

Letters from the Boys

(This column is devoted to letters from men in the service. Newsday will pay \$2 for each letter used. If you have received a letter you believe interesting, mail it to the Service Editor, Newsday. Send pictures where possible.)

From Sgt. Benjamin V. Grabek, written from somewhere in New Guinea, to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Vincent A. Grabek, 183 Northern Pkwy., Hempstead:

Dear Mom and Pop,

Well, as you know, we were in the thick of things with the Japs. It sure was rough and hard on us but we're all thankful, those of us who came out of it all right, to be back here resting and safe. There's a lot to say about the ordeal we were through. I can tell you some things but the rest will have to wait to be told after the war.

When we first started out, we didn't have very much trouble, but we were sent in as a task force and then we started going in after the Japs. That's when things got rough and hard. We had muddy feet every day. It always rained a couple of times during the day and evening. The mud only made our feet all the heavier. We had to use sloppy trails through the mountains. We carried packs with a poncho which we used as a shelter every night, also a waterproof bag full of cigarettes, a sweater, K-rations and loaded with ammunition. We really carried a load but we take off our hats to the heavy weapon boys who had to carry their machine guns and mortars.

Every night, we dug in and formed a perimeter in case of attack. Our worst trouble came when we'd run into an ambush of machine gun fire. Boy, everyone buries their nose in the ground and prays. Then, when they let up a little, we had to go in after them. It was hard to see 20 yards in front of you. We had to look for moving bushes and muzzle fire. Many of the boys had bullet holes through their packs. One fellow had two hand grenades in his pack and when a bullet ripped through it, it blew up both grenades ripping the pack off his back and he didn't even get hurt.

It is amazing that we lost so very few men, I want to tell you, though, that the Jap dead were tremendous. It ran into the high thousands. Our artillery fire was music to our ears as it passed and landed in enemy bivouac areas. One morning, we were shelled by artillery through some great mistake.

If you should ever run across an infantry medico that has been in combat, treat him with the best because those medicos are doing a great job in combat and people don't realize it. I saw one medico who had two wounds on his legs from fragments but he never gave it a thought and went on working on the boys seriously hurt. That blood plasma is a wonderful thing. It is saving many lives.

We made stretchers to carry the wounded. It's very hard to carry a man along narrow muddy trails. We were lucky, though, as a native train met us. They sure can carry a burden for the longest time and the mud doesn't seem to bother them. They're just like ants when it comes to slopes and hills. They really kept the supplies coming in endlessly.

Although we didn't care for the K-rations, we would eat them when we were hungry enough. We were never out of cigarettes, and we sure did smoke. We received life savers, candies, gum, shaving cream, tooth powder, crackers and V-mail paper. Our mail was dropped to us with many other things from planes.

The people back home, I know, are doing a swell job buying war bonds because it certainly showed up on the fighting front.

Coming back from the front, it really was a pleasure to pile in a truck for we all were weary and tired. It was good to see the tents as we passed along and coming in, the divisional band was playing for us. Boy, it was good to hear! A lump as big as an apple was in my throat. After 29 days of rations, it was wonderful to get some good meals again.

It was swell getting letters from you and many of my friends. I don't know when I'll be able to get around to answering all of them. I have some Jap money which I'll send you in the near future. I also had some Jap writing paper that I was going to write you a letter on, but I can't find it now. It had bullet holes in it. Some of the fellows got Jap battle flags. We could have gotten sabers and rifles only we had so much of our own load to carry and fight too.

The past two days of rest and good food is bringing us back to normal again and in no time we will be regaining the weight we lost. I have a big crop of hair now and need a good haircut badly. I only washed my teeth a couple of times because I used my tooth brush to keep my rifle in good working condition. We wore the same set of fatigues all through. Mine held out pretty good although my kneecap was sticking out from the wear in that spot. I returned minus my leggings, pack and ammunition bag, which I had to drop in order to help carry some litter cases.

It's pretty hot here, and no doubt I will look very dark to you. I hope I receive some of those films so that I can send you some shots.

And so, I guess I've said quite a bit now. I'm thankful to have gotten through safe and sound. Excuse the mistakes as I'm doing this on my lap. Hope everyone home is feeling fine. Give my regards to everyone.

Your loving son, Ben.

