

ROLAND CHAMPAGNE

MY COMBAT YEARS

PART 4

BATTLE OF OKINAWA



Dear Roland,

I was with you on Okinawa
and went through some of the things
you talk about in your book.

I was in Co. D. 381st Inf.
A dogface, and remembered most
of the things you talked about!!
Had the pleasure of meeting your
son at my 1st 96th Reunion in
Chicago - 2014!!

Reading your stories makes me feel
that I knew you - Sincerely,

Chuck Cebuhar
Co. D. 381st Inf.
96th

Chuck Cebuhar
Company D 381st
96th Infantry
Chicago Reunion
July 2014



Dear Roland,

I was wounded on May 20 about the same location ^{Boe Hill} you were outside Thuri. I received one of those million dollar wounds where I went to the hospital at the start of a typhoom. It was over by the time I got out but the mud was ass deep.

They took us to an ordnance depot where they had rusty parts of M-1's laying around and told to put us together a rifle.

may God Bless

Jim Foster, Co L 382nd



Jim Foster
Company L 382nd
96th Infantry
San Diego Reunion
July 2013

On October 3, 1944 the Pacific Command received a directive to seize positions in the Ryuku Islands. That included Okinawa.

The Battle of Okinawa would be the largest amphibious assault in history and the last battle of World War Two.

This eighty-two day battle would also be the bloodiest of the war.

Americans Killed in Action: 12,520
Americans Wounded in Action 49,151

Japanese Killed in Action: 110,071
Japanese Wounded in Action: 7,401

Civilian casualties: 142,058

I was wounded in action on May 22, 1945. I spent seventy-nine days in a Navy hospital on Guam before being transferred to Saipan, where I waited for my orders.

April 1, 1945

This was both April Fools Day and Easter Sunday, and for us it was the day that Okinawa was invaded.

A suicide plane hit the troop transport PA47 next to us, which caused a murderous barrage of flak. They also hit the battleship West Virginia, and one more transport.



We had to walk seven hundred yards with the water up to our waist because of the reef. That was tough as we were loaded down with all our gear.

In the first hour 16,000 troops landed. By the end of the day 60,000 troops had landed. We established a beachhead 15,000 yards long and 5,000 yards deep in some places.



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Supply ships arriving on the beachhead three days after the landing. Ships could go to the edge of the reef and then unloaded onto trucks or amphibious vehicles.

We were behind by several days in unloading ships. That meant that we were not receiving needed food, fresh water, or ammunition. You go three days without food and see if you feel like fighting.



The 96th Infantry was making slow progress during this time due to heavy forests, caves and dug-outs, mines and tank traps along rough trails.

We were up against the 32nd Japanese Army. They had a great number of "knee mortars", heavy and light machine guns in well placed positions, and plenty of ammunition.

They were dug in everywhere. They were in tombs and caves on every hill. Taking a hill did not give you safety as the reverse slope also had caves. So going downhill could be even more dangerous than going uphill.

By April 4th we made good advances moving two miles inland. We were told to advance as quickly as possible. That meant that units were cut off from one another and we lost support from our back units.

The rapid advance was aided by tanks such as this one. April 5th began heavy enemy resistance.

We went through green rolling country east of the Ginowan road that had a series of fortified positions protected by minefields.

Each position caused American casualties by well camouflaged Japanese troops which were supported by tanks.



We had some artillery, mortar and machine gun support. We gained 400 yards on the east side of the road and 900 yards on the west side.

We were facing the 13th Independent Infantry battalion.

April 6 - 8 the fighting became intense. Artillery, mortar, machine gun and rifle fire rained down on us. We had numerous casualties as we moved south with savage hand to hand encounters.

By the night of April 8th we were strung out along Tombstone ridge. Heavy fire from Kakazu to the west and our eastern flank brought us to a dead stop.

The XXIV Corps suffered 1,510 casualties with the 96th having the bulk of them. We would continue to have serious losses in attempting to reduce the Kakazu enemy positions.

No.

VERY SMALL WRITING IS NOT SUITABLE



(CENSOR'S STAMP)

To MR. MRS. GIBSON CHAMPAGNE
6 BUTLER ST.
LAWRENCE, MASS.

From PFC R. Champagne 3706102
(Sender's name)
382 1/2 St 142 G APO 96
(Sender's address)
9 0 PM Friesco
DATE: APRIL 8, 1945
(Date)

Hello Everybody, The Ryukyus
Well here I am again in combat.
I woud wish you were here Although this
island is really beautiful compared to Leyte.
I hope you're keeping those clippings for me
Coming ashore I had a tough time. We had to
wade through the water, up to our fannies,
for 700 yards. That's really rough when you're
loaded down with equipment. Lucille I "found" a
cute little fan for you. This time it wont get wet.
I also picked up some cute little "sabee" ups (wax).
I was sick as a dog coming over. I didn't eat for 7
straight meals. We had ice cream and it was
really good. The women over here all wear "kimonos"
The people hide in caves and tombs dug in the hills.
they're afraid to be taken prisoners of war.
I'll let you tell me what island I'm on.
That will show you're saving the clippings. Okay.



J R Poland

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT FORM NO. 1

April 8, 1945

Okinawa

Hello Everybody,
Well here I am again in combat. I wont wish you were here. Although this island is really beautiful compared to Leyte. I hope you are keeping those clippings for me.

Coming ashore I had a tough time. We had to wade through the water, up to our fannies, for 700 yards. Thats really rough when you're loaded down with equipment.

Lucille I "found" a cute little fan for you. This time it wont get wet. I also picked up some cute little "sakee" cups (nine).

I was sick as a dog coming over. I didn't eat for 7 straight meals. We had ice cream and it was really good. The women over here all wear kimonos. The people hide in caves and tombs dug in the hills. They're afraid to be taken prisoners of war.

I'll let you tell me what island I'm on. That will show you're saving the clippings. Okay.

Yours, Roland

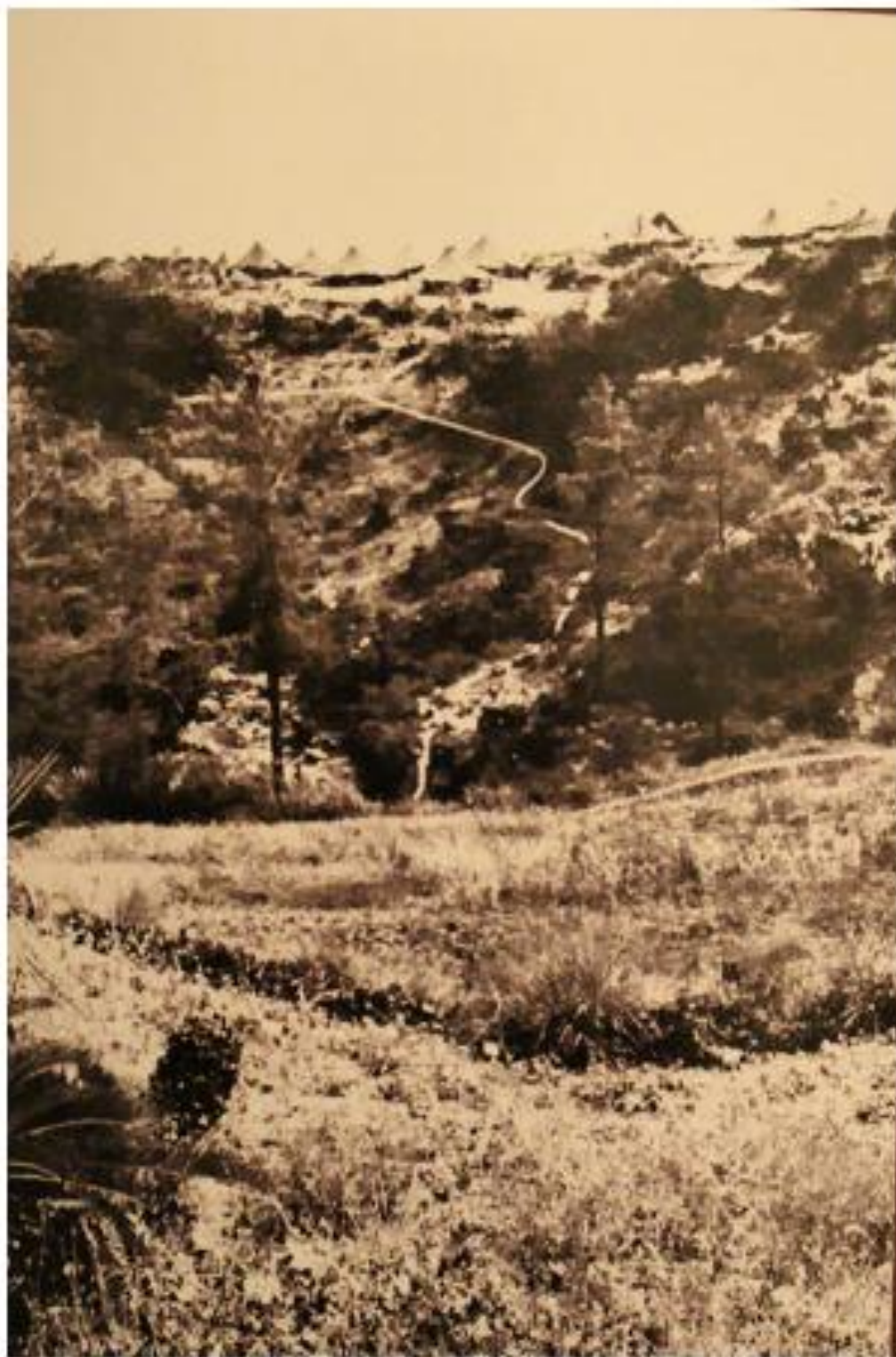
On April 9th we began our attack on Kakazu. The deep gorge made the use of tanks impossible. We did have heavy artillery support from the Navy.

Our advance quickly came to a standstill. The ground was very rocky with drops making it difficult to maneuver. There were also a couple of places that made it very easy for the enemy to defend.

On the 10th our 3rd Battalion secured one of the knobs east of Tombstone Ridge. However, heavy rains bogged us down as we encountered heavy enemy mortar, machine gun, and 47 millimeter fire made us withdraw to our original position.

Machine guns had opened up on us at almost point blank range. We had flame throwers but so did the Japanese. They also had plenty of knee mortars.

The mortars rained down on us even as we withdrew.



This is Kakazu Gorge. pg 122
from the saddle between Kakazu ridge and Kakazu
West. this view shows you how deep the gorge was
that the 96th had to go across.

At sundown on April 12th enemy flares were shot over our lines. This was an enemy signal for them to attack us with full strength.

Japanese artillery opened up with an intense bombardment hitting our rear command posts and artillery positions.

Two squads attacked the 3rd Battalion with a brutal fight including hand to hand. At least one private killed an officer with his bare hands.

The assault had been heavy, sustained and well organized. The bombardment continued until midnight. The front was held by a very thin line of infantrymen from the 382nd and 381st. Remember I was in the 3rd Battalion 382nd.



Kakazu west and Kakazu ridge
pg 136

This is the territory we fought for but there would be no rest. One job done meant there would be a new assignment.

Hello Everybody, Okinawa Shima
- The Ryukyus
today is Sunday
I attended Mass and received Holy
Communion. The sun is still shining
brightly. What happened on Easter?
Did you get some new clothes?
I hope I'm home for next
Easter. As yet I haven't
received any request packages.
They'll come in handy on this
island. We haven't received
our beer yet. We were sup-
posed to get it much sooner
than on Leyte. Whiskey
sold for \$40 a ^(gallon) 1/5 on Leyte.
Don't mind this paper. I'm
lucky and only too glad to use
it. I'm feeling fine but not
when Jap artillery starts shelling
(over) I Poland

Okinawa

April 16, 1945

Hello Everybody,

Today is Sunday. I attended Mass and received Holy Communion. The sun is still shining brightly.

What happened on Easter? Did you get some new clothes? I hope I'm home for next Easter.

As yet I haven't received any request packages. They'll come in handy on this island. We haven't received our beer yet. We were supposed to get it much sooner than on Leyte. Whiskey sold for \$40 a fifth $1/5$ on Leyte.

Don't mind this paper. I'm lucky and only too glad to use it.

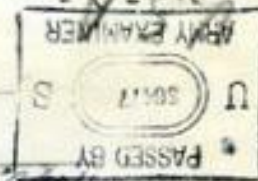
I'm feeling fine but not when Jap artillery starts shelling.

Yours,
Roland

P. S. - I hope you're sending
me some of that red
candy coated peanuts
commonly known as -
Boston baked beans.
yum, yum !!!

Lawrence, Mass.

6 Route 1st St.
Mr. Mrs. Robert Chambers



Chambers
5228 8th St. C. APO 96

Pfc Robert Chambers 5228 8th St. C. APO 96

OPEN HERE

Okinawa

April 16, 1945

P.S. - I hope you're sending me some of that red candy, coated peanuts commonly known as - Boston baked beans. Yum, yum !!!



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No.



(CENSOR'S STAMP)

To Mrs Eva CHAMPAGNE
6 BUTLER ST.
LAWRENCE, MASS.

From
PR Polard Champagne
3122 of Sgt H G APS 96
C/O AM Fisco
DATE: APRIL 19, 1945

B. Don't send the watch until
I ask for it. I'll return
the brooch (watch) you sent -
Okinawa Shima - The Ryukyus -
Another letter to let you know

I'm still around and in one piece - I'm not kidding.
Have you found this island on the map yet?
It's the biggest in the group some 375 miles from Kyushu
So Tony thinks he left me behind, eh? He's probably
still in Manila drinking beer. I think I wrote Mrs.
Letendre 1 1/2 months ago. She didn't get the letter,
and ships sometimes get sunk. That's what hap-
pened to some Christmas mail; also outgoing mail.
Tell her for me, okay. Hey Gene, how about
getting this record - "More and More" - "Don't You
Know I Care" by Jimmy Dorsey^{and} Decca 18647.
also "Frankie and Johnny" by Br⁵²unmy Beigan or others.
Still no letter from Aunt Anna. You'll be getting some
brochlets from Globe Aircraft to be forwarded to me.
That's the only way they'll send them. No packages yet.

V-MAIL

your son, J Polard

Okinawa

April 19, 1945

Dear Mom,

Another letter to let you know I'm still around and in one piece - I'm not kidding. Have you found this island on the map yet?

Its the biggest in the group some 375 miles from So Tony thinks he left me behind, eh? He's probably still in Manila still drinking beer.

I think I wrote Mrs. Letendre one and a half months ago. She didn't get the letter, and ships sometimes get sunk. Thats what happened to some Christmas mail; also outgoing mail. Tell her for me, okay.

Hey Gene, how about getting this record - "More and More" - "Don't You Know I Care" by Jimmy Dorsey. Decca 18647. Also "Frankie and Johnny" by or others.

Still no letter from Aunt Anna. You'll be getting some booklets from Globe Aircraft to be forwarded to me. Thats the only way they'll send them. No packages yet.

Your son,
Roland

My letter really was to let my family know that I was still in one piece. I never wanted to worry them so I said very little about combat. I doubt any letters would have made it past the censor anyway.

The same day I wrote this letter we moved out to attack the Shuri Defenses. Our H Hour was 0640 on April 19th. We would be assaulting 65 to 70,000 enemy troops on the south end of the island.

After a huge artillery bombardment we headed out to face several small but heavily defended hills including Tombstone, Nishibaru Ridge, and the Tanabaru Escarpment.

Beyond these was a more daunting point; the Urasoe-Mura Escarpment. This stretched across the 27th Division's front and across most of ours.

We had the job of taking Tombstone Ridge and the Tanabaru Escarpment. By the end of the day we had gained a mere toehold on Tombstone Ridge.

Our 3rd Battalion relieved the 1st at 0730. We then attacked south from the northern part of Tombstone Ridge.

We had trouble at a small, tree covered, conical hill to the east. We fought all afternoon there with the Japanese counter attacking with bayonets alongside their mortar fire. We were unable to cross the divide between Tombstone and Nishibaru Ridges. At the end of the day only four officers were left in the three rifle companies on the northern slope.

We were relieved the next morning by the 1st Battalion at 0720 April 21st.

We made a circling march to the rear to reach Nishibaru Ridge. We reorganized and attacked eastward.

We gained ground until the first of three Japanese counterattacks.

We beat the first one off. It was platoon strength.

The second counterattack was company strength. It turned into a bitter close fight. Our American mortars were firing at 86 degrees to hit the Japanese mortars who were firing from only 30 yards away. There is a History Channel show which details this as told by one of the mortar crewmen.

The 383rd had tried to help us but were pinned down by hidden machine guns and mortar fire. By fighting off this counterattack we killed 150 of the enemy.

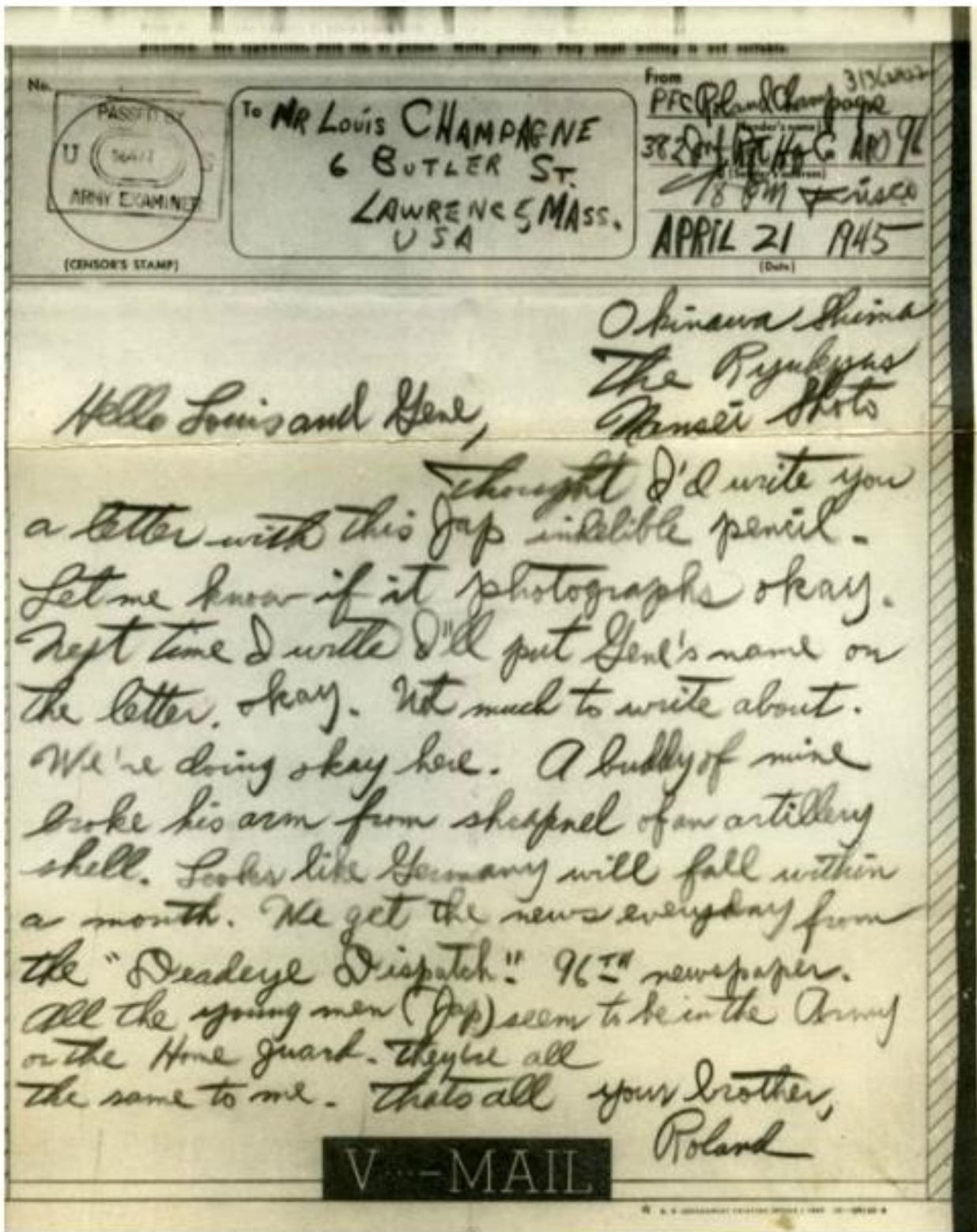
The third counterattack was easily beaten down.

By the evening of the 21st our casualties had reduced our combat efficiency to 50 percent.

I then wrote the letters on the following pages to my brothers and sister. You see how little I told them. No use in worrying them, and I did not know how to explain combat anyway.

We were relieved by the 383rd on April 22nd.





Okinawa

April 21, 1945

Hello Louis and Gene,

Thought I'd write you a letter with this Jap indelible pencil. Let me know if it photographs okay.

Next time I write I'll put Gene's name on the letter. Okay.

Not much to write about. We're doing okay here. A buddy of mine broke his arm from shrapnel from artillery.

Looks like Germany will fall within a month. We het the news everyday from the "Deadeye Dispatch". 96th newspaper.

All the young men (Jap) seem to be in the Army or the Home Guard. They're all the same to me.

Thats all.

Your brother,
Roland



April 21st

AMERICAN RED CROSS

Okinawa Shima
The Ryukyus

Dear Lucille,

First, Shima, like
(Duo) jima means island. okay.
We are in the Nansei Shoto or
Southwestern Archipelago.

I'm so puzzled that I don't
know who to write to.
All my addresses are in my
rear echelon bag.

Here's the letter from
wanted. I was very pleased
to hear about the chair.
Thanks a lot. Now I'll get
one for Gene. okay.
Excuse the pencil - it's Japanese.

Okinawa April 21, 1945

Dear Lucille,

First, Shima, like (Iwo) Jima means island. Okay.

We are in the Ransei Shoto or Southwestern Archipelago.

I'm so puzzled that I don't know who to write to. All my addresses are in my rear echelon bag.

Here's the letter Mom wanted. I was very pleased to hear about the chair. Thanks a lot. Now I'll get one for Gene. Okay.

Excuse the pencil - its Japanese.

Will you ² let me know
the dates of my last two
war bonds. Also the
bank account. You could add
up all the deposits & withdra-
wals. I'd like to know how
much I could of saved.
Pop's birthday coming up
and me out here penniless. ^{How}
I was very glad to hear you
and Mom are having "my" Masses
said at the Protectorate.
I know now, that's the place I
would have liked to have them said.
There's something about that Parish
that I like. You know, Sister
Pacôme will be one of the first
relatives I see when I get back.
I think I'd go out of my way
first to see her. She gave

Okinawa April 21, 1945

Will you let me know the dates of my last two war bonds. Also the bank account. you could add up the deposits and withdrawals. I'd like to know how much I could of saved.

Pop's birthday coming up and me out here - penniless. Honest.

I was very glad to hear you and Mom are having "my" Masses said a the Protectorate. I know now that is the place I would have liked to have them said. Theres something about that Parish that I like.

You know Sister Pacome will be one of the first relatives I see when I get back. I think I'd go out of my way just to see her. She gave a certain confidence that I treasure very much.



AMERICAN RED CROSS

a certain confidence that I
treasure very much. Again I
say - no packages yet.
They're probably holding them
back. Did I tell you that
we're eating chicken and
ham in the new C-rations
instead of hash. Its about
time we get some decent chow.
Now that the war is almost
over they bring out the
best they ever had. Its those
women dietitians in Washington
who never tasted the rubbish
they put out. A balanced diet
for pigs is all I got for that.
I burn up when I think of those
German prisoners in the States

FORM 852A

Okinawa

April 21, 1945

She gave a certain confidence that I treasure very much.

Again I say - no packages yet. They're probably holding them back. Did I tell you that we're eating chicken and ham in the new C-rations instead of hash. Its about time we get some decent chow.

Now that the war is almost over they bring out the best they ever had. Its those women dietitians in Washington who never tasted the rubbish they put out.

A balanced diet for pigs is all I got for that - I burn up when I think of those German prisoners in the States who live like kings.

who live like kings.
I'll be sending home a few
souvenirs when they let
us. As much as I want to get
a Jap flag, I can't find one.
I seem to find other things
that I don't look for.
The last 3 letters I received took
10, 9 and 8 days respectively.
That's pretty good time.
How about my letters?
How's the night life?
Are there many good looking
4 F's around or do you
girls dance with each other?
I forgot - get me Bob Savoie's
and Tommy Kiscella's addresses.
I got another hunch I can see em.
Send me addresses Your brother,
when you think
somebody is out here. J Roland

Okinawa

April 21, 1945

I'll be sending home a few souvenirs when they let us. As much as I want to get a Jap flag, I can't find one. I seem to find other things that I don't look for.

The last 3 letters I received took 10, 9 and 8 days respectively. That's pretty good time. How about my letters?

How's the night life? Are there many good looking 4F's around who you girls dance with each other?

I forgot - get me Bob Savoie's and Tommy Kinsella's addresses. I got another hunch I can see em.

Send me addresses when you think somebody is out here.

Yours,
Roland

P.S. - Just received 2
packages. See next
letter. Thanks a lot.

Okinawa

April 30th

Hello Louis, and Gene;

Received 2 letters from
Louis and one from Mom. They
took 8 days to get here.

No packages yet...
I hope you didn't send any
soft stuff. It melts easily.
I can't tell you anything
about here yet. You'll
have to read it in the
papers. They can tell most
of it, better than I can.
I guess I won't see Kinsella.
I guess I'm the only one in

April 30, 1945

Okinawa

P.S. - Just received 2 packages. See next letter. Thanks a lot.

Hello Louis and Gene,

Received two letters from Louis and one from Mom. They took 8 days to get here. No packages yet.

I hope you didn't send any soft stuff. I can't tell you anything about here yet. You'll have to read it in the papers.

They can tell most of it better than I can.

I guess I wont see Kinsella.

I guess I am the only one in the Pacific and Far East.

The Pacific and Far East.
And also the only one from our
gang in the Infantry.
I saw a list of points
for rotation to Heaven - the U.S.
You get -
2 points per month for overseas (18)
10 points for battle participation (20)
4 points for Good Conduct Medal (4)
10 points for a Purple Heart (10)
I have 42 points. Some guys
(41st Division) have 102 points.
It's going to be a long time be-
fore I see the States again.
I may see you in the Spring of 47.
Those S.C.U.'s (sick, crippled and useless)
don't get any for being in the States.
They'll be home getting the

April 30, 1945

Okinawa

I guess I'm the only one in the Pacific and Far East. And also the only one from our gang in the Infantry.

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I have 42 points. Some guys (41st Division) have 102 points. Its going to be a long time before I see the States again.

I may see you in the Spring of 47. Those S.C.U.s (sick, crippled, and useless) don't get any for being in the States.

They'll be home getting the gravy (women) and we'll get the scrappings from the bottom.

gravy (women²) and we'll
get the scrapings from the bottom!
I guess there aint many guys
left to play softball, eh?
Do you see Red Perry or
did he ship out?
How are those 4Fs (2 Leo's)
making out. I haven't written
to Lam and I don't intend
to. I can't seem to write him
after all I've seen - - - - -
I can't find nothing to
say so I'll tell you some
war honors

Do you think you could eat
your dinner after seeing
Japs with their bellies blown
wide open by hand grenades
they held in their hands (hari-kari)

April 30, 1945

Okinawa

They'll be home getting the gravy (women) and we'll get the scrappings from the bottom.

I guess there aint many guys left to play softball, eh?

Do you see Red Perry or did he ship out?

How are those 4F's (2 Leo's) making out. I haven't written to Lam and I don't intend to. I can't seem to write him after all I've seen....

I can't find nothing to say so I'll tell you some war horrors -----

Do you think you could eat your dinner after seeing Japs with their bellies blown wide open by hand grenades they held in their hands (hari-kari)

On the front lines all you
can see are dead Japs all
over the place. Some with their
head blown off, others with
their guts spread all around.
War is hell and you can't be-
lieve it until you've seen it.
Nights of horror with bazai
charges and artillery barrages
plus guard duty all help to
give you a restful sleep for
the next day's work with
breakfast consisting of a can
of meat & beans ^(12 ozs.) plus cold coffee
and biscuits that aren't fit for dogs.
I hope this war ends all wars.
And I hope you never have to
face the enemy under fire
if we do have one. I pray to God
for your future safety and also mine.
Keep praying and keep writing.
your brother,
Roland

April 30, 1945

Okinawa

On the front lines all you can see are dead Japs all over the place. Some with their head blown off, others with their guts spread all around.

Was is hell and you can't believe it until you've seen it.

Nights of horror with banzai charges and artillery barrages plus guard duty all help to give you a restful sleep for the next days work with breakfast consisting of a can of meat and beans plus cold coffee and biscuits that aren't fit for dogs.

I hope this war ends all wars. And I hope you never have to face the enemy under fire
If we do have one.

I pray to God for your future safety and also mine.

Keep praying and keep writing.

Your brother,

Roland



Okinawa caves ch 5 pg 6

I remember throwing a phosphorous grenade into a cave and out marched five Jap soldiers with their hands up. It never occurred to me at the time that any one of them could have come out with a gun and shot me.



Here are some photos of the enemy. I found these in a hut that was probably used for headquarters.



The photos are small. They are about the same size as the ones that I took on Saipan. They must have developed them there just like we developed ours.

When you look at the photos closely you see that some are just kids. So young. Just like us.



Here is a Japanese grenade. The Japanese soldiers sure did give us hell.

We all fought, dreamed of home, and wished it would all end soon. After a time we knew we would either be killed or wounded, it was just a matter of when.



Okinawa
May 1, 1945

Hello Pop, Well its about time I wrote you a letter. I've written plenty of letters to the family but none addressed directly to you. I'm so lazy that I write once every three days. I've got the time to write but I don't know what. I'm allowed to tell you of my personal experiences but I'd rather not. I must admit I've had some close shaves and many's the time I thought my time had come. Continuous prayer and trust in the Lord have brought me through. Everybody out here prays. Louis told me about the Lawrence airport. Are they planning to put hangars and buildings on the field? That Catholic hospital will be

Okinawa May 1, 1945

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Well its about time I wrote you a letter. I've written plenty of letters to the family but none addressed directly to you.

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Continuous prayer and trust in the Lord have brought me through. Everybody here prays.

Louis told me about the Lawrence airport. Are they planning to put hangars and buildings o the fields?

That Catholic hospital will be quite a job.

quite a job. There should be plenty of work there for some time. Lawrence is rapidly changing itself. There'll be plenty of new places and faces. Even the neighbors will look different. Even ^{on} myself I can see a change. My face and hands are beginning to look rough from all the cuts and bruises I picked up in combat. I'm still gaining weight, but not much height. I'll look black, like Raymond Poy did, when I get back.

It hasn't rained much. It gets pretty cool and windy at night. The mosquitos are as bad as ever and they're really big. They carry malaria. That's worse than those bullets.

Okinawa May 1, 1945

There should be plenty of work there for some time.

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I'm still gaining weight but not much height. I'll look black, like Raymond Roy did, when I get back.

It hasn't rained much. It gets pretty cool and windy at night.

The mosquitoes are as bad as ever and they're really big. They carry malaria. That's worse than those bullets.

I was interest²ed again.
I had to clean my rifle for a
little inspection. I was issued
a new rifle on Leyte. I never
fired it until I tested it today.
There's not a speck of rust
on it. I keep it well oiled,
and clean it most every day.
Those machine guns have to
be cleaned everyday. It's not
so bad when you get used to it.
I see where the Medics
are getting the Combat
Infantryman's Badge (like mine)
for the excellent work they're
doing under fire. I've seen
them move up to aid a wounded
man while the rest of the

Okinawa May 1, 1945

I was interrupted again. I had to clean my rifle for a little inspection. I was issued a new rifle on Leyte. I never fired it until I tested it today.

There's not a spec of rust on it. I keep it well oiled, and clean it most every day. Those machine guns have to be cleaned everyday. It's not so bad when you get used to it.

I see where the Medics are getting the Combat Infantryman's Badge (like mine) for the excellent work they're doing under fire.

I've seen them move up to aid a wounded man while the rest of the platoon was pinned down by rifle fire.

platoon was pinned down by rifle fire. I've even assisted the medics by carrying back a wounded comrade. One of those times almost cost me my life as my buddy carrying the other side of the litter was shot down before my eyes. He was hit by machine gun fire and died within 5 minutes. I was never so scared in all my life. I still don't know how that machine gun missed me. I was praying like I never prayed before. And I'll keep on praying till I reach home. Congratulations on your 57th birthday. Many happy returns of the day. your son,
Poland

Okinawa May 1, 1945

I've even assisted the Medics by carrying back a wounded comrade.

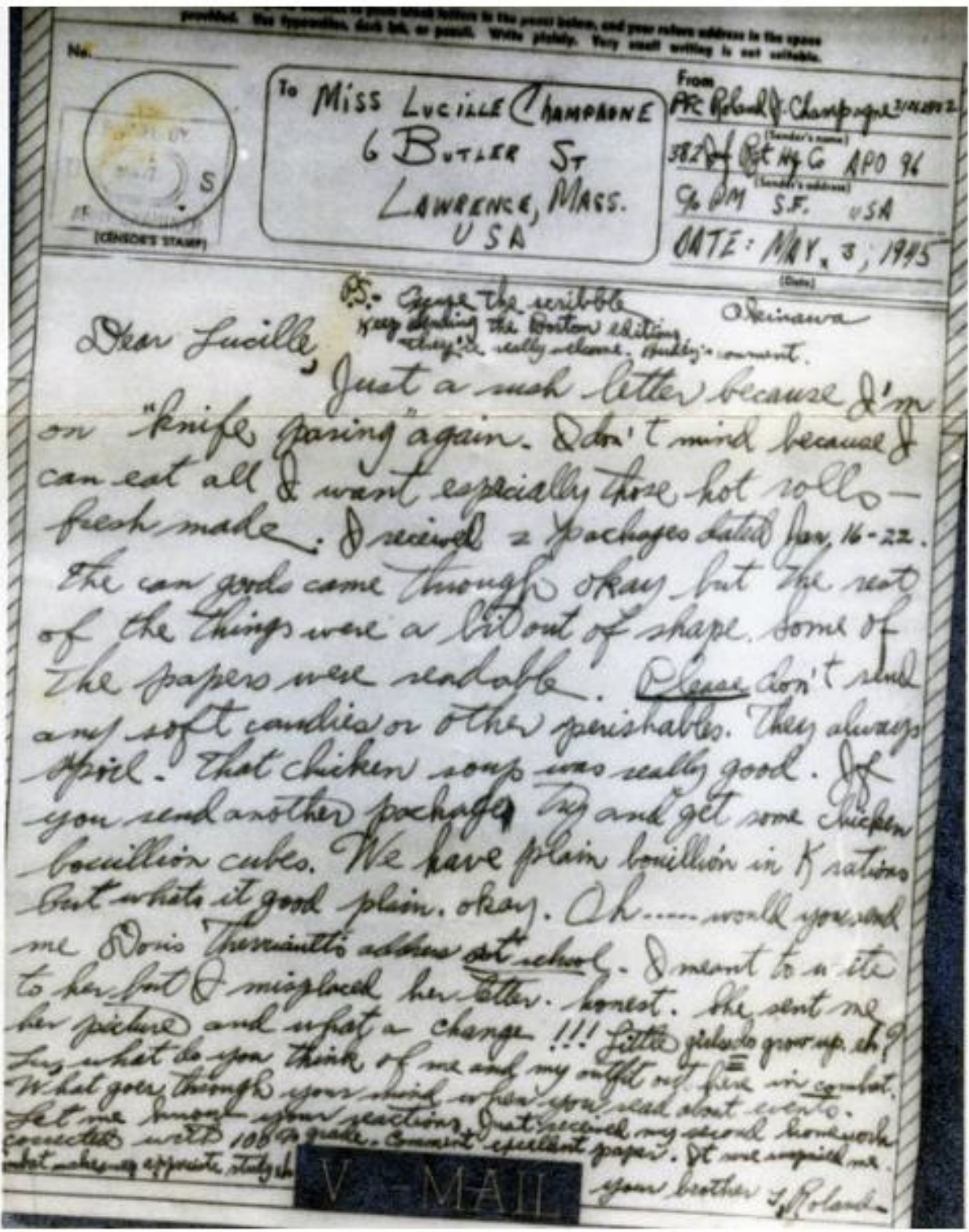
One of those times almost cost me my life as my buddy carrying the other side of the litter was shot down before my eyes. He was hit by machine gun fire and died within 5 minutes.

I was never so scared in all my life. I still don't know how that machine gun missed me. I was praying like I never prayed before.

And I'll keep on praying till I reach home.

Congratulations on your 57th birthday.
Many happy returns of the day.

Your son,
Roland



Okinawa May 3, 1945

Dear Lucille,

Just a rush letter because I'm on "knife paring" again. I didn't mind because I can eat all I want especially those hot rolls - fresh made.

I received 2 packages dated Jan 16 - 22. The canned goods came through okay but the rest of the things were a bit out of shape. Some of the papers were readable. Please don't send any soft candies or other perishables. They always spoil. That chicken soup was really good. If you send another package try and get some chicken bouillon cubes. We have plain bouillon in K rations but what good is plain. Okay.

Oh ... would you send me Doris Therriault's address at school. I meant to write to her but I misplaced her letter. Honest. She sent me her picture and what a change!!! Little girls do grow up, eh?

Lu, what do you think of me and my outfit out here in combat. What goes through your mind when you read about events. Let me know your reactions.

I just received my second homework corrected with 100% grade. Comment excellent paper. It sure surprised me. Combat makes me appreciate study, eh.

Your brother,
Roland

Okinawa
May 5th

Dear Mom,

I had a writing session yesterday. I wrote to Aunt Anna and Marie-Louise Mrs. Stahle and Armand J.; I haven't received Dick's letter yet. All I lack now is one address and a particular letter. I may not be able to send home Aunt ~~Anna~~ Marie-Louise's letter - its in French. That blotch ↑ was because I'm nervous. Something just flew by overhead and it wasn't a bird or an airplane!

Okinawa May 5, 1945

Dear Mom,

I had a writing session yesterday. I wrote to Aunts Anna and Marie Louise, Mrs. Stahle and Armand J.

I haven't received Dick's letter yet. All I lack now is one addrss and a particular letter. I may not be able to send home Aunt Marie Louise's letter - its in French.

That blotch was because I'm nervous. Something just flew by overhead and it wasn't a bird or an airplane!

I guess Red Percy and Richard
Morrill are still on Iwo Jima.
Our army, the 10TH has
Marines fighting alongside
the dough boys - that's us.
That's the first time it's
been done. Those glory happy
boys don't look too good in
combat. A sailor on my last
ship said some Marines were
cruising when they were getting
ready for a past invasion.
Our boys just laughed and
ate waiting to get in the
"alligators" for their invasion.
I aint lying about this. It's true.
I'll be sending home clip-
pings I picked up in a
Honolulu newspaper and the

Okinawa May 5, 1945

I guess Red Perry and Richard Morel are still on Iwo Jima. Our army, the 10th has Marines fighting alongside the doughboys - thats so.

Thats the first time its been done. Those glory happy boys don't look too good in combat. A sailor on my last ship said some Marines were crying when they were getting ready for a past invasion.

Our boys just laughed and ate waiting to get in the "alligators" for their invasion. I aint lying about this. Its true.

I'll be sending home clippings I picked up in a Honolulu newspaper and the Army Times.

Army Times. I wish you'd
buy me a scrapbook and
paste the clippings in according
to the dates. Start back with
Sept. Can you buy, YANK,
the Army weekly? I was won-
dering because Louis sent me
some clippings from it.
I'll be sending pictures and
poems so please put them
in also. Tell Lucille to
keep getting the Herald and fight
if she can. That story about
Tommy Kinella is typical of
the Marines. Who does he think
he is when he does the same
thing as thousands of G.I.'s
are doing every night. Do you
think I sleep in a cozy hut
all night? I do the same dirty
work he has to do; rain or shine.

Okinawa May 5, 1945

I wish you'd buy me a scrapbook and paste the clippings in according to the dates. Start back with Leyte. Can you buy YANK, the Army weekly? I was wondering because Louis sent me some clippings from it.

I'll be sending pictures and poems so please put them in also. Tell Lucille to keep getting the Herald and "Light" if she can.

That story about Tommy Kinsella is typical of the Marines. Who does he think he is when he does the same thing as thousands of G.I.'s are doing every night.

Do you think I sleep in a cozy hut all night? I do the same dirty work he has to do; rain or shine.

I'm glad I'm a bit shy and not
conceited enough to have type
like that put in the paper.
I know, he's the one who volunteered
to come over and fight the Japs.
Enough said - he's earned his honor - I know.
The clipping I'm returning is
quite true. I couldn't describe it
any better. Read it again. And keep
it for me. Some guys have all
the luck. I couldn't write all
the things he said. That's
the way of the Infantry.
Did you know my 3rd Battalion
had Queen of Battle stamped on our
shirts with a bathing beauty with
a rifle held horizontal like in a
charge. This poem I'm sending
fits the occasion. Keep it for me.
How true the poem is. Right.
That's all,
your loving son,
Roland

Okinawa

May 5, 1945

I'm glad I'm a bit shy and not conceited enough to have tripe like that put in the paper. I know he's the one who volunteered to come over and fight the Japs. Enough said - he's learned his lesson - I know.

The clippings I'm returning is quite true. I couldn't describe it any better. Read it again. And keep it for me. Some guys have all the luck. I couldn't write all the things he said. Thats the way of the infantry.

Did you know my 3rd Battalion had Queen of Battle stamped on our shirts with a bathing beauty with a rifle held horizontal like in a charge.

This poem I'm sending fits the occasion. Keep it for me. How true the poem is. Right.

Thats all,

Your loving son,
Roland

Print the complete address in plain block letters in the space below, and your return address in the space provided. Use typewriter, dark ink, or pen. Write plainly. Very small writing is not suitable.



To Miss Lucille Champagne
6 Butler St.
Lawrence, Mass.

From
Pfc R. J. Champagne
382nd Inf. 8th C. 3131272
% P.M. S.F. RPO 9C
May 6, 1945
(Date)

Okinawa

Dear Lucille,

Received the latest flight, April 21st,
last night. Your letter took nine days.
We took some pictures and I hope they come out.
One is the gang, the other is me in action.
Those are the two I expect to send home. I hope the
family is trying to get film. Any size will do
and I can pick up a camera in the vicinity. No 122!
Pop will probably know what these Feathers Reserve
is? It sells for 20 a fifth. And it tastes good.
The Air Corps and Navy guys want souvenirs,
and the Infantry (not me) wants whiskey so.....
I'm feeling happy today. I don't know why.
It's not because a young man's fancy turns to "I
know. Seeing those "Wee may have helped it.
Are there any photographs idling in the drawers?
That would sort of buck me up till peace is here.
I lost all I had on the Leyte invasion, remember?
I guess that's all so excuse the scribbling till I can
write on a decent desk. My hope never was just for writing, but...?
Your brother, I Roland

V-MAIL

Okinawa

May 6, 1945

Dear Lucille,

Received the latest Light, April 21st last night. Your letter took nine days.

We took some pictures and I hope they come out. One is the gang, the other is me in action. Those are the two I expect to send home.

I hope the family is trying to get film. Any size will do as I can pick up a camera in the vicinity. No 122!

Pop will probably know what Three Feathers Reserve is? It sells for \$20 a fifth. And it tastes good.

These Air corps and Navy guys want souvenirs, and the Infantry (not me) wants whiskey so

I'm feeling happy today. I don't know why. Its not because a "young man's fancy turns to". I know. Seeing those Wacs may have helped it.

Are there any photographs idling in the drawers? That will sort of buck me up till peace is here. I lost all I had in the Leyte invasion, remember?

I guess thats all so excuse the scribbling till I can write on a decent desk. My lap never was good for writing, but..?

Your brother,
Roland

ch 11 pg 5

This flame thrower tank is protected by infantrymen against the enemy satchel charge attacks. There were so many caves and tombs that it was very slow going.



Here is a picture of a satchel charge. Those would be placed next to the tanks and deliver a blast that could knock it out of action.

The Japanese did not care if they were killed or not. They would do suicide attacks whenever there was an opportunity. That made defending against them all the more difficult.



ch 14 pg 5

Infantrymen walking past mud clogged tanks.

On May 9th we went back to the front lines to relieve the 17th Division.

We were now close to controlling the Kochi Ridge. Next assignment would be to attack the Shuri Defenses.





Enemy fire was so strong the next day that we had to get supplies by tank. It was very risky to leave our foxholes to go to the base of the hill to get supplies.

We attacked Dick Right from Baker Hill. My Company K reached the north slopes of the fingers of Dick Hill. Company L met up with us after a terrible mortar barrage.

The 3rd Battalion lost six men killed and forty seven wounded in this mission.

On May 11th we received orders to take Flattop and Dick Hill. These orders would take ten days to achieve.

Dick Hill was the highest and most heavily fortified hill. We finally fought the enemy off of Zebra Hill.

We tried to move across open ground to Dick Baker, but enemy fire was too accurate and we suffered many casualties. One platoon lost all its noncommissioned officers leaving a private first class in command at the end of the day.

We attacked again on May 12th. With the help of artillery fire the 3rd Battalion was able to advance slowly between Zebra and Item Hills. Heavy fire forced the 1st Battalion to withdraw. Our capture of Baker Hill 600 yards south of Zebra was the only success of the day.

During the nights of the 13th and 14th the Japanese reinforced their positions in the entire Dick Hill area.



ch 10 pg 8

When they were available we preferred using the flame thrower tanks. They could burn out the caves where the Japanese snipers were hiding.

But they could not work on the slopes and steep hills. Those had to be cleaned out by us infantry!

Heavy rains poured that night turning the slopes into wet clay. What Hollywood movies do not show is the number of bodies with blood and guts all over the place making climbing the hills even more difficult.

In the morning we consolidated our position but were still short of our goal Dick Hill. One platoon made seven attempts to reach the crest but were knocked back each time. That means seven times there were casualties.

ch 14 pg 6

The rains and the mud were a big part of both the Philippines and Okinawa. The foxholes were not the dry ones you see in movies. We would have to spend days and weeks at a time with the water up to our waist or even chest. When we had to "go"? Think about it and do not ask.

My sister Lucille asked about the foxholes. I told her in a May 19th letter just the dimensions of them. No need to say more.



Our exhausting struggle for Dick Hill continued. Each time we attempted to cross over the hill we encountered heavy machine gun fire from from Oboe Hill to the east and from Flattop to the west.

We had been pushed down the slope on the night of the 15th so we were fighting for the same territory again. We made little progress on the 17th.

The turning point was the taking control of the road between Flattop and Dick Hill. On the 19th and 20th we continued to gain territory.

Our combination of tank-infantry teams methodically destroyed enemy positions throughout the Dick Hill area.

On one occasion an armored flame thrower flushed 50 enemy troops out of one cave.



flamethrower tank ch 12 pg 9 (305)

On the 19th I managed to write the letter on the next page to my family.

They had no idea how serious I was when I said that I wanted to let them know that I was still in one piece.

I had no idea that just three days later I would not be in one piece. Those three days seemed like an eternity.

54
May

(CENSOR'S STAMP)

TO: MR & MRS GIBSON CHAMPAGNE
6 BUTLER ST
LAWRENCE, MASS.
U. S. A.

SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2

FROM
PFC W. Champagne 21762922
G K 382 Jm APO 96
6 PM S.F.
May 19, 1945
(Sender's complete address above)

Hello Everybody,

Okinawa

Well, I'm back in King
company again. That's the front lines. I'm
just a short letter to let you know
where I am and that I'm still in
one piece so far. Finally found out
on what ship Raymond Boy is on.
Now if I can spot it. It's pretty hard
to do when you're fighting Japs.

"Red" Paul was asking about you Lu.
I hope you see his family sometime.

I heard Carl Stahlke joined the Navy.
Yes, Lu I do live in a foxhole (5' x 2' x 2')

That's where I am now with this letter.
And I also wear my steel helmet all the time.
No wood, from Tony. I'm so filthy with dirt
that the pigs in the States wouldn't let me in their front
your son, Roland

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE
ADDRESS AT TOP?

V...-MAIL

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE
ADDRESS AT TOP?

May 19, 1945

Okinawa

Hello Everybody,

Here I am back in King company again. Thats the front lines.

Just a short letter to let you know where I am and that I'm still in one piece so far.

Finally found out what ship Raymond Roy is on. Now if I can spot it. It's pretty hard to do when you're fighting Japs.

"Red" Pari was asking about you Lu. I hope you see his family sometime. I heard Carl Stahle joined the Navy.

Yes, Lu I do live in a foxhole (5x3x2). Thats where I am now with this letter. And I also wear my steel helmet all the time.

No word from Tony

I'm so filthy with dirt that the pigs in the States wouldn't let me in their pen. Honest.

Your son,
Roland

There were still pockets to be cleaned out, but by the 21st we were also involved with another fight to take Oboe Hill.

Holding positions at the foot of Hen Hill we were unable to move from our foxholes. Any activity at all brought down machine gun fire and mortars.

Only occasional patrols were sent out. We had an abundance of mud and low spirits and were short on supplies.

On May 21st bitter fighting took place at the lip of Oboe Hill. For the next week the crest of Oboe Hill was a no-mans land. All around was land that was supposedly in American hands, but nevertheless unending grenades and hand to hand combat was taking place.

My combat days were nearly over. I had seen too much and would be glad when it was over.

By this time everyone else in my squad had either been killed or wounded.

I was the last one. At the age of twenty-one years and eight months I was the old man surrounded by replacements.

Tuesday May 22, 1945

Wounded in action today. The damn lieutenant told me and a buddy to head out before breakfast on second patrol to locate a Jap who had been shelling us with a mortar.

I did locate it, right near my spine. Veteran Vern Nuns was hit in the leg. I was glad to get out of there. It happened near to Conical Hill and Dick Hill.

Two good buddies of mine were killed nearby. They were Dussliere and Luebbe. Luebbe was a medic and was treating a wounded man. After he was hit the medic who came to his aid was also hit and killed.

Here is a copy of the morning report giving the official report of what happened to me and my buddy.

Champagne, Roland JH
Combat Infantry Pay
Nuss, Vernon L.

Above named 2 EM (enlisted men) seriously wounded in action 600 yards NE of Shuri, Okinawa Island

Dy to SK Hospital unknown L.D. (living or dead)

SECRET MORNING REPORT		ENGINE	DAY	MONTH	YEAR
		22	MAY		1945
UNCLASSIFICATION INFO. NO. DET. ETC.)		(PARENT UNIT)		(ARM OR SERVICE)	
K		382d Regt		Inf	
STATION OR LOCATION					
600 yds N.E. of SHURI, OKINAWA, IS.					
NAME	SERIAL NUMBER	GRADE	MOS	CODE	
Champagne, Roland J.H.	31362422	PvtICJ	521		
Dac Combat Infantry, Pay-SSN-521					
Nuss, Vernon L.	37535858	PvtICJ	745		
SSN-745					
Above named 2EM, seriously wounded					
in action 600 yds N.E. of Shuri, Okinawa					
Is. Py to SH Hosp unknown to D.					
RECORD OF EVENTS					
600 yds N.E. of Shuri, Okinawa Is -					
Patrol sent out 300 yds to front found					
no enemy but were fired on by					
enemy mortars. Wounded - 2EM					

Record of Events

600 yards NE of Shuri, Okinawa Island

Patrol sent out 300 yards to front found no enemy but were fired on by enemy mortars. Wounded 2 EM (enlisted men)

My son obtained this copy by writing to the National Archives.



The Japanese did have large artillery on Okinawa, like this 320 millimeter spigot mortar. This is just the shell.



This is most likely the size of the mortar that hit me. It is a 50 millimeter grenade launcher.

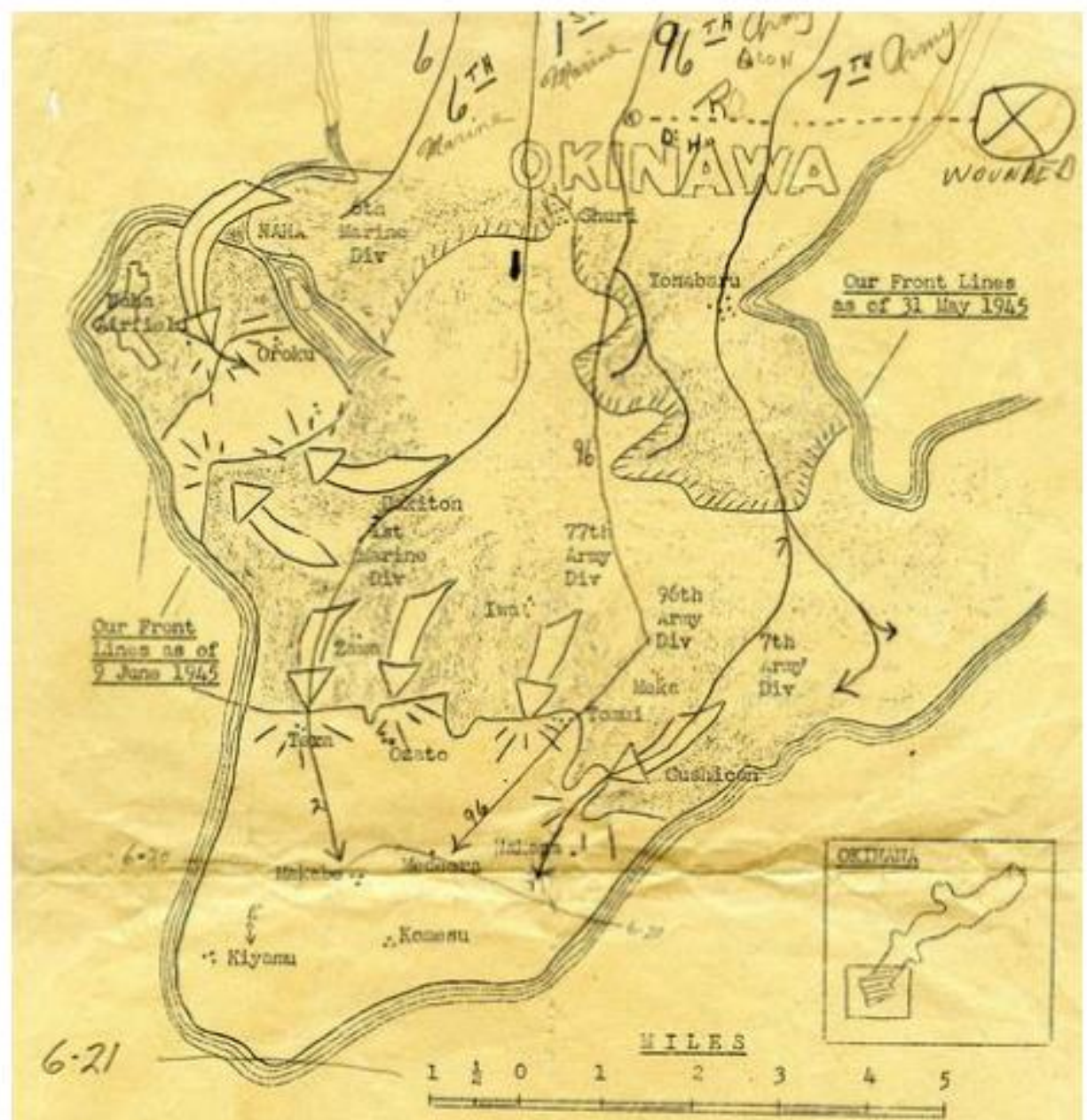
Though I do not remember it, I was probably sent to the back lines first by stretcher and then by a jeep ambulance.

On the next page is a map with an X on the spot where I was wounded.

You can see the advance of the different Armies further and further south.

The battle lasted 82 days. I was wounded on the 51st day. I was the last guy in my squad to be hit, after me they were all replacements. Our casualty rate was over 100%.





COMMUNIQUE NO. 388

3. The enemy on Orokubi Peninsula and in the Yaoju-Dake escarpment in southern Okinawa gave strong resistance to the attacks of the Tenth Army on 9 June. No substantial changes were made in the lines.
4. After elements of the Sixth Marine Division moved into position on the right flank of the First Division, the Sixth Division brought heavy pressure on enemy positions from both north and south in the Orokubi Peninsula fighting. Enemy resistance in this area was heavy. The First Marine Division continued its attack southward toward Kunishi Ridge.
5. Enemy positions on Yaoju-Dake escarpment were under heavy fire by ships of the fleet, field artillery and aircraft throughout the day. The Seventh Infantry Division was engaged in sharp fighting in its effort to capture the summit of Hill 95, 300 yards southeast of Managusuku.

82 Air Battle, 51st P.T.



Interior of Ambulance Plane

I was flown to Guam where I would spend 79 days in a Navy hospital. It took over seven hours to fly there. I remember we were given chicken sandwiches on the plane. What a treat.

After weeks of eating cold rations from a can those chicken sandwiches were the best.

That plane ride was the beginning of my road home. Boy did it feel good to get out of there.

I was able to keep up with reports from Guam and then Saipan. We even had more information than the newspapers back home were given.

One thing that made a great impression on me was the clean, white sheets in the hospital. Boy they sure felt good after living in the mud for the past few months.

The food was good and all the staff sure treated us right.

Next stop Field Hospital 115!

Though I did not know it yet, there would be no more fighting for me.



THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO ALL WHO SHALL SEE THESE PRESENTS, GREETING:

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
HAS AWARDED THE

PURPLE HEART

ESTABLISHED BY GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON
AT NEWBURGH, NEW YORK, AUGUST 7, 1782

TO

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS ROLAND J.H. CHAMPAGNE
ARMY OF THE UNITED STATES

FOR WOUNDS RECEIVED

IN ACTION

ON 22 MAY 1945 ON OKINAWA

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND IN THE CITY OF WASHINGTON

THIS 2ND DAY OF OCTOBER 2012


THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY
For General Orders 470, 7 July 1949
Headquarters, 50th Infantry Division
APO 94




SECRETARY OF THE ARMY

HM 4960-10-WT, JAN 2000

Roland Champagne

Military Order of the Purple Heart

Battle of Okinawa

May 22, 1945