

ONE MAN'S ODYSSEY:

THE LIFE OF 1ST LT. MAX C. KISSEL

Max Christian Kissel was born on November 29, 1904 in Solingen, Germany. Around the age of 20 he came to the United States to live with his brother in Philadelphia, who had arrived here a few years earlier.

In 1926, he enlisted in the U.S. Army and became part of the 31st Infantry. Right after World War II began, the 31st Infantry Division was told to go to the Philippines in what would become the Pacific Theater of Operations. After defending the Philippine Islands from the Japanese for about two years, the American forces surrendered. It was then that the Bataan Death March began.

The Bataan Death March lasted for 12 days. After trekking without any food and barely any water, Max arrived at Camp O'Donnell, a prisoner of war (POW) camp where he stayed for only a few days. From there he went to another camp in Cabantuan. He was there for about a year.

In July of 1944, Max boarded the "hell ship" *Nissyo Maru*. Many survivors of hell ships say it was the worst experience of their lives. He suffered along with thousands of other prisoners for ten horrendous days with little food or water, no bathroom facilities and no fresh air. With more

than 1,400 prisoners aboard, only 500 survived. It is believed that the *Nissyo Maru* was the only ship to make the trip from the Philippines to Japan successfully. After the long trip, the ship finally reached its destination of Moji, Japan.

From Moji, a train took Lt. Kissel and the other prisoners to Narumi, Japan, outside of Nagoya, where they would spend the remainder of the war at another POW camp.

On August 20, 1945 the war ended. After one more month in Japan, Max was shipped home. It was a few years later that he met his future wife, Margaret Nurnberger. They were married in 1947 and had four sons, Christian, Ralph, Arthur, and Walter. It was only 10 years later that my grandfather died of a heart attack at the age of 53. The date was July 5, 1957.