E. D. Winstead’s letter June 18, 1992 to Asbury L. Nix,

author of the book *Corregidor: Oasis of Hope (1991)*.

(RLW: I have retyped this letter written by my father, and it contains a number of stories I heard my father tell. I think he wrote them down for Asbury Nix since Asbury Nix was also a POW in the Philippines.)

Mr. Asbury L. Nix

1541 Ellis St.

Stevens Point, WI 54481

18 June 1992

Dear Mr. Nix:

I have read “Corregidor Oasis of Hope” and am having a bit of trouble in finding a word to describe my reaction. Pleasant and enjoyment come to mind, but an in depth review of the Corregidor experience is hardly a joy. Bittersweat (RLW: based on the rest of the sentence - bittersweet?) is perhaps a better description – both painful and pleasant. I tend to agree with you that being on Corregidor as a POW and not at Cabanatuan for the duration probably saved my life. After the detail’s return to Cabanatuan from Corregidor in late 1942 or January 1943 friends were amazed and happy at our physical condition. Luck played an amazing part.

I was ordered to PI (as a CAC Staff Sergeant, Electrician) and sailed from San Francisco in May 1939. The trip was pleasant for my wife and me, even the four days on the reef in Guam. During my assignment on Corregidor to the Artillery Engineer Section as a Fire Control Electrician I was sent to Ft. Frank for about four months as the American Fire Control Electrician. On 8 August 1940, I was called to active duty as a 2nd Lt. and assigned to E Btry 91st CAC(PS) with Captain Joe East as Btry Commander. Later I was scheduled to be assigned to Ft. Wint, but when the Bn Commander learned that my wife was pregnant the assignment was changed due to a Harbor Defense policy not to send pregnant women to outpost such as Ft. Wint. I was transferred to E Btry, 92nd CAC(PS) with Lt. Steve Farris, Btry Commander, and Lt. Col Biggs (who was later beheaded by the Japanese – Col. Biggs was the father-in-law of Capt. Hauck). The primary duty of Col. Biggs’ Bn was guarding Bilibid prisoners on Corregidor. Ironic that I later became a Bilibid prisoner. Sometime about March 1941 I was summarily assigned to the Harbor Defense Ordnance Office. Neither my Bn Commander, Col. Biggs, nor my Btry Commander, Lt. Farris, knew anything about a potential transfer. I was somewhat concerned because that was the third change in assignment in about

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eight months. After a couple of weeks at the Ordnance Office, my ego was stroked a little when I learned that Col. Barry, the Harbor Defense Ordnance Officer had asked for me by name. That transfer was another stroke of luck which turned out to be the reason that I was returned to Manila and Corregidor by the Japanese.

A low point was time spent at the 92nd garage area. O/a 23 May 1942 we were loaded onto ships anchored on the southside of Corregidor, off loaded onto landing barges and summarily dumped into waist-deep water just off Dewey Blvd. After a very short stay in Bilibid, I took the train ride to Cabanatuan – a little packed in – remained overnight in a school yard, and marched to Camp #3 (about 15 miles, I think) the next day. I think that I was not with the first group to arrive at Camp #3, but part of one of the early groups. It soon became evident that I had not packed judiciously – no mosquito net, etc. After about a week, someone told me that my name was on the bulletin board and scheduled for a trip to Manila. I checked, and sure enough, there it was, scheduled for departure the next morning. The title was “Keeper of the Warehouse of Bullets” – one way to say Ordnance Officer or for the Japanese at that time – “Ammunitions Officer.”

I think that there were two trucks used to transfer the detail to Manila. We arrived late in the afternoon or early night, were fed; rice, curry with meat, and bread. The next morning the interrogation began and lasted for about two weeks. They had detailed information, accurate, of what ships, when and with what cargo came into Manila and to Corregidor. For instance, they would state that “on a (specific date) the ship by name arrived in Manila, ammunition (powder, etc.) by specific type and caliber was off loaded onto a barge, towed to Corregidor, and you (meaning me by name) unloaded the ammo and stored it. Added to the amount of ammo you had on hand and in storage, that made a total of (a specific number). It was easy to see that they were interested in evidence which would show that we had violated the “Limitation of Arms Agreement” of about 1922. By countering with the number of deteriorated powder rounds destroyed by burning, normally out in the Kindley Field Area, I at least disrupted their arithmetic. Whether or not I convinced them, I have no way of knowing.

After about two weeks, the detail was shipped to Corregidor to join the salvage detail. We were housed for a short time in what had been the Market Place of San Jose Barrio at bottomside. The interrogation began all over. At first, we thought that the two groups were checking our stories from the Manila interrogation, but later decided that

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like many other armies, one group didn’t communicate with the other, and in fact, it was a duplication of effort.

Two Japanese officers, on a staff car picked me up each morning and after the session of interrogation, inspected the ammo storage on Corregidor. I complained to them about the accommodations – the slatted sides of the Market with the rain blowing in, and the fact that there were many buildings left on Corregidor which would do a better job. One morning soon after that, the two Japanese officers appeared, somewhat sleepy and disgruntled. It seems that they had been kept awake most of the night by a leaky roof. Very soon after that, we moved into the Station Hospital. Whether my request for better accommodations had any bearing on the decision to move us, I have no way of knowing. But regardless of the reasons for our moving, the Hospital Area was much better than the Market Place. The interrogation came to an end, abruptly, as in Manila, and we joined others on the salvage details.

I remember being sent over to Ft. Hughes with a group for a relatively short period of time, but I don’t remember who was in charge of the detail. At other times I worked with loading fifty gallon drums with debris from a burned out ammunition warehouse and also loading streetcar rails from the Middleside Bilibid Prison Area. Lt. Tokashige (I don’t remember his name, but I assume that from your book, he is the one who was in charge and lived in the Hospital Area) gave a mild criticism for using 6 men to move a streetcar rail. He thought 4 would be enough. I basically challenged him to pick up on one side, with me on the other, and we would see if 4 men were enough. I used the old dodge of picking up a little faster and shifting more weight to his side. He agreed that 6 men was a better distribution, took it graciously, and I suffered no repercussions.

I’m not sure of the exact sequence, but I took a detail of about 30 men to Ft. Frank and the Japanese NCO in charge was Tech Sgt (gunso?) Kometo (spelling in doubt) and we got along quite well. When a Japanese supply boat (two crew members) came to Ft. Frank Sgt Kemeto (RLW: spelling not consistent) and I went (over night) to Nasugbu where I was able to order a complete Chicken dinner and bought two live pigs, 10 dozen eggs, 30 cartons of cigarettes, coconuts, limes, comotes, squash, and I’m not sure just what else – took two carametta carts to take the items back to the boat. (RLW: At the end of this letter see more details of this episode, e.g., the source of the money, from an excerpt\* from another document.) The boat crew were drinking synthetic “Scoth Whisky” from a saucer and eating something I thought to be shrimp,

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but I learned a little later that it was raw fish. Too late, pass the shrimp. I was more interested in the raw fish than the whisky.

At the surrender, Col. Kirkpatrick had some of the powder cans opened and sprayed the magazine with sea water. After a period of time the chemical action caused it to “ferment” and bubble. We convinced the Japanese that pretty soon – “boom.” I took a detail to Ft. Drum and emptied the powder (both good and bad, 6 in charges, as well as charges for the 14 inch guns. The detail worked rapidly and hard to complete the job before the Japanese found out just what we were doing. We moved the powder charges on warehouse carts, through the projectile room, sometimes spilling black powder, and fortunately had no accidents. The bags were ripped and dumped into the bay out of the north sallyport. I had a run in with the Japanese NCO in charge. He promised a day – or an afternoon off – and reneged on the commitment. We took the time off anyway, and needless to say, he was furious. The upshot was that he had me work and the rest of the detail could rest. He thought that he saved face – and I was able to give the detail a break.

To complete the salvage job at Frank, I took the detail back to Frank, but with a different Japanese NCO. I told Kameto that the detail would not work for the guard we called Donald Duck. Kameto said that he could not go on the detail. We dragged out the detail for an extended period of time, and finally when we were ordered back to Corregidor, Donald Duck had orders to New Guinea. As your account of Tokashige’s orderly giving him a hot bath, we did the same to Donald Duck. He asked me if I could arrange for him to get a bath. Of course. We got a fifty gallon drum, put it on cement blocks in a corner of the gun position and filled it with water. I sent a soldier down to the powder room to get a 50 pound bag of powder. I’m sorry that I do not remember the soldier’s name, but if he survived, I’m sure that he will remember the scenario. I told him to heat the water, being very careful to test the water temperature and to be sure that it was right for a bath. I was sure that the Japanese would test the temperature. He did. Next day was a repeat performance. That continued for a few days and he did exactly as I expected. He failed to test the temperature. For a couple more days, the same procedure. The next day I told the soldier who was stoking the fire with the powder to “boil him.” He did and with amazing results. Donald Duck stepped into his “boiling” bath and his reaction was like a rocket at Canaveral – straight up. A pink, par boiled Japanese sergeant. Strange, but there were no repercussions.

I think Lt. Tokoshige made at least two visits to Frank while we were there on the second tour. I had convinced Donald Duck that he and I should go to Nasugbu on the

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supply boat, but when the boat came in the Lt. was on board and Donald Duck backed out. The interpreter was on board so I asked him to ask the Lt. if I could go to Nasugbu with him to buy food. The interpreter was afraid and said that he could not do that. I

insisted and he finally did ask. The Lt. asked only one question – “do you have money?” Yes. OK. Again I was able to buy supplies for the detail. (RLW: Again, at the end of this letter, see the excerpt from another document for the source of the money.)

The time frame must have been sometime in August 1942. Prior to that time, we could listen to Donald Duck’s radio and get the news from Tokyo and San Francisco. But when the U.S. moved into Guadalcanal the Japanese prohibited our access to the news. He listened to his radio, one string Japanese music, much to our chagrin. He locked the radio in a cabinet when he was not there. But the door could be opened enough for me to get to the radio power cord. While the detail was down on the dock working, I put 110 Volts, DC through a 6 or 12 volt circuit. It spit, popped, smoked, and quit. But we were not bothered with the Japanese music after that. When Lt. Tokoshige and the interpreter came over very soon after that, the Lt. asked the Interpreter to ask me “Why I broke the radio?” I heard the question coming, recognized enough of it not to be caught entirely flat footed and hedged that “no American could have broken the radio. It was locked up and we could not even listen to it.” I never told anyone that I broke the radio until I was on the Mariposa headed to San Francisco. On the radio sabotage, I worked alone.

As the “Keeper of the Warehouse of Bullets” I accompanied a Japanese team sent over to collect samples of powder for analysis. The samples were collected and placed into separate, labeled, brown envelopes. In the rain, it was a simple matter to allow them to get damp. Test results – no good – destroy. We took powder, stacked charges, from Btry Wheeler, and hurriedly burned it on topside parade ground. Hauled it to the parade ground on a flatbed truck. I do not know who the truck driver was. There was nothing wrong with the powder. On the last load, orders came to take the last load to bottomside and burn it on the beach. Mission completed without the Japanese knowing that we were actually destroying good equipment.

I was directed to count, or to take an inventory of the ammunition on Corregidor. I could have completed a list at one sitting, but if the Japanese wanted me to count it, that was one way of passing time – and gave me unlimited access to the island. From time to time Sgt Kameto would ask questions about ammo, types of fuzes (RLW: “fuze” = standard military term for an artillery fuse) with what projectile, etc., and if I gave a

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“questionable” answer the first chance I had I coordinated with “Red” (and I do not remember his last name) who was an American civilian ammo technician, and told him what I had told Kameto so we would give the same story. That worked well, but often, in two or three days Kameto would let me know that the info which I had given to him was slightly in error. I do not know who was feeding him corrected information. I was given a card which in effect was a pass to any place on the island and stated that I was on duty, without a guard, for the Japanese. It took the Japanese a considerable length of time – months – to figure that the color code markings on the ammo boxes actually meant something. I just counted boxes of 30 caliber ammo and multiplied by 1000.

The freedom of movement offered many opportunities for finding some caches of food, clean clothes (I did no laundry until I went back to Cabanatuan), and to spot and know the location of weapons. Captain Ed. Rosenstock, USMA class of 1938, asked me if I could get a 45 automatic for him. Yes, I could. I asked how many clips, rounds, holster, belt, etc. He wanted three clips of ammo, the automatic and nothing else. I picked it up the next day, stuck it inside my shirt and belt, and walked back to the Hospital area. I felt a little conspicuous and figured that the weapon bulged as if I were pregnant. As prearranged, I put the gun and clips under Captain Rosenstock’s pillow and never heard anything more about it. I have no idea why he wanted the weapon, unless he was collecting equipment for a possible escape.

The Harbor Defense Ordnance Department kept a two year supply of target practice ammo on hand. The projectiles were painted blue and the cavity was loaded with sand at the appropriate time to bring them up to desired weight. They wee pure hunks of good metal, weighing from about 800 to about 1400 pounds, depending on the caliber. The Japanese never understood just what they were, and when I left Corregidor, they were still stored in Malinta tunnel and being handled very carefully. I think they thought them to be gas shells.

As in any other group, there were friends, some acquaintances, some just tolerated, and others ignored. I appreciate and agree with your kind words about Col. Kirkpatrick and Lt. Sense. Kirkpatrick died a few months after I returned to Cabanatuan. I saw George Sense in Texas about 1946. And of course, thee were other friends too on the Corregidor detail. And that brings me to one in particular who was not a friend of mine. John J. Coughlin lived separately from most of the other POWs, with a few of his early detail and there was a very limited association with him by most of the other POWs. He enjoyed preferential treatment from the Japanese to include additional food. You mention on page 62 that “Captain Coughlin was an experienced ordnance

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officer.” He was a civilian machinist on duty with the Harbor Defense Ordnance Detachment. During the early stages of the war the problem and subject of overtime pay came up. The solution was to commission him and the pay scale of a captain was agreed upon. I objected then and still think that it was a mistake. His commissioning cheapened the grade. He was without character, integrity, loyalty, and patriotism. His later behavior was treasonous. He was not forced to aid the Japanese – he volunteered his expertise as a machinist to repair and place back into service the weapons on Corregidor and all for a mess of porridge. He asked me to join his detail. Why? I’m not sure but speculate that if I were on his detail it would lend a degree of legitimacy and as his past supervisor would prevent any legal action. He was warned by me and Col. Kirkpatrick and told – one on one, face to face, that if he and we survived, he would face a court martial. At one point he discussed with me a plan of his to go to Japan, as a machinist, and the salary of $600 dollars per month was mentioned. Small wonder that I threatened him with a court martial. And on page 54 you state “Captain Coughlin, Ord(i)nance, inspected the powder magazines and assured the Japanese that some of the powder was old, unstable and should be destroyed. The Japanese had men haul the powder to the south beach at Bottomside and spread it out in a long windrow and set on fire.” Whatever your source, it is in error. Coughlin not only had nothing to do with ammunition, he knew nothing about ammo of any kind. If I remember correctly, only one load was burned at Bottomside and I did that. The other loads were burned at Topside Parade ground.

Obviously, I was not there and of course not privy to what went on when Captain Coughlin was summoned to the Japanese quarters and Lt. Tokashige explained what was to be the work of the small group. From what I know of Coughlin, I have no doubt that his behavior again was to volunteer his services and continue his obsequious behavior as the consummate traitor and sycophant. If I sound a bit bitter, it is because an American “officer” was a traitor, by definition and intent, and further, that the officer was one who had been under my supervision. I did not know that Coughlin had returned to Cabanatuan and do not know when he left for Japan. He obviously did not want to see me. (RLW: Captain John J. Coughlin is listed as “Service Personnel Not Recovered Following WWII for the UNITED STATES ARMY” and “Date of Loss” as October 24, 1944 on the ARISAN MARU – a Japanese “hell ship” containing 1,781 POWs from the Philippines heading for Japan and torpedoed by an American submarine. “No POWs were killed by the torpedo strikes and nearly all were able to leave the ship’s holds but the Japanese did not rescue any of the POWs that day.”)

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As well as I can remember, I must have returned to Cabanatuan during December 1942 and prior to the 21st of December. Assuming that Gen. Wright was correct that Red Cross supplies arrived on Corregidor on 21st of December 1942, I was gone by that time. I received no Red Cross supplies while on Corregidor and only one half of a Red Cross package during my entire stay as a “guest of the Japanese.” I figured that I was “shanghaied” back to Cabanatuan for refusing to take the explosives out of shells. Kameto and his superiors wanted me to take the explosive “D” out of the 10 and 12 inch shells, and the TNT out of the 155 mm shells so that the metal could be shipped to Japan. Relatively simple job. The explosive “D” could be drilled out and the TNT could be melted out with a steam jet. The only problem and real danger was that the fuzes (RLW: “fuze” = standard military term for an artillery fuse) had to be removed from the big shells and that is normally done behind a barricade. I was promised total cooperation, the authority to pick my own detail, and to be able to work with no Japanese guards. My answer was no. The pressure continued for a week or two, and when my answer continued to be no, I found myself on the detail going back to Cabanatuan. There were no heroics. One does what must be done under the circumstances at the time.

I was on the last group to leave Cabanatuan to Bilibid for shipment to Japan. Quite a show for a while. Japs brought ships in and the US Navy fliers sank them. We thought that the Japanese would not be able to move us. After having been in reasonably good condition (compared to many others) for the duration, with minor bouts of diarrhea, o/a 10 December 1944 I was weak and dizzy and something just wasn’t right. Friends helped me to the clinic or dispensary. Captain John J. Brennan, MC (RLW: “Medical Corps (United States Army), a corps that consists of all physicians of the U.S. Army Medical Department”), looked, tested a little, admitted me to the hospital, and started giving me a sulphur drug which was in very short supply. I thought at the time that I must be worse off than I thought. About midnight, I knew that I was sick. Dr. Brennan told me about the 11th of Dec. that the Japanese were going to be making an inspection the next day and best that I “look sick.” Sure enough, on the 12th the Japanese (Doctor, I assume) came down the line and when the condition was stated by Brennan, the Japanese rendered his judgement, such as, duty, hospital, etc. When he came to me and asked what was my ailment, Dr. Brennan said “Dysentery” and the Japanese Doctor said “Isolation.” And that is exactly what happened. The morning of the 13th 1619 POW’s (many of my friends) moved out to the dock area and ultimate destruction, and later that day I was moved into an isolation ward, a room about 16 feet square, three walls, a roof, no windows, with one side of the room which opened to the outside and daylight being closed by bars. It was real isolation. I think that

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there were about half dozen of us in the room. I had no complaints and the dysentery was pretty well under control pretty soon. I’m not sure, but I think that I remained in the isolation area for a couple of weeks. I don’t remember the exact time, but after I was ordered to isolation, Brennan told me: “I know that I told you to look sick, but you did not have to over do it.” I told him that I appreciated the warning, but it was no act. I was sick.

The rescue from Bilibid is history. I was the recipient of many “breaks” or good fortune such as my assignment to the Harbor Defense Ordnance Department and my return to Manila and Corregidor, and in a strange way, getting sick when I did. I lost some very good friends on the last ships. One can go stark raving mad trying to figure out the “whys.”

Of course there are other memories of the time as a POW with some of them interesting such as the dismantling of the Searchlight on Ft. Frank. But I have rambled too long already. I wrote this directly on the machine, without an outline, and without it having been seriously edited. Hope it is not too disconnected.

Best Wishes

E. D. Winstead

\* (RLW: Additional information from <http://raywinstead.com/edw/edwautobiopart3.shtm> )

I was in charge of a salvage detail to Fort Frank.  There was a small Japanese garrison on the Island in addition to the three guards with us.  The senior guard with us was a Tech Sergeant.  We liked him and worked reasonably well for him.  The food was not the best, but we were able to supplement it with what we found on the island.  I convinced the senior guard to take me on the small Japanese supply boat down to Nasugbu, a small town about two hours down the coast to buy food in the market.  It was an interesting trip.  The Japanese Sergeant had an American 45 caliber automatic.  On the trip down the coast he amused himself by shooting at flying fish.  I asked to look at his gun.  He handed it to me and I looked at it a little closely and the

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barrel was pretty rusty.  I field stripped the weapon (about nine different pieces) and handed it back to him and told him to clean it.  He followed me around the boat asking that I put it back together.  At the market the guard told me to stay in the market and I would be OK and he would be back a little later.  In the market, I stopped at one stall and ordered 30 cartons of cigarettes, 10 dozen eggs, 100 coconuts, limes, comotes, calabasas, egg plants, other vegetables and two live pigs.  The young lady operating the market stall said: “But Sir, I do not have all of that.”  I asked: “Is it in the market?”  “Yes, Sir.”  “Then get it and put it in a pile here.”  She felt a little embarrassed when she asked if I had money.  I opened a shoulder bag which I was carrying and showed her about 400 silver pesos.  She was a little “bug eyed” at the sight of real money.

This is probably a good place to explain the source of the Silver Pesos.  The Philippine treasury transferred gold, silver, stocks, bonds, records, and silver pesos to Corregidor.  In early May the U.S. Submarine Trout came in with a load of supplies and took the gold bullion out as ballast.  There were another fifty tons of gold bullion and over a hundred tons of silver to be disposed of to prevent its falling into the hands of the Japanese.  The silver pesos were dumped into the deepest waters of San Jose Bay between Corregidor and Fort Hughes.  I do not know whether the gold bullion was dumped also.  Soon after the surrender, the Japanese were aware of the dumping.  They tried salvage operations initially with Filipino divers without success.  The water was too deep.  Then they collected a crew of American divers with limited success.  The Americans bargained for better equipment and good, separate living facilities on the barge.  Some records show that the Japanese retrieved about two million pesos.  The American divers were loyal to their friends.  They were successful in skimming a considerable number of pesos over a period of time.  They lent, gave away, and cashed checks for some American prisoners.  When the silver pesos began showing up in the Philippine economy the Kempeitai (Japanese Military Police) began investigating.  They knew that the source had to be the divers.  The divers’s living quarters on the barge were searched a couple times with no success.  The searches produced no evidence.

While the market stall operator assembled my order I went into a restaurant and ordered a complete chicken dinner. I ate it and enjoyed

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it and the fact that about half the town were watching through a wire fence from the sidewalk did not bother nor intimidate me at all.  The Sergeant came back before I had finished, sat down and I ordered a beer for him.  My  market food order was ready by the time I finished lunch.  I had to be very careful when I paid for the order with the contraband silver pesos to prevent the Sergeant from seeing them.