



# World War II Hero Leaves a Chemical Legacy

*By Captain Kristy Moore*

Sidney Diamond was born to Russian Jewish immigrants on 11 April 1922 in Bronx, New York, where he was raised. As a boy, Diamond participated in the Boy Scouts of America and later become an assistant scoutmaster. He attended Stuyvesant High School—a school for intellectually gifted boys. Upon his graduation in 1939, Diamond entered the City College of New York, where he studied chemical engineering and joined the Alpha Phi Omega fraternity.<sup>1</sup>

Although Diamond had followed the normal course of most boys his age, his destiny was to be determined by colliding world powers and the bloodiest wars in history. With the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 7 December 1941, more than 2,300 American troops were killed. The next day, the United States declared war on Japan and Sidney Diamond's life changed forever. Like most Americans, Diamond felt a sense of duty to his country. On 24 April 1942, he entered the U.S. Army as a private at Fort Dix, New Jersey. Upon completing basic training on 10 May 1942, Private Diamond joined the Chemical Warfare Service at Edgewood Arsenal, Maryland. He trained with Company G, 2d Chemical Warfare Service Training Battalion. Private Diamond was excited to be a part of a new Army service, where he felt his education in chemical engineering would prove useful. The following excerpt is from a letter that Private Diamond wrote to his fiancée, Ms. Estelle Spero:

*Hello Sweet,*

*. . . Can't express my elation and satisfaction with the new post . . . Everyone makes it a point of behaving like a gentleman and Soldier. Persons here are proud of the service they're in. The Chemical Warfare Service is a comparatively new branch of the Army. Corporal informs us that it's merely a year and a half old. It acts its age: young, vibrant, enthusiastic, courageous and, above all, eager! . . .<sup>2</sup>*

In July 1942, Private Diamond applied for Officer Candidate School. He was accepted in August and trained as a chemical officer until mid-November. He was then assigned as a platoon leader, D Company, 82d Chemical Battalion, Fort Bliss, Texas. The 82d, which was on orders to deploy, trained for deployment in Shreveport, Louisiana, and at Camp Swift, Texas. In June 1943, the unit left for San Francisco, California, where Lieutenant Diamond was attached to the 1st Battalion, 160th Infantry Regiment, 40th Division—a 4.2-inch mortar unit.<sup>3</sup>

On 27 June 1943, the unit left San Francisco for Nouméa, New Caledonia, in the Southwest Pacific. In October 1943, they resumed training at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands; and on 15 January 1944, they entered World War II at Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, Solomon Islands. On 18 January, the troops were greeted by Japanese bombers. Under Lieutenant Colonel Stratta, commander of the 1st Battalion, Lieutenant Diamond led his platoon in attacks to clear parallel ridges to the west in the Zambales Mountains above Clark Field in the Philippines. On 29 January 1945, Lieutenant Diamond, who was serving as a forward observer, successfully directed mortar fire during the initial stages of the action, killing and wounding what appeared to be a reinforced platoon of Japanese. To bring fire upon other enemy positions, Lieutenant Diamond—with heroic disregard for his own safety—made his way (alone and under intense hostile machine gun, mortar, and rifle fire) to a position 150 yards beyond friendly lines. Despite the continued heavy fire, Diamond remained in this position, skillfully directing mortars to destroy many Japanese troops and strongpoints—until he was killed by an enemy shell. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star for his actions.

During the time he spent on active duty, Lieutenant Diamond wrote more than 525 letters to Ms. Spero. These letters have been preserved in a collection at the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History in New York; some of them have been printed in the book entitled *An Alcove in the Heart: WWII Letters of Sidney Diamond to Estelle Spero*. The letters, which

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are filled with humor and heartache, serve as an excellent record of the trials and tribulations faced by Soldiers in training and combat—including their feelings of ambivalence toward family and country. The letters also preserve the memory of a young Chemical Corps.

Lieutenant Diamond is an excellent example of a Soldier who contributed to the long, proud, heroic history that is part of our chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear legacy. We face the battle with duty and honor, dedicating our lives to our country. 

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>Estelle Spero Lynch, *An Alcove in the Heart: WWII Letters of Sydney Diamond to Estelle Spero*, Author House, 13 September 2004.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Before the war, the Chemical Warfare Service developed the 4.2-inch mortar, or “automatic howitzer,” to throw gas shells; however, it could also provide high-explosive shells for use against tanks and troop concentrations. The mortar, which weighed about 300 pounds, was capable of slamming out an 8-pound shell every 3 seconds (“Army & Navy—Stovepipe Artillery,” *Time*, 15 November 1943).

**References:**

Dale Andrade, CMH Pub 72-28, *Luzon: 15 December 1944–4 July 1945*, U.S. Army Center of Military History.

Jack Butler, *Fire, Smoke, and Steel: The Jungle-Fighting 82nd Chemical Mortar Battalion*, 2001, <<http://www.4point2.org/hist-82-pl.htm>>, accessed on 16 February 2011.

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