

## WYLIE NIELSON

Wylie M Nielson wrote and illustrated a book he privately published about his service in the 96th Division. He named it "World War II as I remember it." He included several copies of excellent water color pictures he created from memory after the war. I read his book and here are some of the incidents and highlights of his military experiences. Prepared by W. R. Hill

Wylie is from Pleasant Hill, California and was drafted into the Army in September of 1944, and inducted in Richmond. He was moved to the Presidio of Monterey, and then on to Camp Roberts. After conclusion of training there he went to Fort Ord, then to Vancouver barracks in Washington State.

From there he shipped overseas on Feb 18th to Hawaii where he received advance training. Then he shipped past Wake Island and the Marshall Islands and on to Saipan for even more training.

He shipped from there to Okinawa where he climbed down the cargo nets into a Higgins boat during a Kamikaze attack and arrived safely.

As a replacement he was assigned to the HQ platoon E Company of the 382nd regiment on May 7th. He remembers hearing about President Roosevelt's death. His unit relieved an element of the 7th Division when they went on the lines at Zebra Hill on May 8th.

The next day they laid down suppressing fire on Dick Hill in support of the 1st Battalion now attacking. It felt great firing at Japs as he had learned how in basic.

Later 1st battalion men brought in 37mm anti-tank cannons near him to fire across the valley and Japanese forces rained mortar and artillery on his area, knocking out one gun and its crew and a piece of shrapnel flew past Wylie and crashed into a wall of dirt behind him.

Shortly he was detailed to help bring wounded back, and along the trail discovered a dead American soldier who was a replacement he had known. After they brought the wounded back they moved around to their left flank and into their jump off positions for the following morning. They sustained a lot of artillery fire that evening, and it was nerve racking but no one was injured.

His company attacked the next morning using cover and concealment and advanced up the hill with bayonets drawn. Things happened fast Wylie reported, and spares the reader all the violence and intense combat his unit endured, noting that E Company was awarded Battle Honors for that engagement. He reports that they had thirty-four men left out of 120 for four days of action.

His memories included getting field absolution and communion under fire on a number of occasions and a battalion chaplain who risked death bringing it to them. He also reported that two men shot their toes off to escape combat and noted that the medics were thought slow to respond and felt that these men would be court-marshaled.

He went to battalion HQs once to get mail and the Deadeye Dispatch and spent a nervous 15 minutes dodging flying shrapnel getting back in record time.

He reports that Japanese counter attacks gradually slowed down and they held hill Dick Right. Heavy rains began and that made everything difficult as many things like food and water had to be hand carried and wounded carried back. Vehicles were stalled and at one time mud from his foxhole caved in and he lost his pack and beautiful deer knife his father had sent him.

All of the companies in the battalion had lost so many men they formed into one. Soon they were relieved and got to take a shower and received new clothing.

He recalls an incident near the Yuza-Dake escarpment. A young soldier from Latvia came around to each of the men around and said goodbye. He had a premonition that he would die. They tried to cheer him up. The next day he was killed.

Once they were told to dig in and when he did he found the skull of a Japanese soldier and other parts. He was told to move elsewhere. The southern part of the island was a huge burial ground with maggots and flies everywhere. One of their least liked jobs was to burying the dead.

One morning they were surprised to see a Japanese soldier come in with his hands raised. As he neared a fox hole he began to reach inside a pocket and was immediately gunned down. A surrender leaflet was later found in his pocket. They took no chances.

Enemy shells came in and badly wounded his first sergeant, and the second one lit to his right rear and another one hit the front edge of his fox hole which covered Wylie up with dirt. The sound was deafening and the explosion tore up his pack and destroyed his rifle. He helped the sergeant back to first aid. He was given a .45 cal pistol to use and then shortly afterwards a B A R.

Dead Japanese civilian bodies were laid out in rows, and he was required to ride shotgun to take the wounded back to a refugee camp. One time it was an old man, a woman and three children.

He remembers being treated once with a hot spam sandwich and enjoyed the great change from c-rations.

His company set up trip flares and trapped Japs slipping through their lines. There was a lot of enemy and civilian activity in the area and hundreds of wounded Japanese civilians and soldiers traveled down the road near them.

Our tanks were using napalm to flush them out. At night he recalled that they could hear the burned people cry out in pain and thirsting for water until they died.

They brought in a new CO, a Captain, to lead them as they had lost all of our officers, and after three days he had a mental breakdown. One of his Lieutenants came back from the hospital and took command.

They assaulted the next ridge and lost but few men and here was the spot that General Easley came up to get a look at the battle, and was killed by a sniper. His aide was hit in the hand by the same sniper. Easley was still alive as Wylie and others carried him back in a poncho. There were no stretchers available. He died shortly after with medics all around him. His special inlaid pistol he carried disappeared somewhere in the rear area.

The island was declared secure and he had to help mop up, and there were bands of Japanese soldiers trying to make their way up north. Once while on a patrol mortar shells dropped around them but no one was hit. The area was soon marked for an airstrike.

As the battle wound down they were move to a safer area lived in tents and enjoyed movies, and had a chance to clean and repair equipment.

In August they boarded an LST and endured a strong a dangerous typhoon as the sailed to Mindoro. The US Navy destroyed a Japanese submarine attacking their convoy. Later on in the voyage they heard about the a-bombs used on the mainland Japan and were treated with half a can of peaches. Dad at home said they had a block party and they celebrated; whiskey and all.

Wylie learned that our division had been scheduled to assault Japan and now that the war was over, and the division had been slated to be occupation troops, but that idea was cancelled because it was concerned that the men in our division would be poor choices because of latent hostility.

The US Army sent the 96th division home and he ended up in a MP platoon of the 86th division on Luzon. He guarded Japanese prisoners and was sent home early because it was believed that his dad was dying of pneumonia.

He returned home in March and was met by his family waiting for him in San Francisco. He was discharged in June 1946.

Wylie reenlisted in the Army in 1948 and completed a 21 year career as a senior illustrator. He married Adele Marie Silva and then after 30 year's service with the State of California he retired. He now lives in Sacramento, California.