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Dear Mother and Dash¹:

Feb. 24, 1944

Herein lies an accurate, complete, and detailed account of my activities since leaving the states. Some of the following may be reiteration, but in the event that some may have been deleted under the old censor rules, I am not leaving anything out.

I left the States with General D. Bright early on the sixth of December. The first stop was at Hickam Field, Hawaii, where we spent four hours. After a drive through Honolulu and supper at the Officers' Club, back we went to the plane. It had taken us about eleven hours from the West Coast to Hawaii. After leaving Hawaii, Canton Island was our next stop and it was reached just before daylight. There had been some rough weather on that leg of the trip and several passengers and members of the crew got sick. For some odd reason it did not bother either the General or myself. Had breakfast and the General received a telegram to get off at the next stop, Fiji. We had been scheduled to go on to New Caledonia.

We joined the *Americal Division*² in Fiji and were there about two weeks. Fiji is a fairly populated island group where sugar and a little rice are grown. The natives of the island are for the most part black as coal and the men have very powerful builds. They are not much on work however, and so the English imported a lot of labor from India. The Indians live like the native Fijians, but are even less sanitary. White man's diseases have raised hell with the natives and I guess the Indians brought plenty of their own brand from India.

The General flew up to our next location, Bougainville, Solomon Islands (where I still am), but I took the trip by convoy. It turned out to be a good move because I had a week of sea voyaging and the Navy food was superb. They live far better than the Army both when on land or ship. I ate, slept, read, and took sun-baths.

¹ Dash is the nickname of Capt. Robert P. Chew's father, John A. Chew.

² The **23rd Infantry Division**, more commonly known as the **Americal Division**, of the [United States Army](#) was activated 27 May 1942 on the island of [New Caledonia](#).^{[1][2]} In the immediate emergency following [Pearl Harbor](#), the United States had hurriedly sent three individual regiments to defend New Caledonia against a feared Japanese attack. This division was the only division formed outside of United States territory during World War II (a distinction it would repeat when reformed during the Vietnam War).^[3] At the suggestion of a subordinate, the division's commander, [Major General Alexander Patch](#), requested that the new unit be known as the *Americal Division*—the name being a contraction of "**American, New Caledonian Division**". This was unusual, as most U.S. divisions are known by a number. After World War II the Americal Division was officially re-designated as the 23rd Infantry Division. However, it was rarely referred to as such, even on official orders.

Not knowing the situation at our destination, I fully expected to be received by an air attack as we pulled into our destination that morning. However, the Jap air force had not made an air attack in the daytime since the fighter strip had been in operation. I landed on shore and ran into the general immediately. No one had a helmet on and I began to see right off the bat that the war was going to be fought in a sensible fashion as regarded the uniform. No one had a shirt on and most were in shorts or nothing. Being an apostle of the sun, I joined right in and removed my shirt.

After a week or two we were quite well set-up. We had three officers to a tent and a screened mess hall with electricity till ten at night (unless the Japs came over before that time). Except for the monotony of the food there was little to complain about. The staff consisted of several ex-Harvard men and West Pointers and it was a congenial crew to work with. Most of the division is from Boston or New England which I prefer to an all-southern outfit.

Some of the night air raids were quite good shows, but the Japs never attacked in force nor did they ever do any real damage. How they could miss the air strips I could not see, but they rarely got near. Their raids were merely harassing and never did more than kill an occasional unfortunate soldier. One or two bombs fell in and around our area, but no one was hurt. AA (*Anti-Aircraft Artillery*) fire at night is really a spectacle and the noise is enough to awaken the dead.

One day there was to be an attack by the infantry on some Jap dug-in positions across the mouth of a river. The general was going up to see the show from behind the lines. He took me and a Sergeant from headquarters. We got to the front just as our artillery concentration opened-up. On the path up, we ran into a Lt. Col. And a Major from one of our artillery battalions. We all walked up to the outpost wire apron and sat down on a log to watch the artillery falling several hundred yards to the front of us in the jungle. Dive-bombing and previous artillery had stripped the trees of almost all their foliage and the area ahead of us looked much like a wood hit by a hurricane. We could see the effect of the fire very well.

After a while our 81 mm. mortars started to open-up. The role of the mortar in the concentration fire is to fill in the gap between the falling artillery and the front elements of the infantry. Well, the General allowed as to how the mortars were likely to start falling too close for comfort, so he and the other officers went to a foxhole about fifteen yards or so to the rear. The Sergeant and I dove into a hole ten yards to the left of the log, where we found an infantry private. We were as far forward as anyone. It lasted for about forty minutes and got quite hot. Our mortars started falling all around and some fell short injuring slightly several of our own men. Also, the Japs started to throw some mortars back at us.



When the fire lifted, the infantry started through the gap in the wire in front of our hole, so the Sergeant and I fell into line with them and, as I told you, ended up in front of the attack where we drew the first fire of the day and I was pinned down with a dead Marine for about a half hour. We stayed with the forward elements for about three hours then I made my way to the rear and ran into the General. A little while later a call come down to send a stretcher crew up for a wounded. None was available and so when someone found a stretcher by the trail I went with it to drag the man out. On the way up, I stumbled into a foxhole mined with grenades, but was lucky and did not rip the wires. Got the man out and thus ended the day. I was very pleased because I had found out that I did not get nervous under fire—in fact, it did not bother me at all. Having always wondered, it was nice to finally find out.

The General told me that in the future I was not to get up to the front element of the fighting. I had no intention to do so again. Unfortunately, when up there the second time to watch the infantry and tanks attack the same sector, I was standing behind a tree when a Captain crawled back wounded in the feet. He was Harvard '37 and cool as a cucumber. The bones were sticking out of one foot and there was nothing I could do but put some sulfa on and tell him to get to the rear a few more yards where a stretcher could pick him up. He did not want to leave, however, saying that he had been with a colonel and some others up in front of the lines where they had wandered to by mistake. They were in a bad way, he said, and he had to get help to them. I told him I would go up, take in the situation, remove them, or come back for the necessary help. On

that he started to crawl back. I did not think of the General's order nor would I have obeyed it under the circumstances if I had. The Sergeant and I started out as we passed the infantry elements I asked them to cover us as long as they could.

The Sergeant and I made the tree behind which the wounded had fallen or been dragged by the only man in the outfit not hit--a sergeant who was there guarding the three wounded. The tanks were in a line some fifteen yards in front of us. That sounds close, but unfortunately it did us no good. They have very limited vision and had passed behind the first line of resistance without wiping them out. As a result, two Japs in a hole in front of the tree had gotten these three men with hand grenades. A tank did see them and fixed their goose. But on our right a sniper had the spot covered and every time you moved he would let fly with a hand grenade or a shot. He was just out of grenade range, but they came close enough for me.

An aid man came up and patched one man who had lost half his stomach. It was the Colonel. Then the aid man got petrified and would not squirm over the other two men as they were being watched by the Jap. I worked over and got one man hit through the back of the neck back to the roots of the tree. He got on my back as I lay on my stomach and I tried to pull us along the ground by grabbing roots. It was no go, however, for he was too heavy, bled too badly on being moved, and we did not have enough defilade to get to cover to the rear.

I put him down and tried to stop the bleeding, but could not figure out how. He was hit in such a spot that you could not block off the artery. I had the aid man toss me some morphine and I crawled to a small dent in the ground to his rear about four yards. The third man had his leg blown off completely between knee and ankle. I thought he was dead because he was laying on his back stretched across the roots of the tree. It turned out that he was not. He did not dare move because the sniper would have seen it and finished him off. He was exposed to the sniper and, so he gritted his teeth and played dead. A tank pulled back and in doing so got between him and the Jap for a minute. During that time, he got to comparative safety behind the tree.

We lay there trying to figure out how to get them out when the tanks suddenly decided to withdraw. They did not know of the situation behind them and when they pulled back it left us with no protection whatsoever. We had one rifle among us. As they pulled back several Japs in a bunker ten yards to our left started out of the entrance. Evidently, they heard the tanks pulling back and were going to make a break for their rear. Their pillbox was so cleverly camouflaged that none of us had seen or suspected it being there.

As the first Jap came out, he saw us and reached for a hand grenade. The Sergeant with us was looking the other way and did not see him. However, at that point a demolition squad of infantry was almost up to us. The leading one had a rifle and saw the other Jap at the same time as did. He tried to fire, but his gun jammed. It looked like an embarrassing place to be in at that moment. Luck was with us and the (*soldier with the*) flame-thrower behind the rifleman saw the situation and in a flash, he had his thrower going and he ran forward with it--catching the Jap full

in the flame. Another started out of the pill box and got the same. Then the (*soldier with the*) flame-thrower ran to the entrance and cooked three more inside. It was damn quick thinking and acting on his part.

It seemed the best thing to try to get to the rear and send the tanks back to cover the evacuation of the wounded, as we started to squirm back, and infantryman stuck his head up to look forward. Before I had the time to warn him the sniper let go. The bullet nicked a twig directly over my head and caught the man squarely in the throat killing him in a few seconds³. We got back finally and sent the necessary aid.

I kept the story from the General for a while, but he found out when the Sergeant with me was put for a commendation⁴. He called me in and told me to report to the Service Battery, 246th Field Artillery Bn. I flared up immediately, turned on my heel without saying anything and left. I was infuriated because when I got to the battalion the commanding officer told me he was under strict orders not to let me go near the front lines. That embarrassed me and made me even madder. I figured that the General meant to keep me in a Service Battery the rest of the war and thereby keep me as far in the rear as possible. On leaving, he said, something about disobeying an order and how he felt responsible to you for my safety. Not wanting any such favoritism & feeling that disobeying the order under the circumstances was justifiable, I was in a high state of heat and went back to see him and ask for a transfer to another outfit. We got talking and came to terms so-to-speak and he said the time spent with the battalion would be a month if I did a good job. Then I would come back as an aide.

Thus, is the story to now and it will be a dull one from now on. We will be here some months at least and it is a quiet sector of the Pacific. Even if we do eventually get into another action I will not be near the front, so your worries are cut to the bone.

Having been through the above, which is merely an ordinary day for the infantry during an attack, you can see why I admire them; and, also, why the thought of other men being allowed to strike when these get killed for much less pay (not that you can pay for what a soldier does) annoys me.

The Jap is a hard adversary in the jungle. They can live and do live like animals. They rarely give up. However, the Japs are inferior in all types of equipment. If we chased them through all of the jungles of the Pacific, we would never beat them in this century. However, they seem to

³ Edward J. Lichowski, (20610222), Private First Class, Infantry, United States Army, for the performance of meritorious service during an infantry-tank assault at Bougainville, Solomon Islands, on 30 January 1944. After discovering the location of a concealed enemy pillbox, Private Lichowski ran out to an open beach where tanks were in the direct line of fire, succeeded in attracting the attention of one of the drivers and then directed him to the hidden Japanese position. While returning to the officer for whom he had volunteered to serve as bodyguard, Private Lichowski was fatally wounded. Next of kin: Mrs. Albina Lichowski, Mother, 1016 North Marshfield Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. **Awarded the Silver Star.**

⁴ **Robert P. Chew**, (0-440409), United States Army, for gallantry in action on 30 January 1944, at Bougainville, Solomon Islands, where he crawled seventy-five yards under enemy machine-gun and rifle fire to help men who were wounded during an infantry-tank assault. In the face of sniper fire which killed three and wounded five, Lieutenant Chew, a forward artillery observer, moved one man to cover and then administered prompt first-aid to others. Home address: New York City, New York. **Awarded the Silver Star GO, #504 HQ USAFISPA, 9 April 1944**

have the solution out here as you can see by the news--get their bases in one fell swoop and let the rest be stranded on the other islands to starve to death. We are cutting their air force to pieces already and are making inroads on their shipping. When the European air forces start coming this way it will be a wholesale slaughter. I hope we eradicate the race before we stop hitting them.

Thus, my activities for what they are worth.

Love,

Bob

I doubt if we have any more air raids even. It is getting just like garrison life back in the U.S. army camps. Nauseating.

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Addendum



The **Silver Star** is awarded primarily to members of the United States Armed Forces for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States.

The Silver Star Medal is the United States' **THIRD HIGHEST** award exclusively for combat valor, and ranks fifth in the precedence of military awards behind the Medal of Honor, the Crosses (DSC/NC/AFC), the Defense Distinguished Service Medal (awarded by DOD), and the Distinguished Service Medals of the various branches of service. It is the highest award for combat valor that is **NOT** unique to any specific branch; it has been bestowed by the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marines. It may be given by any one of the individual services to not only their own members, but to members of other branches of service, foreign allies, and even to civilians for "gallantry in action" in support of combat missions of the United States military.

The Silver Star was established by President Woodrow Wilson as a "Citation Star" during World War I, and was solely a U.S. Army award, though it was presented by the War Department (U.S. Army) to members of the Navy and to U.S. Marines. (More on that can be found in the introductory pages to WWI awards.) Originally it provided for a 3/16" silver star to be worn on the ribbon of the service medal for the campaign for service in which the citations were given. Based loosely upon the earlier Certificate of Merit, the Citation Star was available retroactively to those who distinguished themselves by gallantry as far back as the Spanish-American War. (Subsequently it has been awarded for gallantry to Civil War heroes who were similarly cited for gallantry in action.) Prior to 1932 the General Orders announcing awards of the "Citation Star" typically began:

"By direction of the President, under the provisions of the act of Congress approved July 19, 1918 (Bul. No. 43, W.D., 1918), the following-named officers and enlisted men are cited for gallantry in action and a silver star may be placed upon the ribbon of the Victory Medals awarded to such officers and enlisted men." (A narrative of the act or acts followed for each man thus cited.)

On February 22, 1932, the date that would have been George Washington's 200th birth day, Army Chief of Staff General Douglas MacArthur revived General Washington's "Badge for Military Merit (1782)" as the Purple Heart. That same year he also successfully advocated for conversion of the "Citation Star". When his recommendation was approved by the Secretary of War, the 3/16" Silver Star was converted from a *ribbon device* to a *full-fledged MEDAL*.

The Silver Star Medal was designed by Rudolf Freund of Bailey, Banks and Biddle, and consisted of a gilt-bronze five-pointed (point-up in contrast to the point-down design of the Medal of Honor) star bearing a laurel wreath at its center. The ribbon design incorporated the colors of the flag, and closely resembled the medals earliest predecessor, the Certificate of Merit Medal. The reverse of the medal is blank, save for the raised text "*For Gallantry in Action*", beneath which is usually engraved the name of the recipient.

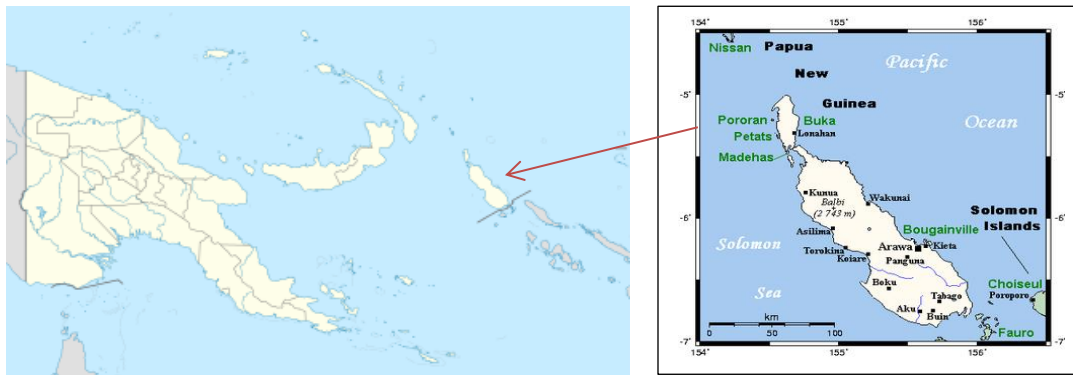
The gold hue of the gilt-bronze star seems at odds with the award's name, *Silver Star*. That title derives from the medal's World War I lineage and the 3/6" Silver Star, once displayed on a victory ribbon, and now prominently displayed in the center of the medal.

The Silver Star Medal remained exclusively an Army decoration until August 7, 1942, nearly a year after World War II began. On that date the Silver Star Medal was expanded by Act of Congress for award by the Navy Department for actions on or after December 7, 1941, (Public Law 702, 77th Congress).

We estimate that the number of Silver Stars awarded World War I to present is somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000. While that number seems quite large, when compared to the more than 30 million American men and women who have served in uniform during that time period, it is obvious that the Silver Star is a rare award, bestowed on fewer than 1 in every 250 veterans of military service.

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Satellite view of Bougainville, Island: <http://www.maphill.com/search/bougainville-island/detailed-satellite-map/>





Often, the fighting was similar to
<https://youtu.be/StO4BrFYq98>

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