection to Berkeley was the Key Systems F Train, which ran on the lower deck of the Bay Bridge. I got off at University and Shattuck, took a local street car, and hiked the rest of the way to the women's dormitory where my fiancée lived. On one such hike I remember passing a young officer and giving him a snappy salute. He was flustered and seemed embarrassed at not knowing how to return the gesture. Miss Strange who managed the dormitory on Ridge Road strictly adhered to the university's curfew policy that locked-out freshman girls after 2:00 a.m. In those days, time was of the essence.

Later in my training I was allowed to have my 1937 Chevy coupe on the

military encampment. Gasoline was rationed, and coupons were necessary,² but I knew gas stations along the way to Berkeley that didn't ask. A bigger problem was tires. Mine had already been re-grooved when I bought the car, and they were now well-worn. New tires were just unavailable. I once drove from Camp Roberts to Berkeley and got five flats along the way. As I think back it now, maybe my paying passengers overloaded the car.

Prior to our final regimental review at Camp Roberts we got a 10-minute break, and I decided to sit on the parade ground to rest while the others lit up smokes. I put my head back, pulled my helmet down over my face, and dozed off. Sometime later I distantly heard the regimental commander screaming, "Somebody wake up that sleeping Jesus." I jerked my helmet aside and saw that I was entirely by myself. The regiment had returned to formation for the trooping of the colors. I got back at top speed.

As a non-smoker I prospered. I saved up a good bit of money stateside, and later overseas I continued to sell my Army-issued cartons of cigarettes. The proceeds went to my fiancée for banking. By the war's end I had about \$1,200, or about \$24,000 according to the way the dollar is today.

² Gasoline ration stamps
www.HistoricBakersfieldAndKernCounty.com



Lew Suverkrop's Water Color Of The Fort Ord Barracks

The day I left Fort Ord was filled with my fiancé's tears and my father's stoic resignation, which surely came from his experiences in the trenches of World War I. To allay his anxiety he painted the water color just above. He entitled it My Last Barracks. It's not his best; it could not be. The shaky brush strokes tell of his inner pain. I was his second son to go to war. War is hell!

My last official train ride before going overseas was from Fort Ord to Pier 35 at the San Francisco Embarcadero. There I boarded the troop ship USS General Hershey.³ Two things I clearly remember: Something resembling a bedsprings that rotated around and around on a mast, and numerous military police who presumably were looking for any last-minute deserters. Once aboard we were given the word that the highest level of

³ The USS General M. L. Hershey (AP-148) was commissioned 29 July 1944 as a US Navy transport. Its troop capacity was 3,500 men. In November 1944, at Leyte, she endured frequent air attacks.

secrecy was expected of everybody. We often heard the expression "loose lips sink ships," but one thing was not secret: We were going to the South Pacific.

That first day the Hershey followed an endless zig-zagging pattern, and a blimp criss-crossed the ocean in front of us. Much sea-sickness set in, and the stench pervaded the mess lines. In the late afternoon the blimp turned back, and its crew gave us long, knowing, goodbye waves. About then a rather elderly-looking San Francisco port pilot climbed down the side of the Hershey and jumped neatly onto the deck of a two-mast, schooner-rigged yacht that had been maneuvering along within feet of us the entire way. All day the rough seas had rolled our huge ship, and I admired the skill shown by little yacht's helmsman.

After we left San Francisco I never sighted another ship, plane, or island for four weeks, until I saw New Guinea gradually rise-up on the horizon. We stood at anchor at Hollandia for many days not knowing that our fate depended on the outcome of the battle at Leyte Gulf.⁴ We waited. At these latitudes the below decks were hot and steamy, and the salt water showers provided little relief. The only reprieve at night was sleeping top-side on deck. Many of us did that.

⁴ **The Battle at Leyte Gulf was 23 to 26 October 1944. It is generally considered to be the largest naval battle of World War II and one of the largest naval battles in world history. (Wikipedia)**

After a week the Hershey raised anchor for Tacloban, Leyte. That voyage was a hot, sweaty 25-days. Below deck the not-enough fans whirred uselessly, and poker games and smoking continued day and night. Each of us had a bunk, six-feet of canvas laced to a metal frame and tiered with others six-high. At night it was bad manners to bend your knees upward, as that risked "goosing" the guy above.

From my favorite sleeping place under a life boat on deck I sometimes saw the fluorescence of the ship's wake, and it was during this time that we passed a mile-high, conical volcano rising up out of the sea. The captain said nothing about it, and I wonder to this day what it was and where we were.

One night I went up on deck to sleep, but saw that the best sleeping place were already taken. I bedded down on the passageway in front of a gun crew's quarters and slept the night, but at the first half-light of day the horn went off for general quarters, and I was immediately trampled by what I felt was the entire ship's company.

As we got approached Leyte the general quarters horns sounded more often, and those times they ordered us into the hot, below decks. We griped that the officers' quarters were air conditioned, and we knew it

www.HistoricBakersfieldAndKernCounty.com **p. 8 of 60**

was true; in the mess-lines we'd felt the cool breezes emanating from their port holes. I made an effort to keep myself busy. In a passage way I admired a blueprint of the ship and noticed it showed the capacity of the fuel tanks. Dividing what I considered to be the ship's range by that capacity, I made an estimate of the Hershey's miles per gallon, and I wrote about that in a letter to my father. The day after I wrote it, the officer assigned to censor my mail sent for me and gave me a scolding. Henceforth all my mail got special handling. I was tagged.

Long after the war was over, about 1953 when I was working for Hoppers in Bakersfield, Frank Hopper called me into his office. A stranger sat next to Frank's desk. The conversation went like this:

Frank Hopper: Don, do you know this guy?

Me: No.

Frank: Don, weren't you in the 32nd Division?

Me: That's right.

Frank: Weren't you in the 128th Infantry?

Me: Yes. But, no, I don't recognize this gentleman.

Frank: Well, he sure knows all about you because he censored all your mail.

Frank Hopper introduced us. Turned out this guy was a Bakersfield

paleontologist, and he'd been an officer in the 128th Regimental Headquarters Company, 32nd Division. Decades after my meeting with him and Frank Hopper I found out that in addition to his assignment of censoring my mail, he also assigned men to units. That fact came to me late one night when he phoned in an alcoholic stupor and apologized for putting me in a combat unit.⁵ He still had problems after all those years. Few of us came away from the war without scars of some kind. For my part, I am averse to watching war movies.



The 32nd Division's Red Arrow

At Tacloban, Leyte, we were loaded into DUCKS which propelled us to shore and then drove like trucks for the next several miles to the 4th Replacement Depot. We remained there a couple of weeks, but during the day they trucked us to an ordnance depot where we manhandled ammunition.

⁵ Following the September 1918 Hundred Days Offensive, the French named the US 32nd Infantry Division *Les Terribles*. The division's shoulder patch, a line shot through with a red arrow, signifies the division's tenacity in piercing the Hindenburg Line. During World War II, the Red Arrow Division was in combat 654 days, more than any other US Army division. (Wikipedia)



Nineteen Year-old Don Suverkrop

I was asleep at Replacement Depot around midnight when a tremendous explosion jarred me awake. My first thought was a shell had exploded under my cot. In the morning when we returned to work the ammo dump was gone, as were the Philippine huts nearby. All that was left of the depot was a Caterpillar dozer turned over in the bottom of a 30-foot-deep crater.

In December 1944 I was assigned to Company K, 128th Infantry Division. That was a day I'll never forget. We were driven part way up the mountain by truck and marched the rest of the way to the top. There

we came upon K Company's perimeter. GIs occupied foxholes arranged in a tight circle, roughly 100- to 150-feet in diameter. Inside lay many dead Japanese soldiers. Attention was then focused on the next Japanese attack, and there'd been no attempt to bury the bodies. Here were the bodies of the men who defended the same circle of foxholes and lost. The reek of death lay heavy.



US Tank And Japanese Dead

In the midst of this carnage I met my new squad leader, Corporal Dutch. During initial pleasantries I learned he was an ex-Chicago gangster who'd been paroled into the Army, but my attention at the moment was on my M1 rifle. They'd issued it to me along the route, I hadn't had an opportunity to zero it in, and it was still sticky with cosmoline from the factory. I asked Dutch where I could zero it. He responded, "Hell, Don,

don't worry about that. You ain't gonna be shooting at anything farther away than 25-feet anyway." His advice was interrupted by the order for us to join a forward patrol.



Don's 1944 Drawing Of How To Site In A Rifle

We halted only few hundred yards out. Minutes later I saw someone moving in the jungle about a hundred yards to my left. I passed the word ahead to Dutch. He looked through my rifle sight for several minutes then said, "Yes, I think you're right. Let's get out of here."

Back at the perimeter the captain asked Dutch who did the spotting, He responded, "Suverkrop, the new guy." I spent that first sleepless night in Dutch's foxhole not knowing that I was marked for eventual transfer. Early in the morning my blurry eyes made out the silhouette of Dutch peeing into the mouth of a dead Jap. "I'm giving greetings to Tojo," he commented.

A few days before Christmas we were ordered to leave the mountain and to march down to the sea. The straight-line distance was some 10-miles but it was through virgin jungle. A real nice Christmas present! The next day I was transferred to the assault platoon of Headquarters Company.

According to postwar history the march to the sea for the 127th and 128th Infantry Regiments started at 0800 on December 23, 1945. As troops hacked their way through the jungle they encountered only small parties of enemy, and there was no effective resistance. Heavy rains, dense, almost impassable forests, and steep craggy mountains slowed the advance, and one officer reported that his men spent the first morning climbing to the top of one mountain ridge. As difficult as it was, the descent was much worse. The opposite side was almost perpendicular. Once at the bottom, another ridge started, and this one was straight up. The men made hand holds for the ascent. On Christmas Day, 1st Battalion, 127th Infantry, met and dispersed 300 to 400

Japanese soldiers. All-in-all there were seven ridges from the first descent to the first possible bivouac. Throughout the march both regiments received supplies by airdrop, which was not completely satisfactory because none of the drops was made at the requested time, and frequently they were widely scattered. On the afternoon of December 29th the two regiments reached their objective: High ground overlooking Tabango and Campopo Bays.⁶

As a pawn in a larger strategy I knew very little of what was happening elsewhere. As far as the air drops to our unit goes, they were successful. The only remembrance I have of that march was a tree log, and I can still see that log well. It was three- or four-feet in diameter, about 70-feet long, slightly swayed, and wet and slippery. It formed a bridge across a ravine. Every man had to cross that log, and slipping-off meant a fall of 40-feet to the bottom. I was weighted-down by my own gear and by a bandoleer of BAR cartridges. I was uneasy about my chances for making it across, but I made it.

It seems to me that our march terminated before 10-days. We came out on a dirt road, were picked up by 2½-ton trucks, and moved to the embarkation point. I knew combat was over for me now, and I discarded the BAR "weight." A private in the squad scolded me for discarding

⁶ Wikipedia
www.HistoricBakersfieldAndKernCounty.com

cartridges from that bandoleer saying "You shouldn't do that. You don't know when Japs will pop up." But it was a good thing I did it because Tacloban had no gangway between the dock and the transport ship. We were transferred to it via DUCKS, and boarding involved climbing a loose cargo net that hung over the side of the ship. It was a difficult hand-over-hand exercise for me; my full pack and rifle, and what was left of the BAR bandoleer, bent me over backwards all the way up. I thought for sure I was going into the drink!

Our next stop was Luzon. Along the way there was much disagreement amongst the troops on how long the trip would take. I offered-up the statement that it would take two weeks. When the first week turned into two, my esteem rose among my fellow platoon members. They were positive I had inside information, but my prediction was based completely on literacy: I'd read the ship's mimeographed news letters and put two-and-two together. After the first week my illiterate buddies regularly asked "What do you hear from your friend at regiment?"

A straight line between Leyte and Luzon looks short on a map, but the route we took was circuitous, long, and punctuated by the blaring, ship horn that sent the gobs to battle stations and the Army to the below decks. From there we never knew what was happening. Tired of this repeated nonsense I decided that the next time it happened I'd crawl

into a nearby lifeboat, hide under the canvas tarp, and wait-out general quarters.

The very next time general quarters sounded I tried my plan, and it worked fine for five seconds until the muzzle-blast from a 5-inch, anti-aircraft cannon laid a round over the top of my lifeboat. I literally flew below deck. A Jap plane might have been coming in, but I didn't stick around to find out.

Our convoy arrived at Lingayen Gulf, and we disembarked the opposite way we got on, via cargo net and small landing craft. My boat ran aground in shallow water before it hit the beach. The ramp was dropped. I followed the others forward, but the moment I stepped into the water the boat rose on a following wave, surged forward, and the ramp caught me behind the legs. I went under. I was unhurt, but I waded soaking-wet onto Luzon.

This beach was not defended. During our subsequent advance across the plains of Lingayen Gulf, joyous Filipinos offered us barbecued chicken (delicious). Again and again they asked for us to raise the American flag, and each time we explained we didn't want to attract attention to our position.

Late that afternoon our assault platoon encamped at a town square, but nobody told us that a battery of 6-inch Army howitzers were camouflaged nearby. At midnight they let loose. We thought the Japs were bombing us, and we didn't know which way to run. Sometimes the secrecy thing went too far.

Communication Platoon was a part of Headquarters Company, and when news was broadcast from the States I could listen-in provided I turned the crank on the generator. That was a mandatory part of the process because nobody else seemed to have enough interest in the news to turn that crank. I usually was the lone listener. Stateside news was of a general nature, but with it and the mimeographed newsletters from headquarters I had at least a broad picture of the war. Of course the average GI never knew how he fit into it. Many weeks later when Fox Movietone News arrived and filmed us doing a posed, combat attack on Hill 604, we knew the kind of story the folks back home were getting of the war.⁷

Days later our platoon was encamped in 12- by 12-foot tents, each sheltering six cots. Our tent was rearmost from the company street, and behind us was a six-hole latrine. Our BAR man just cleaned his machine

⁷ Fox Movietone News produced cinema and sound newsreels in the US from 1928 to 1963. (Wikipedia)

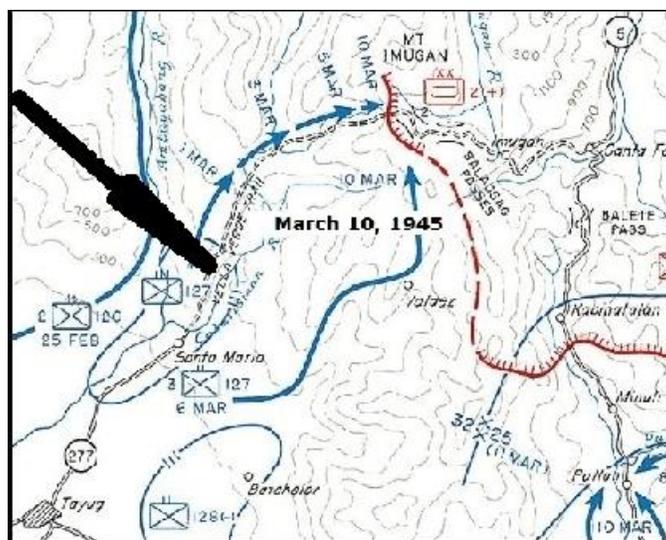
gun and had laid it cross-wise on the slats of his cot admiring it. Then he reached out and "accidentally" touched the trigger. Several shots fired off. We immediately found out that the bullets had splintered the boards between the legs of Pvt. Nick Georgopoulos⁸ who was then sitting in the latrine. He burst into the tent, pants flying and yelling, "You sons-of-a-bitches, what the hell are you trying to do, kill me!" Actually, George was safer there than in combat.

As I mentioned before, in my Senior year I left KCUHS at the end of my first semester. It was wartime, workers were in short supply, and no one objected to my leaving. In June 1943 I came back and took part in graduation, however I later found out that I was short in my coursework for college admission. I wanted to go to UC Berkeley after the war so while I was in the Pacific I took correspondence courses in Algebra and Physics.

I also wrote home every day. I tried to write humorous things, like the 17-pages I wrote about how to climb a muddy hill because by then I knew that if I wrote anything serious, the Army would scissor it out of my letters. On occasion I would scissor-out sentences from my own letters just to confuse the censor.

⁸ PFC Nicholas Georgopoulos (aka Nick Poulos), 254 Park PL, Bklyn, NY
www.HistoricBakersfieldAndKernCounty.com

The mail was once interrupted for three weeks. My parents expected a letter from me everyday, and when they stopped getting them they anxiously sent me a telegram. Little did they know that telegrams went via the same, slow troop ships as the regular letters did. I knew that from sleeping on the mail sacks that were stacked on the deck of the General Hersey. I also noted at times that the cookies from somebody's grandma were sure getting a beating.



Villa Verde Trail (at Arrow); Blue Lines, USA; Red Lines, Japan

We now know 1944 was late in the war, but there was much to come for the 32nd Division: We were going to be relief troops to help secure the Villa Verde Trail, and trail was exactly what it was, a steep, rough path passing 6,000-feet over the Caraballo Mountains between Baguio and

Manila.⁹ During the truck ride I was amazed to see Igorots on foot carrying heavy backpacks and passing our slow trucks.¹⁰ There was evidence everywhere that fighting had been intense. We knew there'd been 90-days of battle, and we heard that 1,000 men of the 32nd Division were killed in action.



Villa Verde Trail – Hill 604 Is At Arrow

⁹ The 32nd Division, part of I Corps, was 90,000-men strong. The Division's job was to block Gen. Tomoyuki Yamashita's Fourteenth Area Army at Baguio (152,000-men) from using the Villa Verde Trail to harass General Douglas MacArthur's troops at Manila. The Japanese knew they could not defeat the Americans, but they could decimate US forces that would be eventually needed for the invasion of Japan.

¹⁰ The Igorot (pronounced [ɪ g ə ˈ rɒt]) are native people of the Cordillera region, Luzon.



GI's At The Top

Our battle line was Hill 604 at the top of the mountain. It was ripped to bits, and 75-feet down the far slope the Japs tenaciously held ground. One night shortly after we settled in, their mortar shells rained directly down on us. I was greatly relieved when a voice in the dark with a little authority and good sense said, "Let's get out of here!"

We occupied one side of the hill, and the Japs occupied the other. We fought for a weak spot, but the battle line didn't move. Weeks went by in slow motion. We were not ordered to advance. Perhaps the previous heavy casualties had led our generals to rethink the cost of the Villa Verde campaign. The hiatus also saved a lot of American lives, but it didn't save enough of us. I saw Sergeant Tullison carry a platoon member back from battle. I ran down the hill for a litter. He'd been shot

through the chest, and within the month I heard he'd died from his wounds. Soon after that, Sgt. Tullison was killed in action. Our platoon was now down to 10 members.



PFC Suverkrop With Tommy Gun – Villa Verde Trail Is Right Rear

Many distinct images from those weeks stand out in my mind. One of them was ever-present on the mountain-- strands of black, communications signal wire. Dozens or more of the lines were strung along the trails, and I say strung because they were not supported by anything other than the bushes. They were also handy pointers, like bread crumbs that lead us back to our side. We used the wire for everything. It found wide use even for fastening makeshift structures

together. My bamboo boudoir¹¹ at Binalonan would have collapsed had not been for that wire. It was the duct tape of WWII.

On one patrol down the mountainside I came upon a fox hole with the legs and lower torso of a Jap showing. A samurai sword lay next to him. I riddled him. His body and legs leapt in small bounces as the bullets penetrated, but I wasn't certain he was dead. I tossed in a grenade but threw it too hard, and it rolled around the perimeter and came to rest facing me head-on. I jumped back into brush, doubled up, and pulled my helmet down. The grenade exploded. When I realized I wasn't touched, I yelled, "I have dibs on the sword!" I got up and moved on looking for more Japs.

Soon, Georgopoulos came up to me with the saber. I reminded him that I had dibs on it. Georgopoulos: "The hell you do! I've got it!" I wondered if he thought I was part of that latrine incident that almost shot his butt off.

After one nighttime banzai attack a prisoner was taken. That was a real rarity. The man was on a litter, and he had maggots in every wound. The medics attending to him offered him a cigarette, and he made a thankful bow. I thought how lucky he was. He was alive, and for him the war was

¹¹ Hastily made shelter
www.HistoricBakersfieldAndKernCounty.com

over.

During this period a US Naval aircraft attempted to strafe Jap positions in front of us, but it happened with so little separation between the lines that some of the Navy rounds came in short. Up close, we watched in horror as an adjacent company took casualties.

I never saw aircraft at that level again. I could, however, watch our P38's strafing the Japs at lower elevations below us. It was certainly an odd view to be looking down on our own aircraft in action.

On another patrol the squad leader and I had to take cover behind a dead GI. We were peering out into the brush when all of a sudden BANG-ZING! A single bullet passed between our heads and left both our ears burning. The squad leader turned to me, his jaw dropped, and he mouthed, "Let's get outta here."

On Easter Day, Sunday morning, I was hiking along the Villa Verde trail to our position. There'd been that banzai attack that night, and I came upon the bodies of 12 GIs laid out on litters. A priest in a white robe was conducting a service over them. Written on one of the ID tags was the name "Lt. Mourning." I thought how ironic it was that a family would soon be in mourning.

We were hastily moved to reinforce a hill about a half-mile to our right flank. I was ordered to make one of the forward-exposed foxholes there livable for the next occupant. This involved shoveling out the brains and body parts of a casualty and shoveling-in fresh dirt to make the fox hole look nice and tidy. I mindfully kept my own head down. After finishing that chore I was ordered to dig a fox hole for a major. To send a silent message of my resentment, I built a hump on the bottom of the hole so he'd be nice and comfy that night.

Japanese troops stubbornly held their caves and bunkers. They must have been under no-surrender orders. Our best tools for routing them were TNT blocks and flame throwers. The first flame thrower I saw was on Hill 604. They'd put it in Heider's hands, but he couldn't manage the kick. They gave it to me. "Suverkrop, this is the fuel valve head. This is the igniter. You're now the official battalion flame thrower!" That was my training on the flame thrower.



Suverkrop And Flame Thrower

I didn't get to use it very much because the officers preferred blasting the Jap bunkers with TNT. The battalion commander personally directed TNT demolition as I stood 60-feet back from the action waiting to be called. The commander's preference for TNT blocks left me idle much of the time. It would have been so easy for the Japs to come out and surrender.



“That much TNT could blow up a whole house.” (Suverkrop, 2010)

About 4:00 p.m. we'd returned to the platoon perimeter, and I was just settling into my foxhole when I realized I'd left my sweater a couple of hundred yards back where we'd been blasting. That, I thought, would never do. I sure didn't want to spend a cold night without my sweater. I borrowed a 45-pistol and ran back and got it, but on my return along a ravine, machine-gun rounds started flying over my head. I was pretty sure the Japs were shooting at someone else, but I didn't really care to find out. I picked up speed.

More than anything else our platoon wanted to stick together. But we'd lost 26 men, and the ten of us left were hardly a platoon at all. Begging didn't help. We were reassigned to an anti-tank platoon in the same

Headquarters company. Our new weapon was a 37-mm, rubber-tired anti-tank cannon. The meaning was clear: We'd be fighting the Japanese at 1,000-feet instead of face-to-face. The new assignment had all the appearance of the safety of state-side duty, and that reassignment probably also saved my life. Another thing -- the Japanese didn't have tanks on the mountain.

Days later, word came that we were being sent to a rest area near Binalonan. In the glee of finally being separated from combat, three of us ran full-speed down the ravines and up the hillsides to the Villa Verde Trail. As young men we never considered that one false step would have scattered us and our full packs and weapons across a couple of hundred yards of the mountain.

The small town of Binalonan was between the Lingayen Gulf and the mountains where we had been fighting. Headquarters Company of the 3rd Battalion, my new unit, was encamped behind a brick wall in the garden courtyard of a Catholic Church. Opposite us was the town square, and that was occupied by an ordnance company.

The church was abandoned and its roof caved in. Perhaps four years of Japanese occupation had discouraged its use. The date carved over the door was 1529. I remember my amazement as I read it-- that expansion

had reached this far corner of world so soon after Columbus' voyage.

Heider and I used local bamboo to construct our "boudoir." It consisted of a low platform, perhaps two feet off the ground, covered with a poncho. I have no recollection as to how the construction orders were given, but apparently it was a mandated design because all the other "boudoirs" in the compound were very similar.

Our outpost was hidden among a group of Philippine huts, and we mingled with the residents. A special treat for the small children was fried cockroaches, and during the frying they sat around on their haunches eagerly awaiting this treat. I will never forget how their eyes seemed as big as the moon.

At Binalonan we had luxurious bathing at the town's river, and I took advantage on a near daily basis. While the women pounded their laundry on rocks nearby, I soaped in my "entirety" and then dove off the town's bridge to rinse off.

During the "retreat" from combat, the assault platoon still had work to do. Ours was guard duty at battalion headquarters. I pulled post Number I, which was at the compound's entrance. The weather was always hot and humid, and it became my custom to remove my cartridge belt and

helmet and lay my Tommy gun aside. On two occasions the battalion commander (a lieutenant colonel) had come out and very gently and in a fatherly manner explained to me what my security responsibilities were there and what was expected of me. The lieutenant colonel knew me by name, and I recall thinking that it was rather unusual coming from an officer who commanded a thousand or so GIs.

A few days later I was back at post Number I. I was idly looking down down the road when I saw a black, 1941 Cadillac Fleetwood limousine. Filipinos were running alongside it, and on the front bumper was a red placard with five stars. No need to salute that one, I thought, it must be a Philippine field marshal. As the limousine got closer I saw the dignitary. It was Gen. Douglas MacArthur. At the last possible moment I executed a smart salute as his car zoomed through the gate. It stopped 100-feet into the compound at the battalion commander's tent. Minutes later it turned around, headed back, and I gave another smart salute. Immediately the lieutenant colonel came running out of his tent toward my post. He was yelling: "Suverkrop! Suverkrop! Were you dressed this time?"

After Binalonan our squad was moved to a nearby defensive outpost. Rumor came in that there were still a few Japs in the area, and a First Sergeant and cook of a nearby company decided split up and go looking

for them themselves. Somewhere in the bushes they unexpectedly met each other. The cook shot the First Sergeant dead. Another terrible accident of friendly fire.

After resting at Binalonan I returned to the anti-tank platoon's defensive outpost on the Villa Verde Trail about a half-mile short of where the actual ground action was taking place. We never fired the anti-tank cannon in anger. There just weren't any targets of opportunity.

The relative inactivity at this outpost contributed to the hurry-up and wait complaint that was so common among GIs. There was definitely more waiting than action. Compared to the recent wars our country has been in, WW II was a war in slow motion. In thinking back on that waiting, I should have treasured the down time. It was from this relatively quiet emplacement that we saw our beloved former platoon sergeant (Tulleson) killed by a Japanese sniper. That was a sad day. He had just returned to his unit after a short class that came with his battlefield commission as a second lieutenant. I figure my own actual time in combat during all of WWII was about six hours. It was enough.

In early September, 1945 our regiment was encamped in tents forming orderly rows that stretched for a half-mile along the coast of the Lingayen Gulf. It was here that I was back at my squad tent after the

noon meal and was on my cot gathering my thoughts before writing a letter. Unconsciously, I twirled the end of the pencil in my ear. Moments later I saw that the eraser was missing. Using the pencil as a depth gauge I discovered that the eraser had lodged itself deep inside my right ear. The medic's tent was more than 200-feet away. He took a look.

Duty Medic: "Yes, you've got an eraser in your ear."

Me: "Can you grab some tweezers and jerk it out?"

Medic: "No, Capt. Gleason will want to see it."

Me: "Okay. I'll come back after lunch."

Medic: "No you won't. Captain Gleason will want to see it right now. He's over at the officers' mess. Get over there right now, or I'll put you on report."

The Officers' Mess was a large tent. Pulling the flaps aside and peeking in I saw Captain Gleason sitting on the far side of an audience of officers. Standing next to him was the regimental commander, a colonel, and he was addressing the hushed and glum-looking group. The colonel sounded serious. No one noticed as I stumbled around the chairs to Dr. Gleason. I tapped him on the shoulder.

Dr. Gleason (whispering but annoyed): "What is it soldier? What do you want?"

PVT. Suverkrop (softly): "Sir, I have an eraser in my ear."

Dr. Gleason (startled): "You have what?"

PVT. Suverkrop (more softly): "Sir, I have an eraser in my ear. The duty medic said you would want to see me."

Dr. Gleason (louder): "You've got an eraser in your ear?"

By now the officers had focused on this intrusion into the solemnity.

PVT. Suverkrop (meekly): "Yes sir. "

Dr. Gleason: "SOLDIER, HOW IN THE HELL DID YOU GET AN ERASER IN YOUR EAR! GO OVER BY THE FLAPS WHERE I CAN TAKE A LOOK."

(The assemblage watched in amusement as Dr. Gleason adjusted my head to the sunlight.)

Dr. Gleason (full stage-voice): "YES, YOU SILLY SON-OF-A-BITCH, YOU'VE GOT AN ERASER IN YOUR EAR. GET OVER TO THE MEDIC TENT. I'LL BE RIGHT OVER."

With the duty medic assisting, the adored Doc Gleason deftly removed the eraser. I thanked him and was on my way. I should have asked for a Purple Heart.

Today I realize that the eraser-in-the-ear incident happened before anyone imagined anything like the atomic bomb. The colonel's briefing must have been related to the planned invasion of Kyushu, the main southern island of Japan. I'm sure Doc Gleason purposely added levity to the moment to relieve a very difficult discussion.



**Japan Prepares For Invasion Of The Mainland.
(Bakersfield Californian, June 27, 1945)**

On August 6, 1945 an atomic bomb fell on Hiroshima. On August 9th another fell on Nagasaki. Japan's official surrender took place on the USS Missouri on September 2, 1945, but three more weeks passed before news of the surrender reached Japanese troops in Northern Luzon.

After the formal surrender we were camped in a valley east of Baguio. One afternoon a platoon member named Polaski sat quietly on his cot, but moments later he was unexpectedly shot in the shoulder. We judged the path of the bullet from the hole it made in the tent canvas and concluded that its trajectory was a 45 degree angle. Miles away, a very distant Jap apparently fired into the sky, and the round found Polaski. By then the bullet was nearly spent, and his wound was not much more than a scratch, but Polaski was later decorated with the Purple Heart.

Our next encampment was in a mountainous area that probably had been selected for its proximity to the remnants of General Yamashita's army. We moved in at dusk, and when morning came I was surprised to find a piece of iron under my cot. Examining it I recognized it was a hand-scraped, machinist's fixture – the last thing I expected to find in such a primitive location. Apparently the area had been a Japanese ordnance repair depot. I later mailed the tool to my dad, and he used it for many years as a milling machine part.

It was at this encampment that an Army dentist filled one of my teeth. His office was a small, olive-drab tent overlooking a river, and his dental assistant powered his drill with a foot-treadle, something like those on old Singer Sewing Machines. He drilled, and I counted the revolutions, one-by-one. I felt no abnormal pain, and the experience wasn't much different from the fillings I'd had done at home.

The Red Arrow NEWS

VOL. III

Monday, 3 Sept 45

Published by I&E Section

NO. 2

V-J DAY PRESIDENT PROCLAIMS VICTORY AS ALLIES ACCEPT SURRENDER

SAN FRANCISCO. (WVIM Radio News)- PEACE WAS ONCE MORE RESTORED TO A WAR-TORN WORLD SUNDAY MORNING AS JAPAN YIELDED TO THE ALLIE'S OVERWHELMING MIGHT, SIGNING OFFICIAL SURRENDER DOCUMENTS IN A BRIEF BUT SOLEMN CEREMONY ABOARD THE MIGHTY BATTLESHIP MISSOURI IN TOKYO BAY, SHORTLY AFTERWARDS PRESIDENT TRUMAN SPOKE FROM WASHINGTON OVER A NATION-WIDE NETWORK TO ANNOUNCE THE LONG-DESIRED VICTORY OVER JAPAN DAY.

YAMASHITA WILL CAPITULATE TODAY AT CAMP HAY, BAGUIO

DIV PRO.-General Tomoyuki Yamashita, the Supreme Japanese Commander in the Philippines, came out of his mountain hideout to give himself up yesterday, and is scheduled to sign surrender papers sometime today at Camp John Hay in Baguio.

Red Arrow infantrymen got their first look at their toughest adversary during the Pacific War at 8 AM yesterday morning, when Yamashita smilingly delivered himself to a 24-man honor guard from I Company of the 128th Regiment, at an outpost three kilometers from Kiangon.

Attired in a clean, worn uniform and

At approximately 9:30 AM (our time) the assembled representatives of Japan and the Allies inscribed 12 signatures on the articles of surrender, thus ending the bloody Pacific conflict which had entered its 8th year in China and had raged almost 3 years and 9 months for the U.S. and Great Britain.

As Supreme Commander, General MacArthur presided over the historic occasion. Prior to the signing, the General addressed the colorful assembly briefly. The Allies, he said, did not come in a spirit of distrust, malice or hatred. Rather, he stated, both sides should arise to the higher dignity of the occasion. He then called upon the Japanese to sign the two documents, one for the Allies, one for the Nipponese. The latter document was bound in black, a fitting

Red Arrow News, September 3, 1945



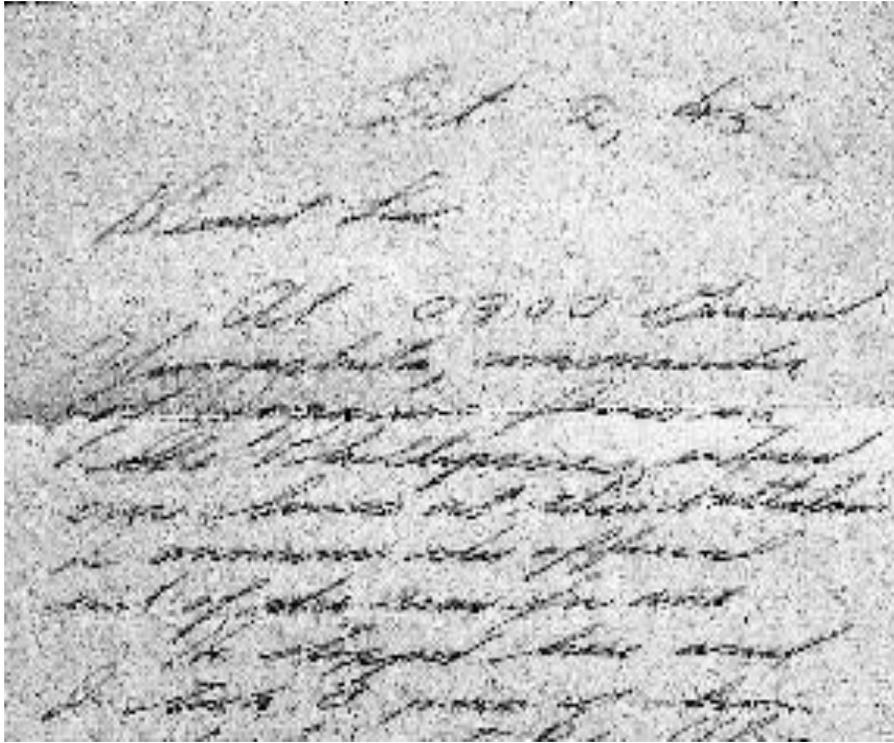
Yamashita Surrenders (Saturday Evening Post, November 10, 1945)

On Monday morning, September 3, 1945, General Yamashita¹² came out of the hills to personally surrender, and I watched as two GI guides accompanied him and 12 of his lieutenants down the mountain trail. They stopped near our tent. Realizing the historical significance of the moment, I moved in and took over. I grabbed Yamashita by the arm, and thrust a pen into his hand. At the same time I turned his aide-de-camp around and held a Philippine Peso note against the aide's backpack. Understanding my clear command, Yamashita autographed the Peso note. I still have it.



Yamashita's Signature On Peso

¹² On February 23, 1946, Yamashita was hanged at Los Baños, Laguna Prison Camp, Philippines. His crime was the commission of massive civilian atrocities by troops under his command. "The legitimacy of the hasty trial was questioned by many at the time, including US Supreme Court Justice Frank Murphy, who protested various procedural issues, the inclusion of hearsay evidence, and the general lack of professional conduct by the prosecuting officers." (Wikipedia)



Don's Letter Home About Yamashita, October 2, 1945

"Oct. 2, 1945. Dearest Lew¹³, At 0900 General Yamashita, commander of Japanese forces in the Philippines, entered our lines at this battalion. It announced the official end of this war for me. He stopped here, and I took 8 pics of him and his staff. Also I have enclosed the one-peso with his signature. And also I'm now writing with pen he so extensively used in making a number of signatures. He made about a half a dozen autographs with this battalion. So you can see it is sufficiently rare. He appeared quite pleasant and enjoyed posing for the pictures. The boys sure swamped him. ... Yes Lew, at last we have the boy that's been causing us all the trouble through Leyte and Luzon. – Love, Don"

¹³ Lew Suverkrop, Don's father.

The aide didn't have his saber, but a beautiful scabbard was attached to his belt. I wanted it for my collection. I opened my Boy Scout knife and commenced cutting it off. He resisted. I pushed the blade against his ribs. He strenuously resisted. I pushed more, but by then a substantial crowd of GIs and officers had gathered around. I knew just a smidgen about the rules of surrender so I settled for rifling through his back pack. Before Yamashita and his gang were escorted away I had in my possession a four-inch slide rule.

During the time Yamashita was there I took some pictures with my Baby Brownie that I'd bought new in 1935 at Kimble & Stone Drug Store at 19th and Chester in Bakersfield. The film was 127, as you can probably tell from the small pictures in my album. The Yamashita pictures are not there because they never came back from developing. They were apparently stolen by thieves (crooked photo technicians) at the Army Postal Service.

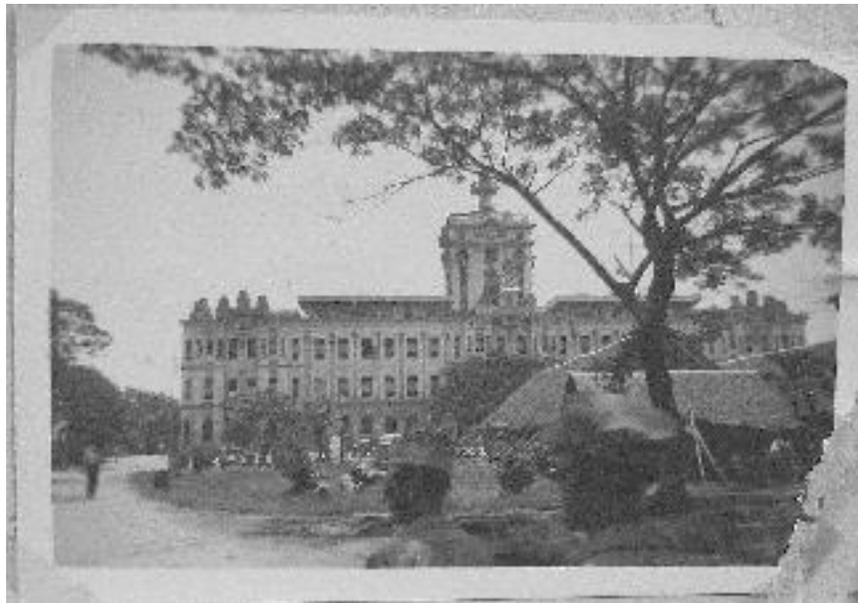


**Yamashita, seated. Aide holding hat kept his scabbard.
(Saturday Evening Post, November 10, 1945)**



Yamashita's Troops¹⁴

I got R&R at Manila and when there passed Santo Thomas University. It had been a Japanese prison for American civilians, but even at this late date, months after its re-capture, the building still housed older, gaunt-looking Americas.¹⁵



My Picture Of Santo Thomas University Prison

On the 10th of October 1946 my days in the Philippines were history. I was now aboard a transport ship for Japan. Off Okinawa we encountered a terrific typhoon, and I moved midships to avoid the violent fore-and-aft

¹⁴ At bottom of photograph: "Those bandy-legged bastards." Three weeks had passed since the formal Japanese surrender. Hatred for the Japanese remained intense.

¹⁵ Santo Thomas University, Manila, had been an interment camp for foreign nationals and American and British prisoners of war.

pitching and teeter-tottering. From a starboard railing I watched the adjacent ship's propeller rise fully up out of the water revealing Okinawa beyond it. In deliberate slow motion the stern fell back down into the sea, and Okinawa appeared under the ship's bow. For three days we rode out that storm.

In late-October we settled into a former Japanese Army barracks at Yamaguchi. From the standpoint of size, the barracks was not so different from those I'd experienced at Camp Roberts or Ford Ord, but the biggest difference was the Japanese barracks had no hot showers. The community bath in town didn't appeal to me. Out of desperation I procured a 50-gallon drum and an immersion heater and improvised a hot shower for myself and for anyone else who wanted to use it.

Lt. Majka saw it and tried to persuade me to join his engineer platoon. I told him I preferred to stay with my anti-tank platoon but I'd be glad to work with him and show his men how to build permanent showers for themselves inside. That day I became his company's unofficial plumber, and shortly after that I was promoted to staff sergeant.



Our Japanese Army Barracks At Christmas

While working on the showers I needed a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch pipe elbow. I drew a picture and went into Yamaguchi with sketch in hand. At the local gas works I presented it to the superintendent. He bowed and motioned me to a nearby table where a table cloth was set out and tea served. More bows. Shortly later, an underling came forward with a tray. On it was a napkin, and on top the napkin was a single, $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch pipe elbow. I thanked them, there were more bows, and I left to finish my plumbing job.



The Street Where I Met The Sumo

My way back to the barracks took me along the narrow, main street. Ahead I saw bearing down on me a bowlegged Sumo wrestler, certainly a man of at least 450-pounds. For me to collide with that huge mass of inertia would have been suicidal, but my understanding of defeat demanded that he defer to me, the conqueror. From what I'd seen, all Japanese respected that natural obligation. For a moment I considered tripping him, but one of the potential outcomes caused me to drop that fantasy. I stepped aside and let him pass. For that abandonment of principles, my tender ego has lay damaged for more than six decades.

The plumbing job gave me an side benefit, a room that adjoined the company bath room, and I converted it into my personal photo lab. A camera store in "downtown" Yamaguchi became my source for a printing box, photo paper, and developing solution. The war had cost the Japanese consumers dearly – most of the stores had empty shelves – but this camera shop was relatively well-stocked. The owners soon recognized me as a regular customer.

Practically no private Japanese vehicles were on the streets. Gasoline for private use was non-existent, and the few trucks still running had been converted to acetylene (welding gas) and had generators attached to their sides. Worn-out engines had been replaced with single-cylinder engines with big flywheels. They put-putted down the street at 10-miles-

www.HistoricBakersfieldAndKernCounty.com **p. 45 of 60**

per-hour.

On the parade ground at Yamaguchi I received with the Bronze Star.¹⁶

We had been assembling for the ceremony when I glanced over at Captain Sackus, who'd been a leader of the assault platoon. I noticed that his Japanese orderly had pinned his ribbons on the right breast of his tunic instead of on the left. I should have kept my mouth shut, but I didn't, and Sackus was glad for that. It would have been real cute if General McBride tried to pin the captain's new award on the left side while all the rest of his ribbons were on the right.

After the shower project I was assigned to manage a carpenter shop that had been formerly used by the Japanese Army. Our assignment was to build crates for shipping US weapons back to the States. The crates didn't have to be finely finished, and my challenge was to explain that fact to the Japanese employees. I did it by holding up one of their wood planes in my left hand and waving my right hand left-to-right, signifying "No, please don't use the plane." It worked well.

Our Japanese employees were craftsmen in their own right, although it took them awhile to adjust to feet and inches. A big problem was

¹⁶ Don Suverkrop campaigned at Buna, Saidor, Aitape, Morotai, Leyte and Luzon. In addition to the Bronze Star he received the Combat Infantry Badge, the Good Conduct Medal, and the Philippine Liberation and Asiatic Pacific Ribbons with two Battle Stars. (Bakersfield Californian Jan 5, 1946)

communication, but the universal language of sketching helped make the transition. I once made a sketch of a machinist's tool chest based on a steel Kennedy box I'd used at home in my dad's shop.¹⁷ Our Japanese craftsmen replicated my diagram to perfection, in wood.¹⁸ Those men came to work every day and did their jobs. Friendship and respect grew. Back at the barracks, other Japanese did mess duty. They loved the leftover mashed potatoes and gorged on them.



Suverkrop And Employees

Winter had come to Yamaguchi, it was cold, and we soon learned that the old army barracks had no insulation. Even piling 17 blankets on my cot didn't ward off the cold, and each lump of black coal we added to the

¹⁷ Kennedy Co., founded in 1911 in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, continues to produce tool-storage equipment.

¹⁸ Don Suverkrop: "Sixty-five years later in Bakersfield I gave those chests to my Japanese gardener."

little stove quickly burnt down to an equal-sized lump of white ash. With resources like that it's little wonder the Japanese lost the war.

Another problem was the sanitary facilities: The latrines were outside. Some men took refuge from the Japanese winter in volumes of Japanese beer, and on a cold night that practice presented problems. One GI worked around this by simply peeing out of the second-story window. Our regimental commander, who curiously was passing by the building one evening, was caught in a drizzle. The boom got lowered.

Yamaguchi was extremely cold in late-November, the roads were icy, and snow was falling. One morning I took a patrol out by truck to a village north of Ube, and from there we set out on foot. Ube was on the far edge of the battalion's zone of action, and apparently the only other GIs who'd ever been there had driven through in motorized patrols. Our mission on the ground was to locate any hidden military stores or anti-aircraft positions. We found nothing.

On a week-long patrol we set up at another location and received Japanese weapons brought in for us to destroy. I recall a group of locals that showed up with boxes of training carbines used by the local high school, but some weapons brought in were valuable antiques, including flintlocks. I saved two antique rifles for myself but tossed the rest of the

lot into the fire with the carbines. Later when I talked to an S-2 officer, he told me they found 70 hidden trucks but only a few weapons. He guessed they'd been hidden on orders of a low-level commander. S-2 knew of no national resistance groups in Japan.



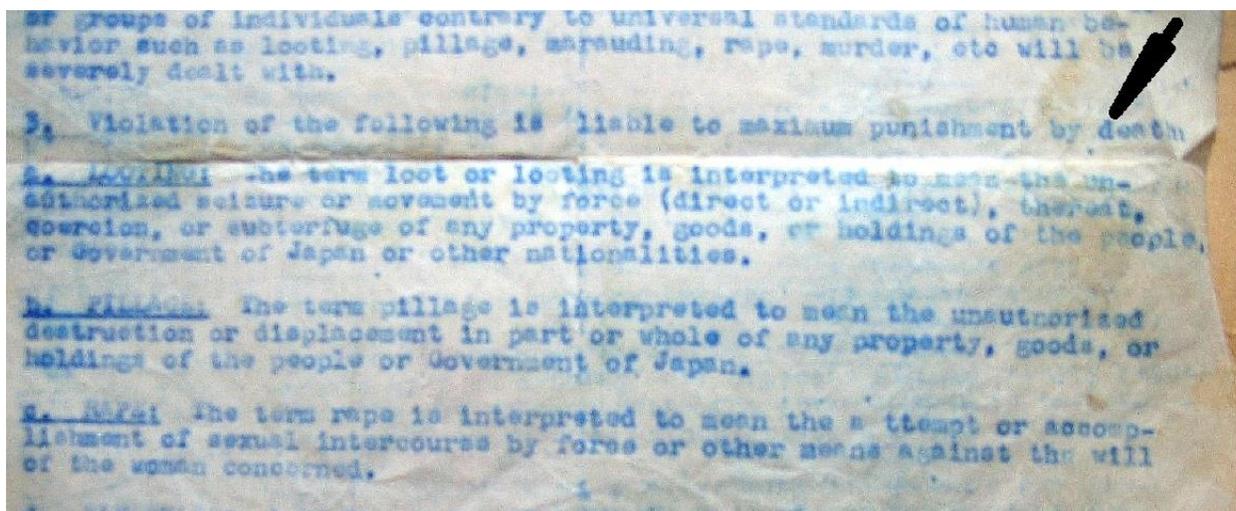
My Photo Of Burned Japanese Rifles

One morning I told our driver to meet our patrol at 1430 at the local Japanese police station. We finished up our patrol a little early, which allowed the fellows about an hour to wander around town. When we did enter the police station it was empty, but conditions changed fast. Apparently the captain thought we'd come to inspect his station. He brought out beer.



Yamaguchi Women

When we first arrived in Japan we suspected that the Japanese women had purposefully dressed-down to avoid any appearance of attractiveness, and we interpreted that to mean they didn't know what to expect from us. Maybe they'd been advised that the Americans were "big bad wolves."



The Suverkrop photo album also contained a faint, mimeographed notice from the US Army to GI's warning them against rape, theft, and other perpetrations against Japanese civilians. All were defined as crimes punishable by death.

I snapped the photo of the women several weeks after we'd arrived on the mainland, and it doesn't even hint at the drab clothing we first saw. It seemed to me that as time progressed the initial tenseness towards Americans disappeared in favor of greater warmth and respect, and perhaps an increasing sense that the code of the Samurai had been misguided.

Decades later I shared that thought with Japanese friends and got nothing other than a warm respect for the way the occupation was managed. MacArthur's staff ingeniously wrote the Japanese constitution to grant women equal rights, and immediately half the nation was on the side of the Americans. To my knowledge, the Japanese never amended that constitution.



My Photo Of A School

For my return to the States I was sent by train to the 4th Replacement Depot at Yokohama. The ride took me through Hiroshima, Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe, and I got an overview of the damage wrecked on Japanese cities. It seemed to me that the fire-bombing of the great cities caused greater damage than the atomic bomb at Hiroshima.



Suverkrop: "I Probably Took This From The Train At Osaka."

I was housed at the former administration building of the Yawata Iron Works in Yokohama. A week passed before I wandered out behind the building and discovered that the factory was busy assembling trucks for peacetime Japan. I enjoyed the experience. It was the kind of sightseeing I always liked best – watching industrial processes in action.

Two of my friends and I were issued passes to Tokyo. The usual form of transport was the National Rail System, which reserved certain passenger cars for American soldiers, although these were always nearly empty while the others were packed tight with Japanese civilians.

Nevertheless, on one occasion the three of us decided to make our own schedule. Standing in the middle of the main-line railroad track we waved-down an approaching freight train. That was how we understood our privileges as victors. We fully expected the train to stop, and it did – a screeching, grinding halt just a few feet in front of us. We climbed up into the cab, waved the engineer on, and tooted our way to Tokyo.

I was hoping to be sent home soon, but weeks passed and in a letter to my parents I wrote, "My morale is pretty low now with demobe cut back. I have nasty words for Ike.¹⁹ I hear they have discharged those in the States with 35 points, and here I am with 42. If I knew it was just a few isolated instances or dependencies I would feel better. I felt so sure of being on my way home next month, but now there is talk of the 45s²⁰ going home on April 30th, and the 40s not going home until July 1st. I've been doing some pretty fancy name calling." Six weeks passed before a troop ship finally took me home.

The Japanese surrendered in August 1945, and I left for home in March 1946. I'd been in the Pacific 17 months and by then had 37 points, but I heard of a sergeant who had 162 points.²¹ He went home for a two-week

¹⁹ Gen. Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower

²⁰ Servicemen with 45 points

²¹ One point for each month stateside, two for each month overseas, five points for the Bronze Star.

vacation, came back to Japan, and was then returned to the States for demobilization. On the 15-day passage I remember running into my friend Don Latta, the son of historian and Bakersfield High School instructor Frank Latta. Sometimes it's a small world.

Late in March 1946, 5,000 GIs and I disembarked at Fort Lewis, Seattle, Washington. I was in the US at last, but I was still in the Army. WWII didn't end for me until April 8, 1946 when I was formally discharged at Camp Beale, California. By then I'd been in 23 months. My service points, and the Bronze Star, gave me enough to get out relatively earlier than some guys. But everyone at Luzon deserved the Bronze Star; all of us went through the same hell.

Not long after I got home I was visited by Earl Price who was a graduate of the West Point Class of 1913 and had served in World War I. Between the wars Capt. Earl Price shot and killed a fellow officer and was dishonorably discharged. During WWII, Earl tried repeatedly to get back into military service, in any capacity, and even though he exchanged frequent correspondence with one of his West Point classmates (Dwight D. Eisenhower), Earl never made it back into the service. One of my last recollections of Earl Price was his keen interest in my own World War II battle experiences. He seemed envious.

For two years the Army had done my thinking and told me what to do. Now I was on my own. The psychological damage and “mental retardation” caused by the kill-or-be-killed philosophy had caused many vets to find themselves out of sync with civilian life. Their personal relationships, both marital and otherwise, also suffered from the extremely long separations caused by war. Readjustment came with difficulty. About this time I departed company with my fiancée.

In the summer of 1946, before I started at Bakersfield Junior College, some of us returning vets decided to form a social club. We called it the Tri Beta, which was also known as the Bakersfield Beer Boys or the Bakersfield Booze Boys. (I started drinking about then.) We met at the penthouse of the El Tejon Hotel, and at the second meeting I was nominated second vice president. I also was on my second martini. When I stood up to accept the honor, I fell flat on my face. As VP, one of my primary activities was to arrange “brawls” at the former Kern County Country Club lodge behind the Kern River Golf Course.

Tri Beta helped some of us ease into civilian life, but a surprising number of us expressed our preference for the military by later re-enlisting for the Korean War. This included my own brother. It wasn't as though the country hadn't anticipated our problems. GI benefits and like programs were in place when we got home. Bakersfield Junior College had a

Veterans' Coordinator, and the YWCA sponsored their Mixer Club. I enjoyed their Friday evening dances held upstairs in that building just south of the Padre Hotel. "La G" was another way to get back to normal. It's gone now, but the dances at La Granada Ball Room held forth every Saturday night for the young adult crowd.

I applied for 52-20 as soon as I returned to Bakersfield. If that adjustment allowance of 52 payments of \$20 a week was taken at today's dollar value it would be about \$400 a week. That and other GI benefits helped me greatly.²² I wanted to attend Cal, so I made a trip to Berkeley to see about starting engineering classes. After preliminaries with the director of admissions he told me the correspondence classes I'd taken in the Army didn't transfer. He suggested I enroll at Bakersfield Junior College.

In fall 1946 I started part-time at Bakersfield JC. I was also working at my dad's machine shop and at other shops here in town -- \$1.70 an hour. That was top wage. About that same time I bought a 1946 Ford Business coupe for \$1,115.49 using the money I saved from selling cigarettes when I was in the Army. After the war, both my father and my sister

²² **Via the Veterans Administration the GI Bill provided grants for school and college tuition, low-interest home mortgages, small-business loans, job training, hiring privileges, and unemployment payments for veterans. Amendments to the act provided for full disability coverage and the construction of additional VA hospitals. (Wikipedia)**

went down to Haberfeld Ford and put their names on Charlie Barrows' list for when new cars came in for sale. Their names were near the top of the list. One day I was riding my bike down Eye Street at the rear of Haberfeld Ford, and I saw four Ford business coupes on a truck transport. Obviously, one had to be mine. Charlie was frustrated when I came in and demanded my car. I didn't keep that Ford very long. Soon I had enough money to trade it in for a brand new, four-door Mercury.

At BC I had math from Ed Hemmerling and surveying from Nick Paninides. The students either liked Paninides or disliked him. I had no problem with the man. I remember a particular trip the surveying class took up to the bluffs. It was not too well organized. I found an old tire and kicked it down the hill, and it made a turn and ran into our theodolite. Paninides wasn't too upset. He knew my dad repaired transits. He said, "Don, what are you trying to do make business for your dad?"

The JC and the high school were essentially on the same campus, but the JC people didn't have much to do with the high students. A common place for vets to smoke was Lawn Fifty, a grassy parkway in the middle of California Avenue across from the JC Building. There's a picture in my yearbook of Jack Doughty, later of the County Assessor's office, doing a spread-eagle, flying-jump and landing on his chest on the flooded grass

www.HistoricBakersfieldAndKernCounty.com p. 58 of 60

of Lawn Fifty. That was the kind of shenanigans going on with the vets. Attending JC with me were Bob King, Mel Davis, Clarence Cullimore, Jr., and Jack Hislop. We all got the GI Bill; in fact, all ex-serviceman who enrolled in a school got that benefit. The money I got took me through JC and all the way to my graduation from engineering school at Berkeley in 1951.

By then I was a married man. Joan²³ worked as a secretary for Standard Oil and was getting \$300 a month, which is about the same as \$6,000 now, and I was earning a dollar an hour at my part-time job at Berkeley mining. When we first moved to the university we rented a nice, reasonably-priced room with kitchen privileges that was near the campus. But that didn't work out. The land lady complained about our noisy parties so we moved to a \$654 a month house. Even at the increased cost of rent we were still saving money.

That sure argues in favor of what president Truman was doing at the time. The government was simultaneously paying for the Marshall Plan and WWII and was still running a budget surplus. I looked at that statistic recently in the Wall Street Journal, and I couldn't understand how that \$4-Trillion debt was paid off. Then I realized it was paid by our

²³ Joan Mercedes Sabattini and Don Suverkrop were married Feb 5, 1949 in Bakersfield, CA

taxes, and they were high. Nobody seemed to feel it. The country was doing well.

Chronology

19440423 Drafted at Sacramento. To Monterey

19440515 Departed Monterey, arrived Camp Roberts

19441000 Arrived Fort Ord

19441100 Shipped out from San Francisco, touched Hollandia

19441200 Arrived in Leyte. Assigned 4th Replacement handling ammo.

19441224 Joined K Company, 3RD BAT. 128 REG. 32 DIV at combat perimeter

19450110 Departed Leyte. Assigned to Hdqrs Assault platoon.

19450124 Arrived Luzon. Engaged in rear action near Binalonan, Lingayen Gulf

19450501 Arrived on Villa Verde Trail

19450601 Banzai attack on Villa Verde Trail

19450615 Departed Villa Verde Trail to Binalonan area

19450715 Departed Binalonan, back to Villa Verde Trail with anti-tank platoon

19450815 Departed Villa Verde for encampment and training near Lingayen Gulf

19450903 Japanese Surrender on Missouri.

19450910 Sent to Northern Luzon

19450930 Yamashita surrenders

19451010 On board troop transport for Japan

19451025 Arrived Japanese barracks at Yamaguchi

19460222 Transferred to 4th Replacement depot at Yokohama

19460320 Departed Yokohama

19460404 Arrived Seattle

19460408 Discharged at Camp Beale in California

< 0 >