

A soldier on the battle for the Philippines, 1945

Introduction

Witnessing the brutality of war and atrocities against civilians could overwhelm the most fair-minded of men. Sidney Diamond, an officer in the 82nd Chemical Battalion, wrote loving, humorous, and hopeful letters to his fiancée almost every day throughout his time in the army. Diamond enlisted in April 1942, interrupting his pursuit of a chemical engineering degree at City College in New York City. After training he was sent to the South Pacific in June 1943 and received a Silver Star and commendations for courage. In this letter, written on January 21, 1945, he expressed his reactions to the horrors he witnessed as US forces pushed the Japanese out of the Philippines:

Sometimes, while slapping away in the jungles there arose the great big “What the hell am I in this for” — Well — I know now — Regulations prohibit atrocity stories in mail but for unmitigated brutality — barbarism — cruelty — the Japanese take the grand prize — Every time we enter a town the Filipinos turn out with tears of joy . . . I’m glad we’ve helped these people and hope we can drive the enemy out of the Philippines quickly.

This is one of the last letters that Diamond wrote. On January 29, 1945, he was killed by a Japanese mortar during an assault on Fort Stotsenburg, north of Manila.

Excerpt

[Please note: This document contains language that is offensive to us today. However, it was in common use during World War II when Japan was one of the Axis powers.]

There is one point though that I’d like to bring out — Perhaps you’ll understand —
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“What the hell am I in this for” — Well — I know now — Regulations prohibit atrocity stories in mail but for unmitigated brutality — barbarism — cruelty — the Japanese take the grand prize — Every time we enter a town the Filipinos turn out with tears of joy and a great shout of “Mabachai” which means — “Long Life,” Good Luck or something — ~~If-yø~~ They won’t let you do a thing for yourself — They’ll assist in digging holes and unloading troops [illegible strikeout] “Victory” with the accompanying V of the fingers is by word—

Sometimes [illegible strikeout] I’d pass an old man who still didn’t comprehend that there’d been a change — Stelle I’d choke with fury when he’d take off his hat and bow down — as they were forced to do towards Nip officers & men — or when I’d give a kid a piece of candy and ask him his name — he’d reply “Hai” which is nip for “Yes sir” —

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So far we've been with the forward elements and on many occasions have been the first American troops into a village — [*illegible strikeout*] "Guerillas" would meet us — then people would come with food — and happy smiles —

Emotions are difficult to transcribe on paper but I'm glad I'm here — I'm glad we've helped these people and hope we can drive the enemy out of the Philippines quickly —

Questions for Discussion

Read the introduction and study the text of the letter. Then apply your knowledge of American history to answer the following questions. Remember to base your answers on the information in the document.

1. This is a love letter, but how would you characterize the tone of the letter?
2. How are the Japanese portrayed in the letter? What words make this clear to the reader?
3. How did Sidney Diamond describe his experiences with the old man and the young Filipino boy? Be specific with your details.

Transcript

21 Jan 1945

Darling —

Again — a short note — we've been moving [*illegible strikeout*] so fast, so often, so far — that we just can't squeeze in mail. I'm writing this in the courtyard of some large Filipino commercial house — — They say we'll stop for two hours — so — a letter to you — a little rest for me. There are so many things to say — so many new sights, customs, terrain, emotions — that this little postcard can scarce do justice —

There is one point though that I'd like to bring out — Perhaps you'll understand —

Sometimes, while slapping away in the jungles there arose the great big [2]

"What the hell am I in this for" — Well — I know now — Regulations prohibit atrocity stories in mail but for unmitigated brutality — barbarism — cruelty — the Japanese take the grand prize — Every time we enter a town the Filipinos turn out with tears of joy and a great shout of "Mabachai" which means — "Long Life," Good Luck or something — ~~If you~~ They won't let you do a thing for yourself — They'll assist in digging holes and unloading troops [*illegible strikeout*] "Victory" with the accompanying V of the fingers is by word—

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there'd been a change — Stelle I'd choke with fury when he'd take off his hat and bow down — as they were [3] forced to do towards Nip officers & men — or when I'd give a kid a piece of candy and ask him his name — he'd reply "Hai" which is nip for "Yes sir" —

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Emotions are difficult to transcribe on paper but I'm glad I'm here — I'm glad we've helped these people and hope we [4] can drive the enemy out of the Philippines quickly —

My thoughts are with you constantly — Sometimes I welcome night — so that I can stretch out on my back — feel around for a comfortable position in my hole then look at the stars and think of home and you — I also cuss my feet for burning — — we walk & walk — then ride —

No trouble so far — I think I'll be okay —

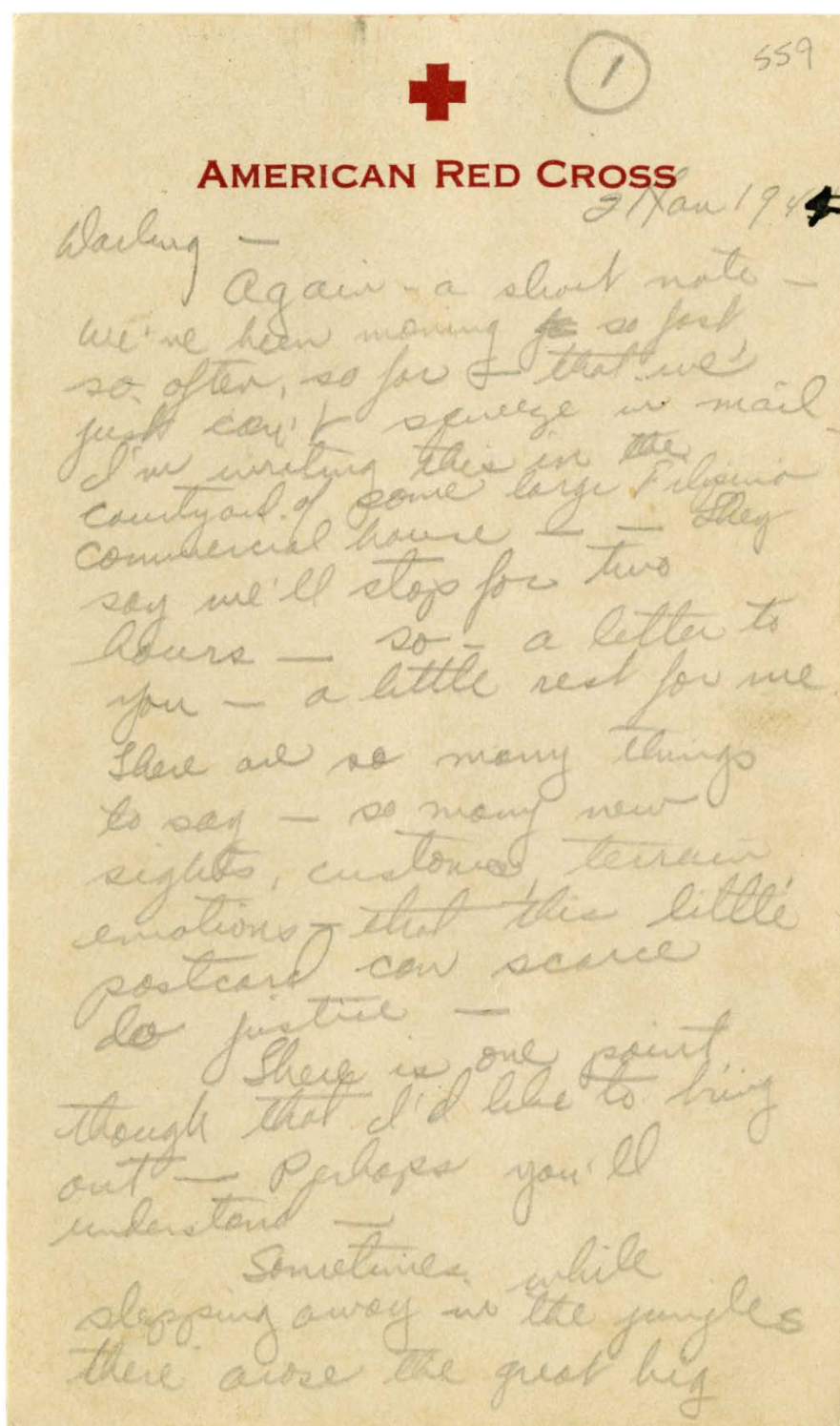
I love you — love you — love you —

Your —

Sid

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Images




Sidney Diamond to Estelle Spero, January 21, 1945, p. 1. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09120.559)

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Sidney Diamond to Estelle Spero, January 21, 1945, p. 2. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09120.559)

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(3)

AMERICAN RED CROSS

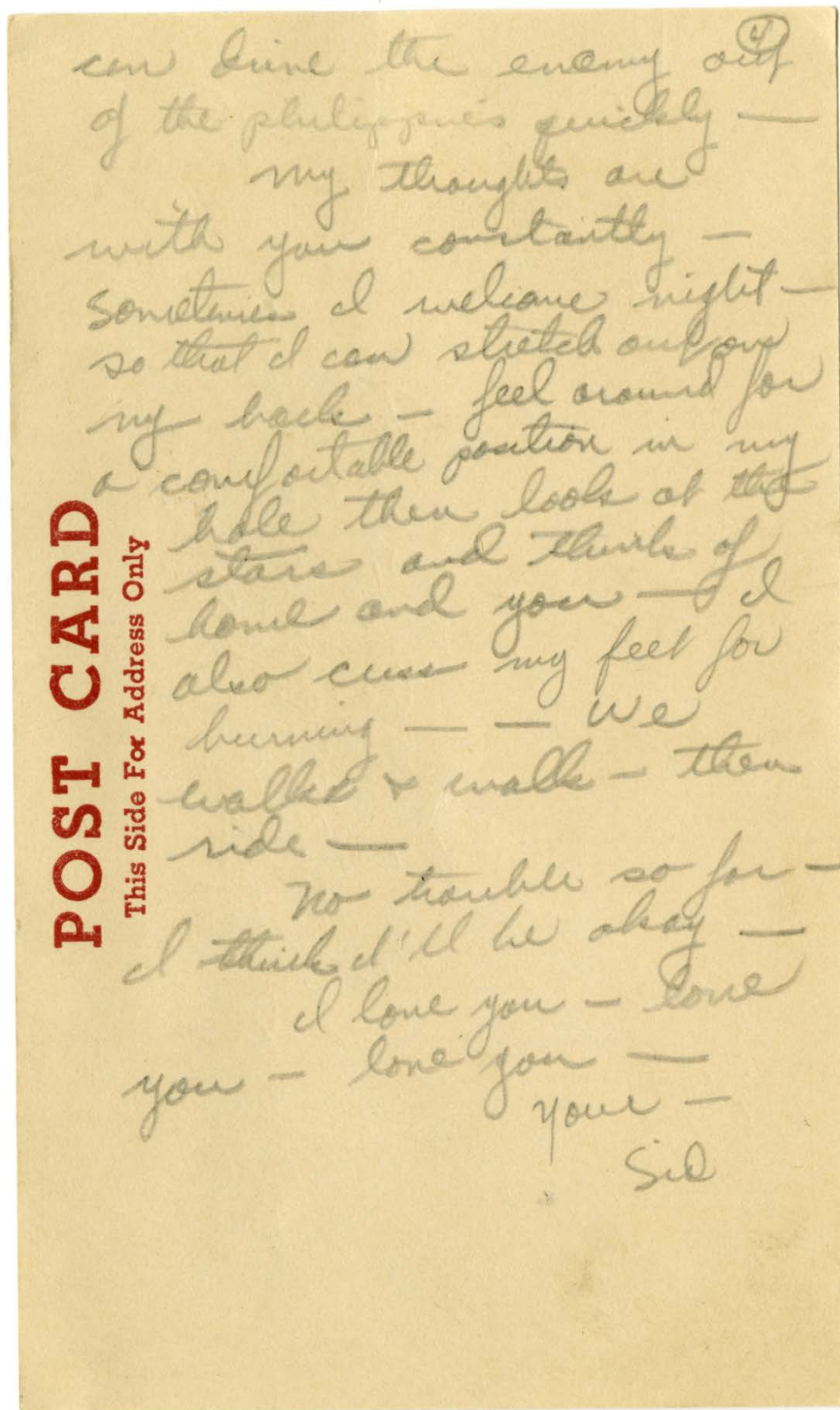
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Sidney Diamond to Estelle Spero, January 21, 1945, p. 4. (Gilder Lehrman Institute, GLC09120.559)