

CHAPTER 7

MY COMBAT DAYS ARE OVER

*** ON MY WAY HOME ***

I spent hours and hours in the ambulance while the driver tried to find a field hospital that could take me. The fighting was so heavy that all the nearby field hospitals were already full of casualties so the ambulance driver had to keep driving south. I was wounded at 7 o'clock in the morning and I didn't get to a hospital that would take me until about 3 o'clock that afternoon. I had been driven 60 miles south of where I was shot to a general hospital in Leghorn that could care for me. When I got into the receiving area of the hospital, the doctor took a knife and split my pants to save time so he could examine the wound. It was decided to operate on me pretty soon.

A Doctor Butler operated on me, and he saved the bullet he took from my leg as a souvenir for me. It was a 38 caliber bullet that was bent 90 degrees which means that it hit the ground and then bounced up and hit me. When Dr. Butler came to see me the next morning, he spoke Pidgin English to me so I thought that maybe he was a Japanese guy from Hawaii. A lot of us spoke Pidgin English out in the cane fields. I was really surprised when I found out he was about 40 years old, non-Japanese, and had a medical practice in Honolulu.

The day after the operation, Dr. Butler told me he wanted to see how well I could walk so I got out of bed and took a step and almost hit the floor because my leg was useless. It just hung there. The nerve had taken such a shock that my leg was paralyzed for almost a month. Dr. Butler decided to keep me in bed for awhile, maybe a week. The ward boy was from Hilo so we got along very well. He suggested that I use a bedpan, but I said, "No way!" If I had to use the bathroom, he'd put me in a wheelchair and push me down the ward to the bathroom. Because of my wounds, I couldn't sit on the commode the right way so I sat on it backwards and draped my arms over the tank. An awkward way, but it worked.

After my period of confinement to bed was over, I started to use crutches to walk around the hospital. It took me a long time, years actually, before the paralysis in my leg completely

went away. Even after my leg healed there would be sometimes when I was walking around and it would get numb and I'd fall flat on my face.

The War Department must have sent my mother a telegram informing her I was wounded because she told me after I got home that an officer brought one to her. Mother said she wasn't upset as she'd already sensed that I was wounded but doing OK. I don't remember writing her a letter about my condition until I got to Denver a month later.

After spending a month at the general hospital at Leghorn, a bunch of us were put on the Army hospital ship *John L. Clem* at Leghorn. I was off crutches by then and using only a cane to help me get around. We sailed down to Naples and spent a few days there. We left there and sailed back to Camp Patrick Henry at Norfolk, Virginia from where we had embarked on the way overseas. Nothing really exciting happened on the voyage home. When we got back, the camp had been turned into a hospital receiving station. We stayed there about a week and then they sent us to different hospitals.

*** MY STAY IN ARMY HOSPITALS ***

The first time the people at Camp Patrick Henry asked where I would like to go I said, "Chicago". I'd already seen New York City. They said, "Fine." Then pretty soon the hospital people put us in an ambulance car on a train heading for Chicago. The entire train was ambulance cars full of GIs heading for some big Army hospital. These ambulance cars had their own little food galley so we didn't have to go to another car to eat. That was pretty handy as I was still limping around with a cane. When we got to Chicago, they unloaded some patients but not me. The train left the station and proceeded on to Denver where I was taken off and brought to Fitzsimons General Hospital which was on the east side of town. I was admitted to Ward D-5 on May 23, 1945. I don't remember seeing many doctors at all. The nurses would occasionally take our temperature or do something else, but it seemed that we were pretty much on our own. I gave up my cane so I would have to use my leg and get well sooner.

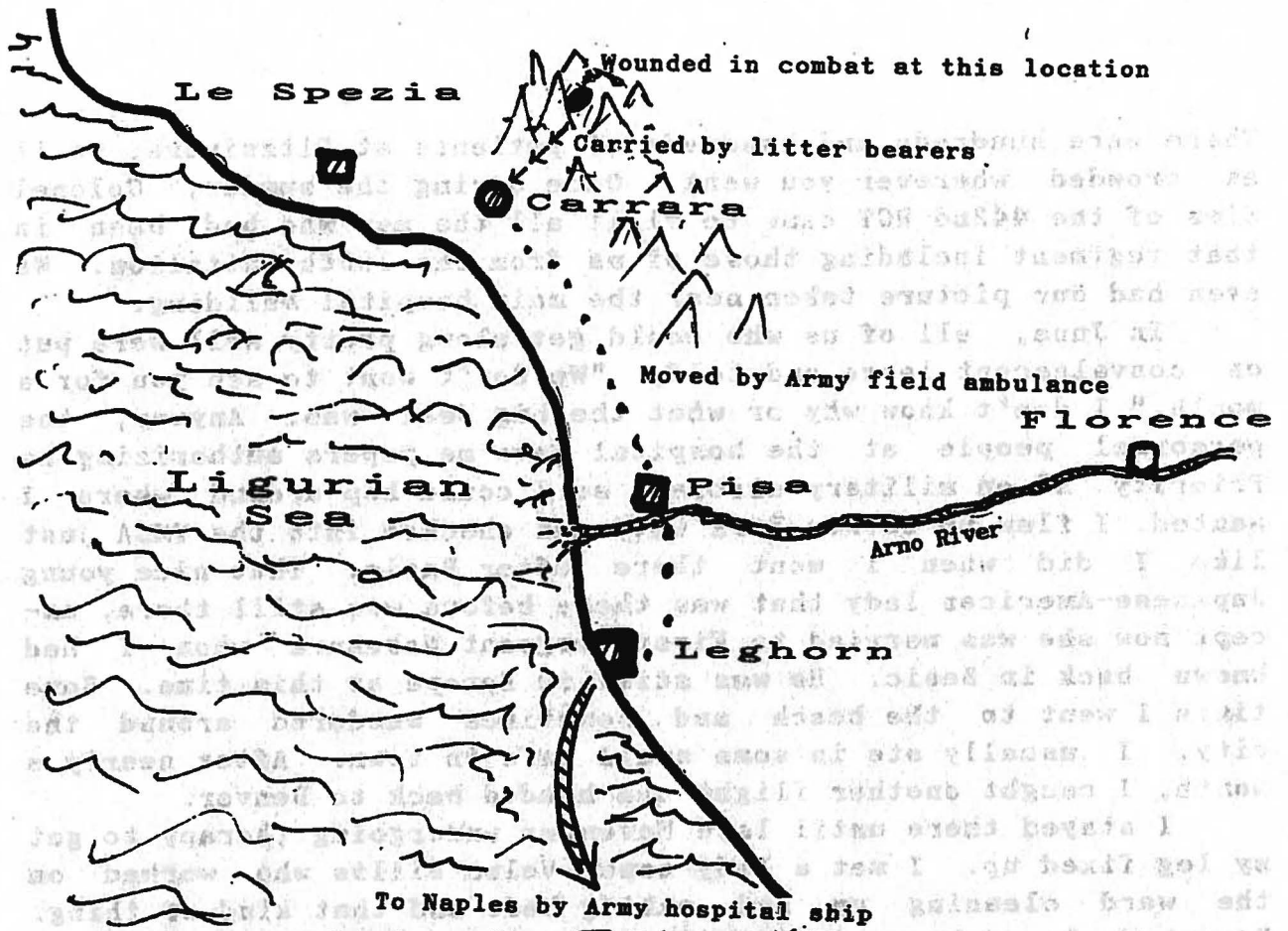
I spent a lot of time in the physical rehab building right across the street from my ward doing exercises. Since everyone on the ward was ambulatory, we walked to the mess hall for meals.

There were hundreds and hundreds of patients at Fitzsimons, so it as crowded wherever you went. Once during the summer, Colonel Sims of the 442nd RCT came to visit all the men who had been in that regiment including those of us from the 100th Battalion. We even had our picture taken near the main hospital building.

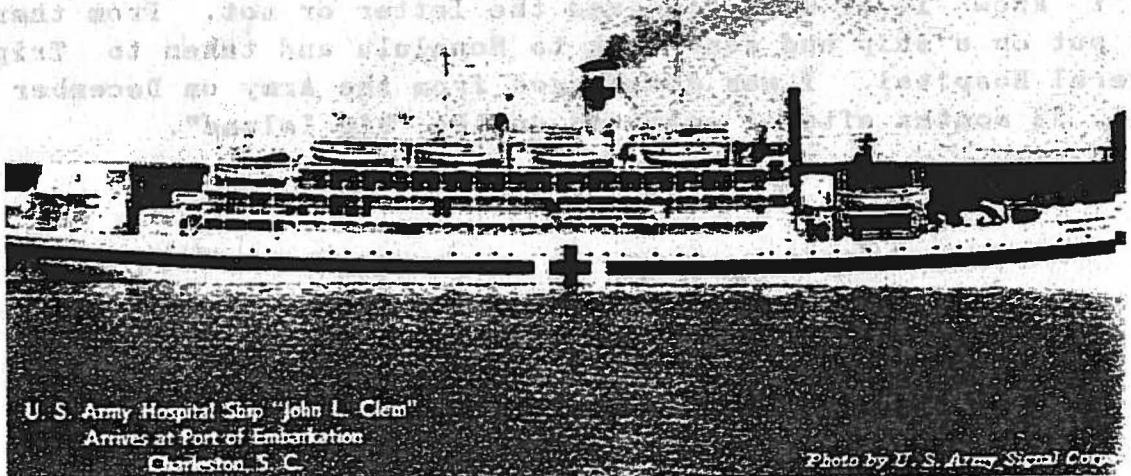
In June, all of us who could get along pretty well were put on convalescent leave and told, "We don't want to see you for a month." I don't know why or what the big deal was. Anyway, the personnel people at the hospital gave me papers authorizing me Priority "A" on military aircraft so I could hop around where I wanted. I flew up to New York City and checked into the YMCA just like I did when I went there after Basic. That nice young Japanese-American lady that was there before was still there, except now she was married to First Sergeant Nakamura whom I had known back in Basic. He was still in Europe at this time. Some times I went to the beach and sometimes wandered around the city. I usually ate in some small cafe in town. After nearly a month, I caught another flight and headed back to Denver.

I stayed there until late November undergoing therapy to get my leg fixed up. I met a lady named Velma Willis who worked on the ward cleaning up and making beds and that kind of thing. Everybody loved her and called her *Non*, even the Black guys. In late November, the doctors decided I was ready for discharge. I enjoyed my stay in Denver, but I was ready to get out of the hospital and go home.

I was transferred to California where I was kept at an Army hospital on the outskirts of Los Angeles for nearly a week. While I was there, I met an Italian man that could write Italian. I had him write a letter for me to Mr. Vennuci in Carrara telling him I had been wounded up there in the mountains outside of town. I don't know if he ever received the letter or not. From there I was put on a ship and sent back to Honolulu and taken to Tripler General Hospital. I was discharged from the Army on December 22, 1945, 33 months after I enlisted on the "Big Island".



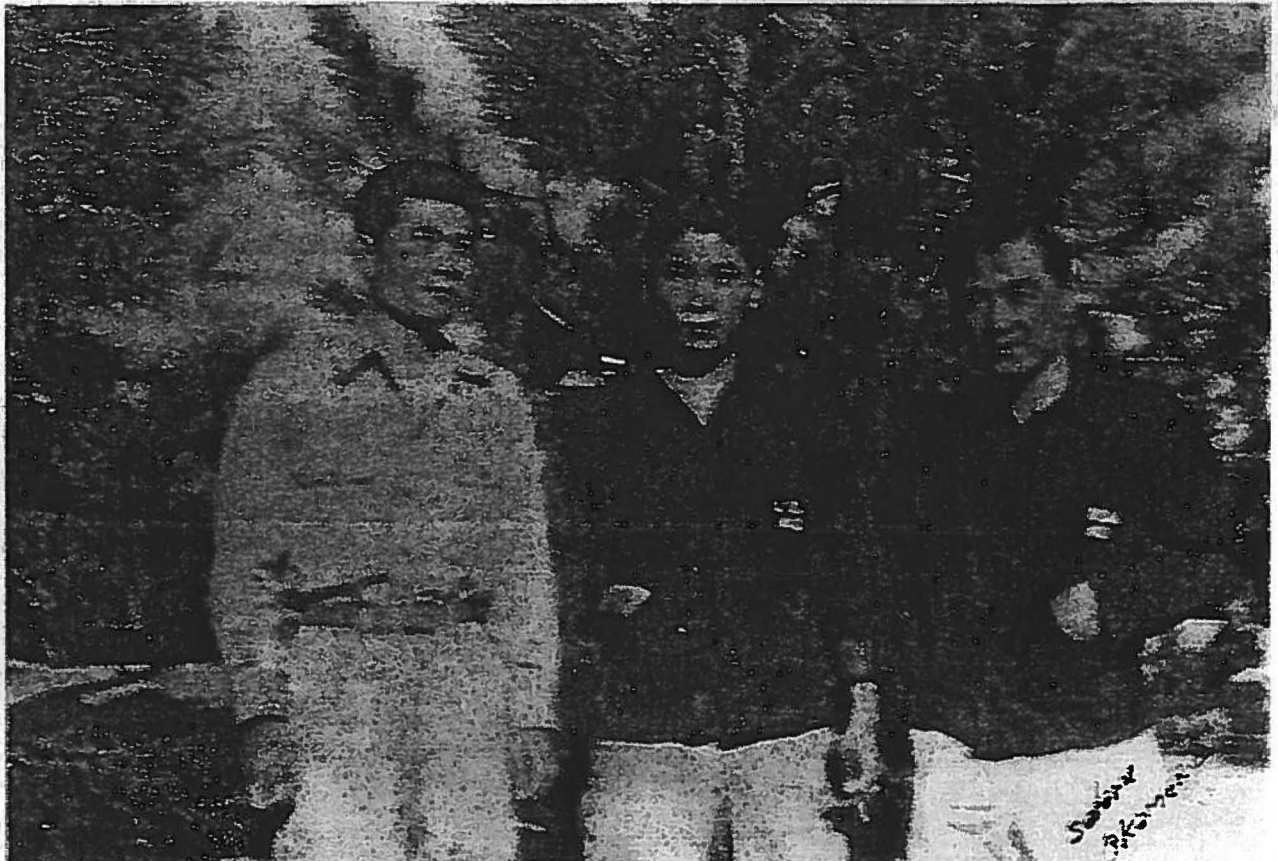
Shimizu was wounded in the mountains outside of Carrara. Litter bearers carried him down into the city from where an Army ambulance drove him to a hospital in Leghorn.



After treatment at Leghorn, Shimizu was placed aboard the Army hospital ship *John L. Clem* for evacuation to the United States.



Pfc Shimizu relaxes in the Ward 5-D day room by reading the local newspaper while hospitalized in the Army's Fitzsimons General Hospital.

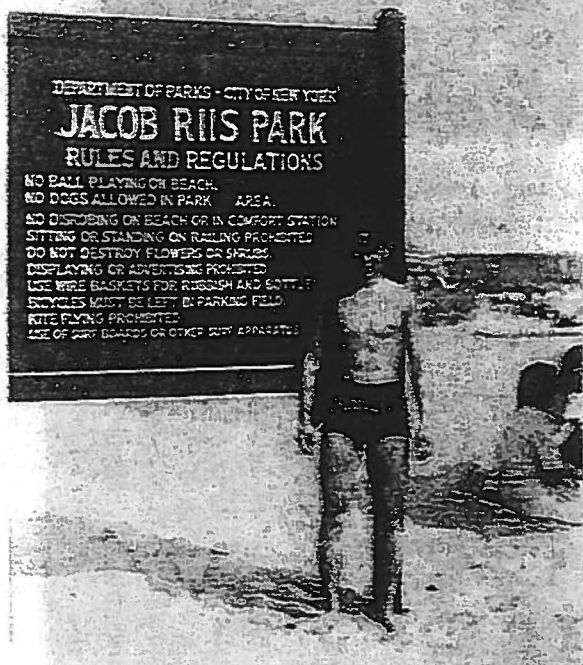


Patients from the 100th Bn / 442nd RCT at Fitzsimons General Hospital in the summer of 1945. Left to right: Sueo Sakamoto, Harry Shimizu, and Satoru Okamura.

Right: Col. Sims of the 442nd RCT visits Nisei patients at Fitzsimons General Hospital in the fall of 1945.



Left: Shimizu relaxes on the beach in New York City while on convalescent leave.



Below: Men of the 100th Bn/442nd RCT were guests of the young members of the Denver Buddhist community at a mountain picnic.





Left: On May 23, 1995, the 50th anniversary of his admission to the hospital, Harry Shimizu visited Fitzsimons Army Medical Center. Clarke Brandt shows him a display at the Education Center of his World War II service.

Below: In 1945, this was Ward D-5 of Fitzsimons General Hospital where Shimizu was an inpatient. In 1995, the ward is now part of an Army school.



Left: The current gym is where Shimizu spent much time as an inpatient undergoing physical rehabilitation.

