

S. F. Pacific Hero Dies of Wounds

WITH THE THIRTY-SECOND DIVISION IN THE PHILIPPINES, Jan. 16 (AP).—Death in action on Leyte has ended the spectacular fighting career of a legendary hero of the Pacific battle front, Captain Hermann Botcher of San Francisco.

The German-born soldier, who was promoted from staff sergeant to captain on New Guinea's bloody Buna battlefields, was mortally wounded New Year's Eve by enemy mortar fire, division headquarters announced today.

But on Leyte as in other campaigns, he had carried to the end his own individual style of harassing the Japanese behind their own lines.

Because he had served as a major in the Abraham Lincoln brigade in the Spanish Civil War, Congress had to pass a special act providing him American citizenship necessary to his captaincy.

The 35 year old graduate of San Francisco State College enlisted immediately after Pearl Harbor. As a sergeant in the Buna campaign he had often said that he would "get something done" if given a command post.

When the battle was critical he was given an infantry company that successfully assaulted enemy positions. For this action he won his captaincy and the Distinguished Service Cross.

Subsequently wounded three times, he added the Oak Leaf

cluster to his D. S. C., and now has been recommended for a posthumous Silver Star.

It was Botcher's delight to outsmart the Japanese at their own jungle-fighting. Operating almost continuously in enemy rear areas, he once captured a Japanese captain—highest ranking prisoner of the Leyte battle.

He was known as the "eyes and ears of the division." Sometimes he tore down enemy bridges, concealing the pieces for later American use.

For more than six weeks, during hard fighting in New Guinea's Aitape sector, his troops were supplied only by air as they fought deep in enemy-held mountains.

All such dangerous missions cost his unit only four wounded—until his death on Leyte while engaged against a numerically superior force.

His men idolized the mild-mannered Botcher. One of them recently confided to an officer:

"It's actually fun working out there with him. It's like playing cops and robbers. I never feel safer in the jungle than when I'm with Botcher."

An aunt, Mrs. Alice Botcher Brueggemann, 239 Ramsell street, San Francisco, was listed as his next of kin in the United States. He was unmarried.

His Last Letter Hinted Death

Indicating a premonition that the Leyte battle might be his last,



CAPT. HERMANN BOTCHER
Jungle Fighting Career Over

Captain Botcher, in his last letter to his aunt, Mrs. Brueggemann, which was written shortly before Christmas, stated he was settling his affairs and making a will, she said today.

He also sent large amounts of money to her and her 13 year old daughter, Evelyn, and to several friends, pointing out he wanted them to have it in case he failed to return, Mrs. Brueggemann said.

While attending San Francisco State College, where he was studying international relations, Botcher worked as a cabinet maker for several downtown department stores.

He was the son of a German soldier killed in World War I in combat against Australian infantry. His only other survivors, besides his aunt and cousin, were relatives in Germany whom he had been unable to communicate with since America's entry into the war. One brother is believed to have died in a Nazi concentration camp.

S. F.'S 'ONE-MAN ARMY' KILLED

By United Press

WITH 32ND DIVISION, Leyte, Jan. 16.—Captain Hermann Botcher, 35, of San Francisco, the one-man army of Buna, died of wounds early Dec. 31 as his small reconnaissance force battle off 300 Japanese far behind enemy lines in the drive south toward Ormoc, headquarters revealed today.

The German-born Botcher, who enlisted as a private soon after Pearl Harbor and became a legendary hero in the Southwest Pacific, was struck in the arm and knee by enemy mortar fire and died a few hours later.

As a sergeant at Buna during the New Guinea campaign two years ago, Botcher won a battlefield commission and the Distinguished Service Cross.

He often had said, "If they only would give me the actual command of an outfit, I would get something done."

When bitter fighting became worse at Buna, he was told, "Now is your chance," and was given command of an infantry company. He led it to victory.

Congress passed a special act granting him citizenship so he could be commissioned.

When Botcher was to be presented with a Distinguished Service Cross for his work at Buna he failed to show up at the ceremony. They found him training his reconnaissance troop.

During the Aitape campaign in New Guinea when the 32nd Division killed 9000 Japanese, Botcher and his troop operated more than six weeks deep inside enemy lines.

For nearly a month and a half Captain Botcher operated almost continuously behind enemy lines on Leyte, disrupting the Japanese defenses by destroying bridges. He often would remove entire bridges piece by piece, hiding them in the jungle for future American use.

His men lived mainly on native food, asking headquarters only for salt, sugar and tea.

Botcher was idolized by his men. "People may think I'm crazy but it's actually fun working out there with him," one of them said recently. "It's like playing cops and robbers. And I never feel safer out in the jungle than when I'm with Captain Botcher."

For his work on Leyte he has been recommended for a posthumous Silver Star.

CAPTAIN BOTCHER JOINED ARMY FROM S. F. HOME

Captain Botcher's home was San Francisco. He enlisted here the day war was declared—Dec. 8, 1941. He is survived here by his aunt, Mrs. Alice Botcher, 239 Ramsell-st, and her daughter, Evelyn.

He came to the United States after serving with the International Brigade on the side of the Loyalists in the Spanish Civil War. In that war against fascism, as in this one, he entered the ranks as a private, emerged as a captain.