

IN HONOR OF EDWARD J. HAMILTON

Adapted by Patty Durso

Today we honor the memory of Edward J. Hamilton by reading excerpts of letters that he wrote, and those that were written about him, beginning with a remembrance of his early life by his niece, Laurie Wheatley.

Edward Hamilton was born September 23, 1924 and lived all his life in a house on Orchard Street, on the property where the ACME Shopping Center now stands.

He enjoyed working in the several gardens there and helped his father raising a breed of rabbit called the Checkered Giant, which they showed at county fairs.

His consuming interest was auto mechanics. By the time he was 14, he fashioned a small truck on the chassis and motor of a Model T Ford, called it Deluxe Trucking, and drove it on a track which he made within the boundaries of the five acre property where he lived.

Ed was an active member of the then newly formed Boy Scout Troop 59, and of Archer Methodist Church, where he attended Epworth League, striving to cultivate Christ-centered character.

He spent a year at Wentworth Institute in Boston after graduating from high school in 1942, and then entered the Army Air Force. He was trained as an airplane mechanic and was sent to an air base on the island of Mindoro in the Philippines.

It was from there, on February 13, 1945, that Edward sent this letter to his sister, Betty.

I've moved again, and with each move things seem to get more like home. A train whistle is one of the familiar noises that we hear every day and milk cows are also in the vicinity. Haven't tried to milk a cow for quite awhile, but some dark night I might try.

The dust here doesn't compare with anything we have at home, though. It's rained only once since I've been here but the following day it was as dusty as ever. Out on the strip when the planes taxi around, it's so dusty, you can't see twenty feet in front of you.

I am happy in my work, especially as crew chief. But don't let the papers back home kid you about the number of boys that are being returned to the states after 18 months' service - because it's a lot of bunk! I generally

don't gripe, but it makes us all mad to read that, when we have guys here with over 30 months in already. Still, I've started receiving my packages, at last, and I've had quite an enjoyable time opening them. I should have all of them by Easter, if I'm lucky.

Yum-Hum, old girl - guess I'll be seeing you. Be good now.

Love,

Brudder Edward

9 days after Edward wrote that letter, his mother received this telegram.

WESTERN UNION – Washington, D.C.

The Secretary of War asks that I assure you of his deep sympathy in the loss of your son, Sergeant Edward J. Hamilton. STOP. Report received states he was killed February 22, Southwest Pacific Area. STOP. Confirming letter follows.

Signed,
J.A. ULIO
The Adjunct General

This letter, from the squadron's commanding officer, followed:

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Hamilton,

Words cannot adequately express my own personal sorrow and that of our entire squadron over the loss of your son. He met his death yesterday morning, February 22, 1945, at one of our airstrips here on Mindoro Island when a disabled plane crashed into the grounded aircraft on which he was working.

As a crew chief it was the responsibility of Sergeant Hamilton to inspect and to maintain one of the combat aircraft assigned to this squadron. These fighter planes have in no small measure been responsible for the success of all the branches of the Armed Services in the Southwest Pacific area. In turn, the success of the planes has depended upon the exceptional performance of experts like your son.

You will be justly proud to know that the lives of the pilots who flew his plane were safely entrusted to him and that his work kept a plane in the air defending the lives of countless other individuals on the land and on the sea. It is noteworthy that on many occasions his duties were faithfully

fulfilled in the face of enemy action and under the most trying conditions of weather and limited equipment.

Not only will we miss the technical abilities of your son, but we will also miss him greatly as an individual. He leaves behind him a host of friends in our squadron and will be remembered by officers and men alike for his exemplary conduct, friendliness and integrity.

His funeral service was held this morning at ten-thirty o'clock, the personnel of the entire squadron being in attendance. In complete accordance with the customs and traditions of the Service, full military honors were paid to your son in the simple but impressive ceremony. His grave is No. 159, Row 11, Plot 1, United States Armed Forces Cemetery, Mindoro Island, Philippine Islands.

By my words I have attempted to tell you what the loss of your son has meant to us. Your own grief must necessarily be infinitely greater. If there is any way in which I can be of help to you in meeting this great loss, please feel free to write to me. To assist the parents of a fine man and an excellent soldier will be my first duty.

Yours very sincerely,

CAMPBELL P.M. WILSON,
Major, Air Corps,
Commanding
433rd Fighter Squadron

Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton reflected upon the abiding joys of their son's life and sought to honor Edward's memory as "a son who was so thoroughly devoted to his God, his country and his family." To that end, and recalling their son's love of Boy Scout Troop 59, they contacted the Commanding General of the Boy Scouts of the Philippines and, furnishing a generous check, requested that some Filipino Boy Scouts lay native flowers on Edward's grave.

Mr. Exequiel Villacorta, Chief Scout Executive, Philippine Islands, wrote in response:

In accordance with traditional custom and practice, and in keeping with the spirit of the Movement, a Scout is a brother to every other Scout. Our willingness to accede to the request made by Mr. & Mrs. Hamilton is based on our desire to honor a brother.

And so they did. The flowers were laid. And his memory is alive today. Edward J. Hamilton, patriot, man of faith, son of Allendale, died in service to his country on February 22, 1945.

He was 20 years old.