



511th PIR



Letter between Sgt. Martin L. Squires (Division Recon) and Maj. Henry Burgess (CO 1-511th PIR)

Written December 20, 1984 by Martin
at his home at 230 Pacific HWY, Billingham, WA, 98
Maj. Burgess whose address was PO Box 728, Sheridan, WY 82801

Note: Sgt. Martin L. Squires was a member of the 511th PIR's Easy Company before joining 11th Airborne Division's famous Provisional Reconnaissance Platoon, or "Ghost Platoon". Martin and his fellow Recon Men participated in the famous Raid on Los Baños on February 23, 1945 in which 2,142 civilian internees were rescued from behind enemy lines. Martin later married one of the liberated civilians, Margaret.

Maj. Henry Burgess served as commander 1st Battalion, 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment which formed the core force for the parachute drop on Los Banos as well as the Amtrac-conveyed reinforcing force. Maj. Burgess wrote the book, Looking Back: A Wyoming Rancher Remembers the 11th Airborne and the Raid on Los Banos which includes information Martin provided in this letter.

For more information on the history of the 11th Airborne, please read, "When Angels Fall: From Toccoa to Tokyo, the 511th Parachute Infantry Regiment in World War II"

To any outlets, historians, reenactors, etc. who use the information in these letters, please credit www.511pir.com – Jeremy C. Holm

Letter from December 20, 1984:

Dear Henry,

I received your letter of the 18th of October and have been intending to answer it for quite a while but somehow have kept putting it off till now. I'll attempt to answer questions you asked.

First, I'm not sure of the identity of the two Recon men in the gate incident you described. I believe they may have been Leonard Hahn and Jim Bruce who were detailed, as I remember, to mark the landing point for the Amtrac. However I will attempt to find out for certain.

The Recon did leave with the troopers of the 1st Battalion. I don't know if they left in a group or if they split up because Terry Santos and I helped bring up the rear and were among the last to leave. We were the last two Recon men to leave the beach and were with the last two Amtracs to leave.

We went to Muntinglupa *lsicl* to eat and re-group. We stayed that night talking with the released internees. Most of us tried to find and talk to people

from our home state—hoping to send word home with them. We pulled out the next morning for more patrol missions so we had no more contact with the internees at that time.

I had infantry heavy weapons basic training at Camp Walters, Tex. I bounced around Texas in various areas until volunteering for the paratroops. I joined the 11th A/B at Camp Mackall after jump school at Fort Benning approximately at Thanksgiving time in 1943—a few months before the move to Camp Polk. I was sent to the 2nd Battalion Co E-511th under Capt Hobard Wade, a man for whom I had great respect. I missed the early training with the 511th at Toccoa and Mt. Currahee *isic*—but hearing about it at that time convinced me I was lucky to arrive when I did.

Soon after arriving I noticed that two E Co men were on "detached" duty to a new group being formed for division reconnaissance under Lt Jim Polka. Also, about this time I found out that a lifelong friend from my hometown who had landed in the 457th PFA Bn was also on duty in this new group. Well, I had liked the idea when I first hear about the group but when I found my best friend already there, it was only a matter of time until I got permission to transfer. Of course, transfers were held up pending the move to Camp Polk and maneuvers then again held up through Camp Stoneman and to New Guinea. However, shortly after arriving in New Guinea the Recon Platoon became an established group and all three of us were transferred to it.

I was with Maj. Ewing. I remember him well. He was a Captain at the time he took our patrol up into the mountains. He was rough and ready and well liked. As you may know he replaced Lt. Polka who made the cardinal mistake of trying to tell Gen Swing that due to the effects of the repeated series of long patrols that the men in the platoon were not in condition to immediately head back up into the mountains but that we needed a day or so of rest, first. Swing said no! Polka went to the Medics—then back to the 187th. We got our day of rest. We also got Capt. Ewing and out we went!

I haven't been to any 11th Airborne Reunions. Generally they were held some distance away and my job at Boeing Company prevented my attendance. My wife and I did get to the 35th Anniversary Reunion of the Internees from Los Baños and Santo Thomas *isic* held in San Jose, CA.

This brings up the fact that there is to be a 40th Anniversary Reunion and celebration to be held beginning the weekend staring Feb 8, 1985 in Las Vegas. My wife, who is an ex-internee liberated from Los Baños, and I plan to be there along with Terry Santos. We are both trying to contact the Recon men to encourage them to attend also. If we are lucky we may have a mini-Recon reunion at the same time.

If you are free that weekend come and join us. I have taken the liberty of having your name added to the mailing list for an announcement of the celebration. It is to be held at the Sahara Hotel. If you wish to attend but don't receive the official information write or wire me a week or two ahead of time and I'll send you more details. General Swing and General Pierson both attended the 35th reunion. I heard last week that taps were sounded recently for General

Swing so we will have to have a moment of silence and a drink to him when the right moment occurs.

I expect there will be a big celebration in Manila and Los Baños this coming year and that some of the airborne will attend. My wife and I traveled back to the Philippines in February and March this year and we participated in celebrating the 39th anniversary of the liberation in Los Baños.

I was the only 11 A/B man there so, believe it or not, I represented the division at the memorial services and at the luncheon held afterwards. I found I was expected to give a speech—so I did! The speech wasn't too good but I waved my arms a lot and thus managed to preserve the honor of the 11th.

I have mixed emotions regarding your comments about emphasis on the raid on Los Baños. It is true that there was not a lot of hard fighting nor were there many casualties. That is what we prevented by our quick strike. Had we failed there would have been a terrible catastrophe *!sic!* As it was the Japs came back into the area after we left and looted and shot and killed many civilians—to the extent that it is a bitter pill there to this day as I found out this past Spring when we went back. What probably could or would have happened might also be judged by the amount of fighting it took when the division later moved into Los Baños. As you know, the Japs were beginning to lay down fire on us as we left. Needless to say, I'm proud of the operation. We pulled it off. We had the elements of the 1st Battalion there in case things went wrong. It was a well planned maneuver—not a fiasco as in the case of the Iranian hostages.

In my view the key part of the operation was the part played by the Recon in crossing Laguna de Bay (in the dark) and approaching the camp unseen to be able to be in position to start the attack just as Capt Ringler & the boys hit the silk. Our way across the Bay started two nights earlier. All of us got becalmed in those darned bancas. It took Lt. Skau's group approximately 8 hours to cross what would normally be a 2 or 3 hour trip. It took my group approximately 10 hours and it took our third and major group approximately 22 hrs to cross. All of us had to remain down and out of sight during the daylight to avoid detection by the Japs. If you think hornets are mean and nasty tempered you should have seen the Recon then. We were really spoiling for trouble then, should it occur.

Well I've rambled on and on so guess I'd better close before I run out of ink. Hope to see you in Las Vegas.

Wishing you a Happy Holiday Season

Sincerely,
Martin Squires

P.S. On rereading this and on second thought I believe I'll send a copy of this letter to you to General Flanagan in case he can use any of it as background for the book he is writing.