

World War II Letters from "Chuck" Pressentin

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## *Luzon Island, Philippines*

*July - December, 1945*

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Actions of Chuck's 475th Battallion on Luzon

July 1945 *The month of July 1945 saw the final preparations of the units to be used in the assault on the Japanese home islands.[The 475th Battallion was one of these units.]*

July 13, 1945 *The 475th AAA AW Bn A/T was assigned the mission of supporting a reinforced regimental combat team that would precede the initial landing.*

July 14, 1945 *After service in New Guinea, the 475th Battalion moved to the island of Luzon in the Philippines. Apparently Chuck's unit was north of "San Fernando" and on the South China Sea.*

August 14, 1945 *President Truman announced that Japan had surrendered. All combat training for Chuck's Battalion was ended.*

September 13, 1945 *The 475th Battalion relieved the 32nd Division in the vicinity of Solano, Nueva Vizcaya, to arrange the surrender and processing of all Japanese troops in that area. The Battalion established outposts near Ibung, and Prisoner of War Stockades at Kiangan, Solano and Aritao and Headquarters at Bayombong. Chuck's unit was based at Solano.*

Philippine Islands



Chuck was first based north of San Fernando (see map at left), which is north of Manila on Luzon.

Then he was based at Solano (red star on map below indicates location of Solano).



Phillippines Letters

September 5, 1945 (approx.)

This is a single page from a letter apparently written to Charles' sister "Snooks" [Louise Presentin Ledbetter] after Charles reached the Phillippines.

You know Snooks—It's sure a good thing this ended when it did. We were really hot as hell when we got the news of Japan's first acceptance.

Our outfit was attached to the 6th Army and we were scheduled to make an Airborne invasion on Japan on D-3. We were going in as guinea pigs to draw the Japs into a trap. We were told our casualties would be as high as 60%. The big show wasn't to start until three days after we landed. Guess you can see now why I'm happy about this damn thing ending when it did. You'll never know what a big plan they had worked out for the invasion of Japan. Believe me; it would have made the Normandy invasion look like a sideshow in comparison. Christ, we were all set to hit them with everything and everywhere. It still would have been a bloody mess.

I doubt very much that I'll be sent to any other zone. Think they'll just keep us here and use us as service troops until our time comes for heading stateside. All the troops have already been picked for the occupation army as far as I know.

Yes I'm only 2 ½ hours' drive from Baguio. I'm 48 miles north of San Fernando and our camp is set right on the ocean which is the China Sea by the way. Get a map and look at the N.W. coast of Luzon.

I'm going into Manila on a three-day pass next Monday the 10th Sept. I'll try and look Tom Soules up. Maybe we can pitch us a good drunk. Hope he's got some stateside whisky. I can't go this local stuff.

Love to all, Chuck

[Postscript] Well how do you feel now? Some letter, huh.

Letters from Solano, Luzon Island

September 17, 1945

The envelope was a pre-stamped, 6-cent airmail envelope dated Sept. 27, 1945

Solana. Nueva Vizcaya, Luzon, P.I.

Dear Pongee and Family,

Well, I've moved again but my APO will remain the same. I'm now in the interior of Luzon, and my job is to disarm, process and intern approx. 16,000 Japs that are still in this area. My boys are really getting a workout.

We've also got a Filipino guerilla army attached to us and between the flips and the Japs we've got our hands full. Christ I've been on the go day and night since I arrived here. In the past four days we've handled nearly 5,000 Japs through our area. We have to strip them, take their name, rank and serial number, what outfit they're from and etc.—then we tag them and ship them on down the line to other stockades closer to the railroads and ports.

We push some of these Jap Generals around just like they should be treated, if you get what I mean. All in all it's really a messy job. These guys have been living on themselves, rats and what else they could find in the mountains. They've had it pretty rough for the last four months. They all are mighty happy to get down here and get our canned rations. Food is the first thing they ask for.

After we clean out this area, I'm hoping we'll be considered for shipment home. There's a rumor we might but I'll not build up any hopes until I see the old golden gate with my own eyes. One thing—I'm mighty glad I didn't have to go to Japan.

I could pick up bushels of Jap souvenirs but all I think I'll keep for myself is a beautiful Jap saber. The rest of the stuff is just so much junk to me. Here's a couple of real Jap yen for Barbs and Noel. I took it away from a Captain today.

Love to all, Chuck

Letters from Solano, Luzon Island

September 27, 1945

Postmark on the "air mail" 6-cent pre-stamped envelope is dated Sept. 28, 1945

Solano, Luzon

Dear Pongee, and Family,

Just a few lines before I roll in for the night. Just came in from a date with a little Filipino 1st Lt. Nurse. She's attached to a Filipino hospital that's set up down the road from us. She's the head nurse. She's quite a gal too. She can really give out the orders when there's work to be done around her sick bay. She rattles off a mouthful in her native tongue and everyone jumps.

Well the 475th finally made the front page. Guess I wrote and told you about us being stuck with the job of cleaning out all the Japs on northern Luzon. The paper says 11,485 but to date we've handled over 23,000 Jap prisoners. Christ, I'm tired of looking at them. Today we had to bury 5 of one bunch on the way down out of the mountains. The stragglers that are coming now are all next to dead. In fact I believe they were left to die by the others that came in voluntarily from this one particular spot. Most of this bunch was all civilians (Jap of course) and have been pretty much neglected by the Jap Army. They've been living on grass, rats, roots and maybe even themselves. Yeh! They're a mess.

Lordy! How I'd like to be home for Xmas. Maybe I'll make it. It all depends on the transportation facilities. I've only got 63 points but that's still way above the average.

Saw Poly [Elwin Dameron, husband of Charles' sister, Mildred. Poly saw service in Europe, and then was transferred to the Pacific.] two weeks ago and may visit him again this weekend. He's at San Fernando and that's 190 miles south of me. It's quite a trip 'cause the roads are still in bad shape.

Love to all, Chuck

Solano, Luzon Island

Enclosed with Chuck's Sept. 17th letter were five pieces of Japanese currency:

Two Ten Yen Japanese bills

Two One Peso bills, with "The Japanese Government" written across the front of the bill.

One "Japanese Government" one centavo bill—about 1 ½" x 3 ½"



Following is a copy of a typewritten account of the activities of Chuck Pressentin's unit in the Philippines from July to October, 1945.

It was enclosed with Charles' letter of Nov. 21, 1945 to his sister, Pauline Kemmerich.

Cover note from Charles paper-clipped to the document:

"This is a little proof from our Battalion records to show you how close I came to being in Japan 6 days before D Day. Yes, we were all set to make the first airborne landing on the Japan mainland. We were told our casualties would have been over 60%."

Solano, Luzon Island

Ack-Ack and Rasin-jack at Solano

The month of July 1945 saw the final preparations of the units to be used in the assault on the Japanese home islands. The 475th AAA AW Bn A/T was assigned the mission of supporting a reinforced regimental combat team that would precede the initial landing. The President's announcement of August 14th that Japan had surrendered brought to an end all combat training. The period of celebration was quickly followed by the disappointment of missing what probably would have been the greatest military operation of the war. It now seemed a question of sweating it out until shipped home.

Perhaps the newly organized Luzon Area Command considered the Battalions' misfortune when the 475th was ordered to relieve the 32nd Division and attached units in the vicinity of Solano, Nueva Vizcaya, to arrange the surrender and processing of all Japanese troops in that area. Establishing outposts near Ibung, PW stockades at Kiangon, Solano and Aritao, and Headquarters at Bayombong, the 475th Bn took over from the 32nd Division at noon, 13 September 1945.

Since American forces had made their drive through the Cagayan Valley, great numbers of Japanese troops were forced into the mountainous terrain on either side of the valley. These mountains of north-central Luzon are unexplored, inhabited by wild tribes and almost impassable. The series of prisoner of war stockades were set up along the only good road in the valley and outposts were located where intelligence reports showed the largest concentration of enemy forces. Certain Japanese officers were appointed liaison men to contact all enemy units and report their strength and disposition. Due to disorganized Japanese communications and poor trails, many small units ordered to report at one location made contact at others, thus complicating coordination of the surrender.

A typical outpost was that of Battery B, in the Mountain Province, seven miles north of Ibung. Scattered over a treacherous trail from the outpost to Battery Hq at Ibung were several ready stations. This system afforded fresh US guards to minimize delay in marching surrendering Japanese columns to Ibung and offered better protection against hostile Philippine civilians. At the outposts, the Japanese gave up all ammunition and automatic weapons. At the Battery Hq they surrendered their side arms and were interrogated and searched. From here the PW's were transported by truck to the various stockades, tagged with name, rank and serial number, further searched and interrogated and sent to the main PW camp at San Jose, fifty miles south.

By 27 September 1945, 19,274 Japanese Army and Navy personnel and civilians had surrendered to the 475th Bn, its attached units, including many from the "Who's Who" of Japanese General Officers. Among them were Lt. General Iwanga of the 2nd Armored Division; Major General Saboo Tuchiya of the 10th Division; Lt. General Nakajima and Major General Terlura, Kira, and Yamomoto of the 14th Area Army; Lt. General Araki and Major General Baba; Major General Yahii, Commanding General of the 12th Line of Communications; Lt. Col. Nakahara, Operations Officer on the staff of General Yamashita; and Admiral Matura of the Imperial Navy.

In spite of the long tedious hours of work during the surrender there were many events memorable to troops of the battalion. Many Japanese spoke English fluently and had lived in the States prior to the war. One prisoner asked an American Sergeant how many points he had. When told that the sergeant had 70 points he remarked, "Hell you haven't got even enough to go to Manila." One night, as prisoners were being processed at Ibung, a Jap Lieutenant looking as innocent as a saint stepped up to the Battery Commander and saluted. He was quickly searched for weapons, and as an added precaution his hat was removed—the usual hiding place for grenades. Stacked on top of his head were twenty silver pesos which showered down to the floor. A sheepish grin crept over the lieutenant's face and the room roared with laughter. It was interesting to note that many Filipino collaborators tried to turn themselves in as Japanese troops. In one instance a Japanese Filipino admitted after long interrogation that he had personally murdered over two hundred Filipino civilians and guerrillas. On 5 October 1945, the Battalion moved back to its bivouac area on the shores of Linguayan Gulf.

*Letter written while Chuck was based on the shores of Linguayan Gulf,
south of Baguio, Luzon Island*

November 21, 1945

Postmark on the "air mail" 6-cent pre-stamped envelope is dated Nov. 22, 1945. The envelope has a stamp "Passed by US Army Examiner 25790" and written initials

[Word illegible], Luzon

Dear Pongee, and Family,

I've been an awfully busy guy the past couple of weeks—have been up to my ears in bookwork. Lordy! We've been transferring men in and out by the dozens trying to get all men with over 70 points and under 55 points out of our outfit. It looks like the 475th is going back to the States as an outfit composed of nothing but 55 – 69 point men.

If so, this means I'll have to work right up to the last day that the outfit exists. I was hoping I'd be relieved and just sent home as a casual. That way I wouldn't have a damn thing to worry about.

So far no definite date has been set yet for our trip home. I was eligible by my points for discharge the 1st of November but since our unit is going home intact my points don't mean a thing. Christ I had high hopes of being home by Xmas. By now I'll be lucky as hell if I make it by Jan. 15.

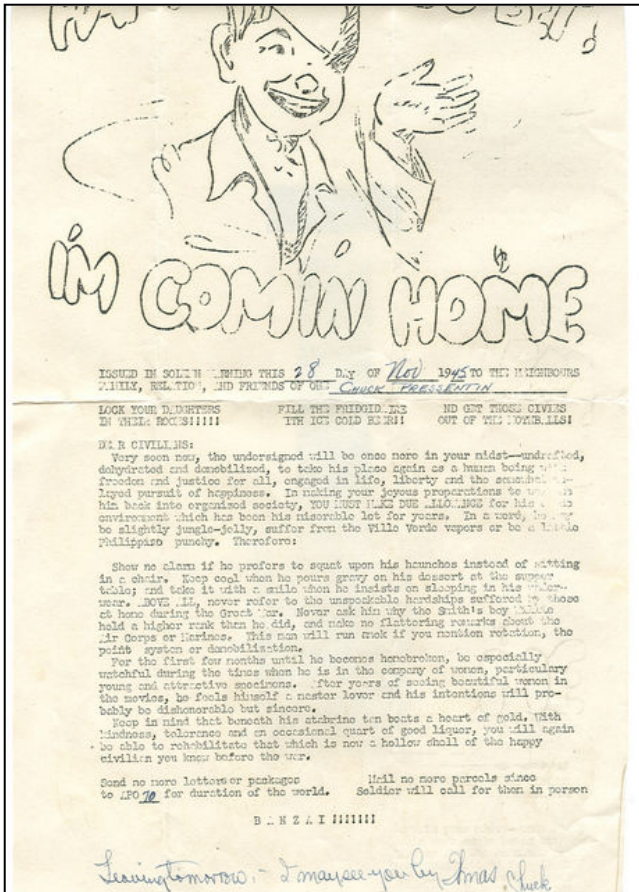
About my postwar plans. Well Pop's health will probably keep me at home and maybe after all that's the way it should be. I've had several other offers but now I'll just probably marry one of my gals, build me a house and see if I can't continue on with Pop's work.

It might surprise you bit I think my future wife and baby girl is living just a stone's throw from you. Yeh! Of all the gals I've been stringing along, this little Portland gal (She was in Los Angeles while I was stationed there) would make the best wife for a small town plumber. You'll be the first one in the family to meet her no doubt. I'll let you pass an opinion before I make any serious moves. O.K.

*So for tonight
Love to all, Chuck*

November 28, 1945

This is my transcription of the "form letter" (below, left) apparently provided to troops being sent home after Japan surrendered. Charles sent it to his sister, Pauline Kemmerich.



I'M COMIN HOME

ISSUED IN SOLEMN WARNING THIS 28 DAY OF NOV 1945 TO THE NEIGHBOURS, FAMILY, RELATIONS, AND FRIENDS OF ONE CHUCK PRESENTIN

LOCK YOUR DAUGHTERS IN THEIR ROOM!!!!
FILL THE FRIDGIDAIRE WITH ICE COLD BEER!! AND GET THOSE CIVIES OUT OF THE MOTHBALLS!

DEAR CIVILIANS:

Very soon now, the undersigned will be once more in your midst—undrafted, dehydrated and demobilized, to take his place again as a human being with freedom and justice for all, engaged in life, liberty and the somewhat delayed pursuit of happiness. In making your joyous preparations to welcome him back into organized society, YOU MUST MAKE DUE ALLOWANCE for his crude environment which has been his miserable lot for years. In a word, he may be slightly jungle-jolly, suffer from the Ville Verde vapors or be a little Philippino punchy. Therefore:

Show no alarm if he prefers to squat upon his hanches instead of sitting in a chair. Keep cool when he pours gravy on his dessert at the supper table; and take it with a smile when he insists on sleeping in his underwear. ABOVE ALL, never refer to the unspeakable hardships suffered by those at home during the Great War. Never ask him why the Smith's boy Willie held a higher rank than he did, and make no flattering remarks about the Air Corps or Marines. This man will run amok if you mention rotation, the point system or demobilization.

For the first few months until he becomes homebroken, be especially watchful during the times when he is in the company of women, particularly young and attractive specimens. After years of seeing beautiful women in the movies, he feels himself a master lover and his intentions will probably be dishonorable but sincere.

Keep in mind that beneath his atabrine tan beats a heart of gold. With kindness, tolerance and an occasional quart of good liquor, you will again be able to rehabilitate that which is now a hollow shell of the happy civilian you knew before the war.

Send no more letters or packages to APO 70 for duration of the world. Mail no more parcels since Soldier will call for them in person. BANZAI !!!!!!!

Send no more letters or packages to APO 70 for duration of the world. Mail no more parcels since Soldier will call for them in person. BANZAI !!!!!!!

[Chuck added a note at the bottom of the document]

Leaving tomorrow—I may see you by Xmas. Chuck

Dec. 11, 1945-- In letters to their daughter, Pauline, Chuck's parents say that "Charles should be able to make it here by Xmas. He was to have boarded a ship about the 7th of Dec. We think he is on the water and should be close to Pearl Harbor by this time. He was transferred to a Tank Battalion headed for home."