

Ignacio Josue's Memories of the invasion of Leyte – Samar  
Tacloban Oct 24 – Oct 31 – Nov 9 1944

1. Arrive Leyte Bay Oct 24, 1944 (D+4). Plenty of Jap air activity. One dived into a LST (Landing Ship Tank) making a huge fire. A Jap bomber tried to bomb and strafe a Liberty ship, was hit and dove straight down in the bay.
2. While we were trying to land on Oct 25 (D+5), 3 Jap bombers (Betty's) came flying parallel to and left of our LST 552. Our gunners opened up putting the last plane in flames. The second plane swerved up and then down for us, letting go of its bombs and strafing us. I was OD (Officer of the Deck) and at the bridge with Captain Jenkins. I dove down to the floor with the Captain on top of me. I felt a stinging sensation on my left ankle. One of the bombs hit us amidships on the left side shaking the boat considerably. The other bomb missed us on the right side by not more than 5 yards, throwing up a spout of water which practically drenched us in the bridge. When we got up, there was fire on the spot where the bomb had hit. There was some confusion as the water system did not work for a while. As I watched, I saw Lieutenant Blankenship trying to fan out with his shirt or coat the flames coming out of a burning truck. I thought for a while he had gone crazy, but I was later informed that he was trying to save a man underneath the truck then in flames. Then a truck full of ammunition began popping. The water system was fixed by this time. I saw a man bleeding near the ammo truck shaking for help and could not get away. I asked Captain Jenkins to stay on the bridge and I went for the man. I could not carry him up and across a truck so I called T/3 Afaga to help me. He came and once over the truck, he dragged the wounded man away. Then I heard more shouts for help under a truck forward of us. I went under the truck, gave the man a drink from his canteen then tried to pull him away but couldn't. His foot was caught some place so I gave it a push and it was extricated. He was wounded in the shoulder so he was able to run away fast. The ammo was popping fast so as I got up from under the truck, Captain Gadley shouted at me to get the hell out of there. I needed no prodding and I got away fast. The sensation on my left ankle became more intense so I took off the legging and had it dressed. It was but a scratch of a fragment. Then I went up to the bridge again. The boat skipper wanted stretcher bearers and helpers to clean up the debris. I had the EM on boat help in the work. About 33 men were killed and about 100 were wounded. The closest call that I knew of was Lt. Blankenship – a fragment went right through his cotton cap barely singeing his hair and scalp. Both his hands had to be bandaged for burns received in his effort to rescue the man under the burning truck. Men killed in our unit are Alicante, Sebastian and Dalipe (missing until we saw his grave on land). Wounded were Nunez (of Leyte, he had to go back to New Guinea), Cabreles, Caboba, Abaloe, De Guzman, Gonzales, Lt. Blankenship and myself. The most horrible scenes I saw were the burned bodies of soldiers with pain shown in their faces. As for the planes, one tried to dive headlong into us but missed, another tried to get away but our gunners got both of them. The third plane in the formation was reported downed by another ship's gun crew. The bomb that hit us landed immediately behind one of our gun crews. All of them (this gun crew) disappeared with hardly a trace at all.
3. During that day (Oct 25) several more Jap planes came through and we were in fox holes or on the ground most of the time. The gun crews of our boat became trigger happy they even shot and downed one of our Navy planes.
4. In the afternoon of Oct 25, we were directed to 6th Army Headquarters bivouac area. Over 500 yards away from the area is a hill just won from the Japs the day before. We saw it being dived bombed by our planes. On the night of D+4, the interchange of M/G (machine gun) shots we saw in the boat was in this area with Jap bullets grazing overhead our tents. While there on D+5 Jap planes came over and I saw a bunch of Jap bullets about 50 yards kicking up the ground as a result of Jap strafing. I did not consider it safe there so I went and rejoined our other Officers and men near the landing beach (White beach). It was beginning to get dark so we dug fox holes for the night. Cababa, Ramos, Flores and myself occupied one fox hole. At night there were interchanges of rifle and M/G shots and even heard some Bonzais from nearby Jap snipers or infiltrators. Didn't sleep a wink.

5. On Oct 26 (D+6) we went to Tacloban. Road was a mess of mud. Lots of civilians on road. All seem happy. They were carrying a lot of food supplies from Army corps or clothing given them by soldiers. Saw a nice looking buxom Pinay. The road to Tacloban was lined up with a lot of dead Japs already beginning to smell. Saw one SBD Dauntless downed in the fields and also several Jap planes. In Tacloban, we headed for the MP Hq. They didn't seem to know where the Municipal Hall was. I was ordered to follow in a Jeep a Col who was supposed to go to the Municipal Hall. He got lost and we drove around in circles for about two hours. When we got to the place our other officers and men were already there. After setting up offices there, we set up camp at the Eureka Lumber Mill. Mr. Diaz and Mr. Villasios were kind enough to let us sleep in their beautiful house.
6. In Tacloban we worked with unit #1. Menadin and I worked together as Adjutant and Assistant Adjutant. We set up the pattern of the offices which we have used since. Menadin interviewed and fired all war collaborators. Felix Molina, son-in-law of the pro-Jap Governor Salazar, was one. Also Ayoay, another pro-Jap, a little latched in the head and Seving Luz. All were Philippine Army officers, captured in Bataan, released from concentration camp and put in Jap PC in Tacloban. Ayoay and Luz later put in jail for their activities. Molina seemed cleared and may yet be drafted or pressed into the new Philippine Army. The girl assigned to work with me was Lily (Miss Lourdes Lauzon), daughter of former fiscal under Japs. Her brother was brutally killed by Japs and hence her family were resentful and never heartily cooperated with Japs. Her father was saved only because of intimate relationship or friendship with Salazar. Lily was a very efficient worker and very charming. I really fell in love with her but no sooner was I determined to press my suit then, presto, we were ordered to Basey, Samar.
7. One of my greatest thrills in Tacloban was seeing our first Army land planes (P-38's) flying protectively over us on or about D+9. Before that the Japs seem to come at their leisure and bomb the vicinity. Our ack-ack didn't seem to have much effect. On their (P-38's) second night in town the Nips bombed our air strip and must have damaged it because the next day and night not much of our planes were seen and Jap planes came in at will (it seems). They bombed the town missing MacArthur's place by 50 yards. One big bomb did hit 75 yards from our Motor Pool, killing a whole family of civilians. We dug and made elaborate foxholes with bed cots and mosquito nets but I never used mine. Same goes for a lot of other Officers. It seems that when the air raid warning sounded, we were too sleepy or too lazy to get up so we just stayed in bed and sweated it out. There were many a time when the shots came close and the planes sounded as if they were by our roof tops that I actually shook with fear in bed. Luckily we were not hit.
8. All was not work in Tacloban but it was not until after a week that I was able to get my bearings back and ready to take a whirl in getting acquainted with people. As stated previously I fell for Lily Lauzon so I tried to cultivate her friendship. Went to her house once and met her at Felix's place several times. Also met the Veloso's (the father in Manila supposedly pro-Jap), the mother was a very charming lady, Patrica, and another sister. They gave a dinner and dance for me and Menodin and there is where I started to woo Lily. It was a good beginning. I also met Miss Teresita Pil and her younger sister at the Holy Infant College cousins of the Velosos and Salazars. By far she was the most charming and likable Leyteman I met. Danced and sang divinely, too. I took Teresita and chaperon back to the college. Our Jeep had no lights and it was pitch dark. In hugging the edge of the street we fell in a foxhole. We had no flashlight so we had a hell of a time until a truck came along and hauled us out and guided us on our way. What a memorable night! Unfortunately the next day we were ordered to Tanauan.
9. The first time we were ordered to Tanauan was on Oct. 31 to evacuate civilians from beach to be used by 6<sup>th</sup> Army Hq. We evacuated civilians and then for two days evaluated abandoned houses as basis for any future claims. While there, we opened a dispensary and hired Miss Rosario de Vayras a law graduate. She was acquainted slightly with Eden Aquirre in Manila. When job was done, we returned to Tacloban on Nov 3, 1944.
10. From Nov. 3<sup>rd</sup> to Nov. 7<sup>th</sup> did nothing but work with #1 in Tacloban. Was just resuming acquaintanship when on Nov. 8<sup>th</sup> we were ordered to Basey, Samar. The night before we left Tacloban I was to meet the Jaramilla family but preparations for the trip prevented me from doing so. Night of the 8<sup>th</sup> we had a typhoon. Part of our unit was in Basey, some in San Antonio, and others at the landing

beach in Tacloban awaiting the LCM that got lost during the day. We met Major Akin of the Basey guerrillas and we took him to Mr. Diaz's residence for the night.

11. Before starting on our stay in Basey, here are more items about Tacloban. a.) On Oct. 26<sup>th</sup>, 200 Japs were supposed to have broken through and on the way to Tacloban. Whole unit alerted and put in a perimeter around the camp. Our nerves were on edge so every suspicious looking light was nearly shot at when approaching a light of another outfit whose presence we were never told of in our neighborhood. b.) One morning some of our men went after some suspicious looking individuals in a hill back of the lumber mill. They happened to be Korean laborers forced (so they said) by Japs to infiltrate and spy in town. Shot two of them, killed one and one presumably got away. In scouring edge of hill and river nearby, a cave with elaborate emplacements was discovered. This was supposedly a Jap officers hangout. A beautifully designed Jap O boots was found there. The prisoners and information were given to GHQ G-2. c.) Mr. Villasios (co-owner of lumber mill and owner of house we were using) was ordered arrested by Major Reyes of PC for pro-Jap activities. Evidently was cleared for on last visit to Tacloban, Villasios was out. On the other hand, Major Reyes was reputedly jailed for his activities as a pro-Jap PC officer. d.) Met attorney Montilla and daughter Mathilda. Montilla is brother of Frank Montilla of Seattle. e.) Nov. 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup>, our unit ordered to evacuate civilians from White and Red beach. Approx. 500 people evacuated. f.) In one Jap air raid while we were having dinner one of our .50 caliber spent bullets came through the roof over us. It bounded on Lt. Crosby's shoulder, and then on mine. I picked it up immediately and had to drop it for it was still red hot.

Basey – Nov. 9<sup>th</sup> to Nov. 25<sup>th</sup> 1944

1. Perhaps the most pleasant stay we had, for myself especially, in the Leyte-Samar campaign was our stay in Basey, Samar. The people were kind, congenial, considerate, cooperative and treated us like kings. This was perhaps due to the fact that we were the only Army unit there and we were there to give them relief and restore their normal governmental and economic functions. That we succeeded in winning their friendship is attested by the two testimonial dances they gave us, the many parties they gave individual members of our team, and the many other favors which they did for us which we were reluctant to accept but which they pressed on us. The hospitality and the friendship of Basey will live forever in my memory.
2. Before our unit moved to Basey, Captains Willie and Jenkins and Lt. Crosby were ordered to investigate conditions there. They found only about 50 in a town which had a population of around 30,000 before the war. When the Japs came, the people of Basey evacuated to the mountains carrying with them all their municipal records, their women and children. Only guards against bandits were left in the town. The people voted their life into the hands of Major Abia (then Captain Abia of PC). He had continued the normal municipal governmental functions in the mountains. Their council met, passed resolutions, levied taxes, maintained law and order and maintained a steady watch on the enemy. The Japs took the town but were afraid to go out into the mountains fearful of the guerrillas under Major Abia. The Japs were afraid to do any violence in town for fear of retaliation from the guerrillas. On the other hand, the guerrillas did not molest the Japs in town for fear of retaliation on the few civilians left in the town. When they did take on the Japs it was their patrols away from Basey that did it and the Japs could not point against the Basey guerrillas. Another point is that the Basey guerrillas under Major Abia were lacking arms and ammunition. Home made revolvers and shot guns were made, hidden in coconut tree tops. The seas around were scoured for drifting mines, the powder taken and used in home made ammunition. Actually, then, the guerrillas had no means of actually fighting the Japs but they kept up their front well and kept the Japs from going after them. After the Americans came, Uncle Sam gave them adequate supplies. They went after the Japs about 50 kilometers from town, killing 200 of them without a casualty on the guerrillas side.
3. My first concern in Basey was hiring of laborers. The mayor gave out bandillos and the first morning at about 10:00 am I had more men than I can take care of. Our office was like a mad-house. As I interviewed the typist-clerks I put them to work immediately. Those others who were not hired stayed for a visit or chat and pretty soon the office was filled like a can of sardines with no way of

- getting around and everybody talking at once. Outside, the registration of common laborers was going on. No such thing as lining up seems to be known in the Philippines. The men seeking work simply milled around blocking the way, the doors and the street in front of the building. I must have raised the dickens then and there because I ordered everybody not employed out in no mean terms. I had the soldiers and acting police formally line-up the waiting men and I gave them a tongue-lashing for their non-business like behavior. It was not until later, in a town in Leyte, that one of my girl employees told me how, since that moment, they were fearful of me. Perhaps it was just as well as the scene threatened to repeat itself several times to be broken only by an order on my part. For the first few days I hired around 500 men daily for our different sections creating a little WPA, cleaning roads, digging wells, building public latrines, cleaning buildings for business, just to create initial employment. Then we were ordered to discontinue the WPA (my own term) work and I had to fire all but the clerks and a few necessary workers. The people were encouraged to leave town to go to their farms to plant rice, or to fix their badly damaged houses. In time the NCB's and some Ack-Ack outfits required several hundred workers and I had a difficult time getting the workers back to work. Some were actually in the farms, while others found it more remunerative to trade mats, chickens, souvenirs etc. for Army rations, clothing shoes with GI's or else work for individual soldiers and get some pay plus a lot of extras. Before this problem became acute, the Naval PCAU took over. How they solve the problem, I don't know but fortunately for them the demand for workers lessened when the Naval Base contemplated for Basey was abandoned.
4. Other work in Basey was in reopening schools, restoration of the municipal government under Mayor Tabunda (Mrs. Tabunda, wife of the JP and former Mayor himself), restoration of Police Dept. under Chief of Police Saludo, mapping of the town by Abaya (civil engineer working under Capt. Galley, Engr. O), making a study and survey for the need of materials for the rebuilding of homes damaged by the recent typhoons so as to render them habitable enough for the people still in the mountains to come home to, the so-called "sewing circle" project under Captain Jenkins which was actually remaking of salvage Class B Army clothing into garments for kids and women so they have clothes to come down from the mountains and to attend school with. This was necessary due to the fact that when the town people left the town for the mountains, they left their clothing behind. The Japs either pilfered or destroyed them. In time these unfortunate people had to wear tree barks and leaves for body covering. When the Americans came, they could not come down from the mountains for lack of clothing. Hence, the "sewing circle" project. It was so-called because there were over 80 women workers, young and old, with Singer Sewing Machines (14 of them) hired by the day as the women. Eventually the clothes made cost us over 5.00 P each for a value of perhaps on 1.00 P each. For a while we thought there would be hell to pay but nothing came out of it. Actually no one profited illegally. There were just too many workers trying to make a good thing last long and, of course, too lenient a control on the project. One incident in this "sewing circle" was the rivalry among the girls in trying to maintain leadership among them. Without the knowledge of our Captain, I had to soothe nerves and hurt feelings before calm was restored. Other work done was in giving relief to the townspeople. This work was under Lt. Crosby. Some sort of rationing was instigated under a bunch of clerks. It worked well with a few chiselers caught. Stores were opened selling canned food and rice, two bakeries given initial flour to work with. Prices were well controlled with speedy prosecution and confiscation threatened violators. Except for few infractions, the people really cooperated in enforcing Pres. Osmena's Ex. Order on Ceiling Prices on commodities. As a reflective observation, it seems that only in Basey were such enforcement really effective. (See #6)
  5. After a week, things quieted to routine work that I began getting acquainted with the people. Our men were quartered in the Public Market, while the officers lived in the upper floor of Mr. Cabonse's house – a two story, sturdily built of nana lumber, tin roofing, cement ground floor (used as store and living quarters for the owners, a family of 11 persons). We had a civilian do the cleaning and bed fixing, and getting enough water supply for baths and cleaning. Laundry was done by neighborhood women soliciting for the work. At nights all the officers met, shoot the bull or else discussed the day's work and problems over a bottle of tuba or mixed alcohol. One afternoon I took Gloria Cabonse and Sideria Cabigon to San Antonio for a ride. Sideria (Dading) is just a kid of 17 with bright sad eyes with a smile that could break your heart and a voice that touches the

- emotions. I fell for her then and there. I visited her several times and while she was receptive she seemed deathly afraid of her cousin who was then her guardian. I never did get to know what the reasons were. Anyway, she promised to wait until after the war when I go to take her and take her with me to the States. But she is so young and, although I could really love her I wonder if it is wise to let her think I would go back. Since leaving Basey, in spite of a letter from her I never did answer her or give her further encouragement. As for other acquaintances in Basey, the names in the front will furnish other friends there. Another girl that I fell for was Alice Hernandez. She was rather plump but she had a bewitching smile. Friendly but too ambitious for comfort. She reminded me of Eden. Only child of a sister of Betty Fernandez, dentist, and she belongs to a well-to-do family of Capooan, Leyte. She was residing in Hinunangan with Betty. Estela Gancha gave us several “familiar” dances in her home, Mrs. Distrajo (Estrellita’s mother) gave me a dinner of pansit, shrimp, fish and a drink of delicious tuba whiskey. Baby Samonte and Dading gave me a dinner of small clams and fish, Chief Saludo, lechon and chicken, Neva Villegas and the de Verjra’s, a merienda of lechon and rice candies, bibinea, etc. at the convent, Antonio Colinares gave me a mat. “Manila” (Mrs. Tating Marabut) gave me some candies when I visited their house to buy a mat. She and her husband knew Guillano Udaars and wife, formerly Ramona Ranjo, both of Paankin, in Manila before the war. Another girl to be remembered is Gloria Cabonce, the daughter of our host. Nightly I would go down and visit with them. Sometimes I would drink tuba with her brother, a guerilla kid. Once they got a gang together and serenaded us in the old Philippine custom. We would go down and sing with them. In one of these singing sprees a drunk guerilla soldier came over to stop one of the singers and ordered everybody to stop. We had him arrested and reported to Major Abia.
6. In addition to #5, we opened a medical and dental clinic with a civilian doctor and two dentists (Betty Fernandez one of them). Betty is the most outspoken Filipino I have met here so far. She would flirt for anything she wants without showing concern. She was not bad looking and she had a keen business sense. If I had to do it over again I would fall for her.
  7. From Basey we could see the daily bombing of Tacloban just across the straight from town. It is a thrilling sight to see planes going down in flames. Once a Jap plane could not dislodge its bombs in Tacloban so it came across and deposited its bombs in a barrio schoolhouse about 3 km. away. Luckily it was noon so that the building was empty. However, houses nearby were damaged and several people and children were killed or injured badly. I saw one woman with strands of meat dropping from a stump just below her knee. Also a kid without arm. I went to the nearest NCB outfit to request for transportation for the wounded to the hospital in Tacloban. On the way I met my first Navy Commodore and Navy Captain. Helped them pull their vehicle out of a mud hole. They gave me a note which authorized me the use of a naval craft. I got the boat but on the way to Basey, it got stuck in shallow water. Had to holler for a native banku to take me ashore. The wounded were taken finally to Tacloban at high tide.
  8. Another thrill in Basey was in watching two P-38’s go after a Jap plane. The Jap plane was chasing a C-47 over the straight into overhead Basey. The C-47 was really going like a scared chicken. Suddenly 2 P-38’s came from the skies and followed the Jap plane. The Jap spied the P-38’s just before it could get the cargo plane. It (the Jap) tried to swerve away but one P-38 immediately went after him and with one burst put him in flames. He came down in the straight only 300 yards from where we were standing. Several civilians got into their bankas and went for the plane. Later they brought back several parts for souvenirs. I had one but it was too bulky so I threw it away.
  9. Just before leaving Basey, Capt. Jenkins was ordered to leave us for an unknown destination. He was a good man and I miss him a lot. Hope he does well and meet him again soon.
  10. Leaving Basey on Nov. 25<sup>th</sup> was a sad day for all of our unit, especially for the men. It seems all had cultivated intimate friends. Leaving Basey gave me a choke in my throat and a little misty in the eyes and with a heavy heart. It seemed like leaving San Francisco all over again.

Tanauan – Nov. 25 to Dec. 31, 1944

1. Upon leaving Basey, our CO chose Tanauan for our camp site for the rest awaiting further orders. We stayed in the same old Avila house near the bridge. Mr. Tampil kindly gave us use of his house. For two days we had nothing to do. However, on the afternoon of Nov. 25, we were given hint that we may store medical supplies. So I acquired a house being used as a bootlegging and gambling place for storage purposes. Nothing came out of this. During first week all we did was dog-rubber for 6<sup>th</sup> Army C. A. furnishing them 21 men daily for camp use. Also furnished 10 men and 2 EM to Tacloban for storing medical supplies there. To me personally the only memorable event that first week there was in meeting Nading in front of the church one evening. Since it was raining I took her home. She invited us (Ramos and I) in and met her father, mother and sisters. On Dec. 2, I and Velasso went to Tacloban to meet the Jaramillas. Nading wanted to visit her sister-in-law there so we took her along. In trying to get to her place we got stuck in mud until pulled out by another Jeep. Also went to see Teresita Pil that day. She was looking well as ever. While cruising around met George Josue (Arsenio) and told him we'd meet her in the Jaramilla's. When finally we arrived there, we met Charing Jaramilla, Virginia, and the other younger sisters and brother, and also Mrs. Jaramilla. Had lunch there. Luz (Lusing) did not come home until noon for lunch. She was as lovely and demure as she was pictured to me. Why have I not met her before? Before 1:30 P.M. her Jeep picked her up to work. She was humble, meek, very silent and we hardly had a word together. At 4:00 P.M. we left town and on way out we met her in a Jeep taking her home. Picked up Nading and sister-in-law for Tanauan. Arsenio and another soldier came with us also. Upon arriving in Tanauan I was told the we may need girls to work for us ripping parachutes. On Monday, I contacted Nading and Rosal and made them Foreman and T/K if they can produce the girl workers. During all of Monday we went around in a Jeep contacting the girls. Got stuck in mud once, riling Riseden, the transportation Sgt. Can't blame him. On Tuesday, Dec. 4, work in ripping parachutes started.