ONE MAN'S VIEW

A U.S. MARINE'S PERSONAL STORY OF WORLD WAR II IN THE PACIFIC

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Corvallis, Oregon USA

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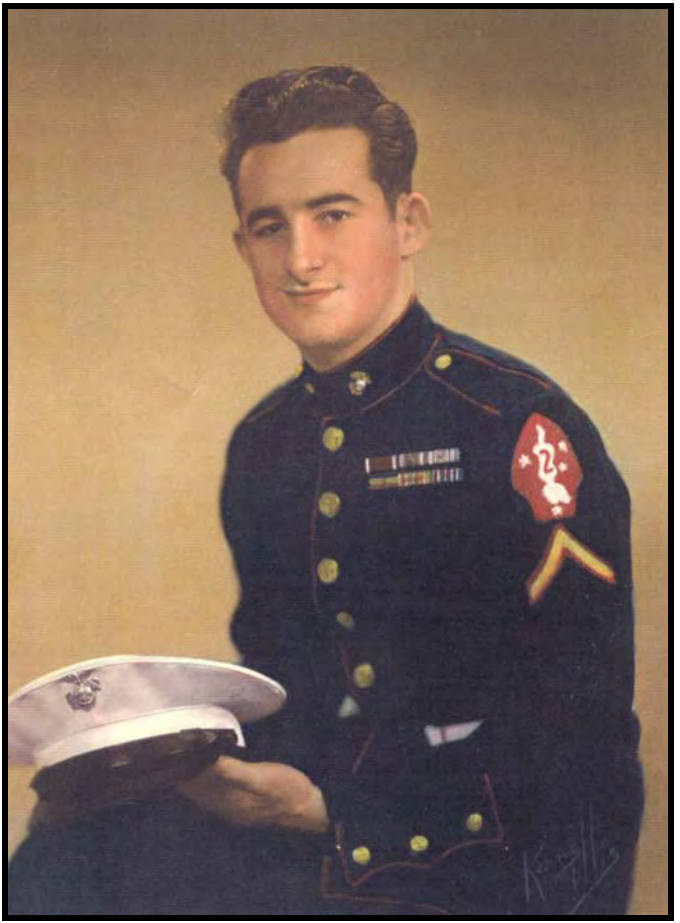

Frontispiece. The author upon his discharge in December, 1945.

ONE MAN'S VIEW

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO OUR SON AND HIS FAMILY:
CRAIG, LINDA, AND IAN

Because of the interest future generations may derive from it, I have been asked to write a history of my experiences while serving in the U. S. Marine Corps during World War 2.

Although many years have passed since the activities described herein, my memory remains clear on everything I have recorded. In fact, some of the events are almost as vivid as if they had just occurred, rather than having happened more than sixty years ago. My memory has been refreshed by having revisited most of the locations covered in this story.

Assisting in my recollections is the official history of the Second Marine Division, published shortly after the war, with a copy having been given to me by the Marine Corps at that time. Also of great help was the fact that I had recorded, on a calendar kept throughout the war, the exact dates of incidents with which I was involved. That, and other notes made both during the war and immediately thereafter, allow me to be very specific about when things actually happened, the names of ships involved, and other details which would have escaped me otherwise.

A lot of military historians have written books describing the planning, strategy, and logistics of warfare. That activity took place on a much different level than mine and has no place in this story. Somewhere I remember reading that, to a soldier, war is what is happening a hundred feet on each side of him. That is very true and that is what I try to describe. In other words, this is no official history of combat, it is just one man's view.

Leonard E. Skinner
U.S.M.C.R. 372831

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1 Introduction

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese Fleet bombed Pearl Harbor in the Territory of Hawaii. The following day the United States declared war against Japan. While war was also declared against Germany and Italy, I seemed to know from the beginning it would be Japan that I would be concerned with.

I had graduated from Myrtle Creek (Oregon) High School in June of the same year. I lived with my parents and was working in Kusler's Cash Store, the major grocery store in town, while deciding what course I should take. The Pearl Harbor attack galvanized the American public into a patriotic fervor and I, along with most of the young fellows my age, was caught up with the excitement. Many of my friends were joining the various branches of the military service and by the following month I could wait no longer.

In January 1942, I talked a friend into driving to Eugene with me so we could enlist in the Navy. Upon locating the recruiting station we found a long line waiting to join. In fact, the line extended out of the building and for almost a block along the sidewalk. My friend and I took our places at the end of the line, which was moving very slowly, and complained about having to wait. Little did I realize then that the service would see to it that I would become an expert in standing in line waiting for

Figure 1. Leonard at home in Myrtle Creek, Oregon, on December 7, 1941, a few hours before hearing the news about the attack on Pearl Harbor.

something to happen. While waiting, my attention was caught by a large Marine Corps recruitment poster located on a sandwich board on the sidewalk. I wasn't sure what the Marine Corps was, but the poster showed a picture of a handsome man in a dress blue uniform. The poster also gave the location of the Marine recruiting office, which was less than two blocks away. I suggested to my friend that we go over there to see if the line was any shorter. He agreed, and upon arrival we found no line at all! We entered the building and received immediate attention. In no time I passed all the preliminary procedures and was informed to return home for about a month, at which time I would report for duty. The time passed rapidly and I basked in my role as a

potential hero about to save his country. This also made a good impression on the girls, who were equally patriotic.

What about my friend? He flunked his physical and returned to life as a farmer. Ironically, he drowned a couple of years later during a flood of the Umpqua River while I survived everything.

2 Boot Camp and Beyond

On March 3, 1942, I left home and reported to the recruiting office in Salem, along with a number of other young men from around the state. We were fed at a local restaurant and transported to Portland where we were housed overnight. I was still not officially a Marine until the following day when I was sworn in. I was 17 years old. Later that day we were placed on a train headed for the Marine Corps Base at San Diego, California. This base served the western half of the United States.

We arrived on the 6th and started indoctrination procedures. We were issued uniforms, a rifle, bayonet, gas mask, pith helmet, and other equipment. The rifle was a 1903 bolt action Springfield. While this was a very reliable rifle, it did show how obsolete most of the Marine Corps equipment was. We also received haircuts, which consisted of removing all the hair with electric clippers. We stood in lines to receive one shot after another for diseases I had never heard of. The shots didn't hurt near as much, however, as the one trip we were allowed to the post exchange (PX). We were not permitted to buy candy or anything good, but were simply supplied a list of required items, such as a bucket, scrub brush, and soap for washing our clothes. We had no money, but were informed the cost of the items would be deducted from our first month's salary. The cost came to almost $15. As our pay was only $21 a month this represented a

Figure 2. 287th Platoon at Boot Camp. March, 1942. Len is in the second row from the top, fifth from the left (see below).

sizable investment. I was convinced it was going to be quite a sacrifice to become a hero.

On March 16th, I was assigned to the 287th platoon and our training commenced. There were 60 of us in the platoon, which was commanded by W.W. Westmoreland, a career Marine with the imposing rank of corporal.

All of us recruits, or boots as we were commonly called, were housed in Quonset huts during basic training, which was known as boot camp. A Quonset hut was a round-roofed, prefabricated, metal structure which provided living quarters for about 30 men in double-decked bunks. There were a large number of these huts on the base.

The drill instructors made boot camp as rough on us as they could, but I expected that and didn't really mind, even when we were roused out of bed in the middle of the night, told to fall out with our newly purchased buckets, and then required to run across the sand to the bay about a mile away. Upon reaching the bay we dipped up a bucket of water and ran back to the base. The buckets were then checked to be sure they were still nearly full. Those who passed the inspection were then told to dump the water on the ground and go back to bed. Those who failed got to run back to the bay again.

The drill instructors did use some unique, though highly effective, methods of instruction. In the thinking of the

Marine Corps, every man was considered to be first and foremost a rifleman, and the training reflected this. We were very precisely instructed that this weapon was to be called a rifle and not a gun, as the latter was a term used to describe an artillery piece. The proper use of this nomenclature was dramatically demonstrated to us in a lesson that I never forgot. One evening a recruit from another platoon opened the door to our hut and stepped inside, holding his rifle in one hand and his penis in the other. First presenting one, then the other, he loudly recited the following poem:

This is my rifle and this is my gun,
This is for shooting and this is for fun.

He then went on to the next hut, as he had to repeat his performance to everyone in the entire recruit depot! As I watched this humiliated individual, I promised myself that I would never make that mistake. This object lesson was apparently repeated often enough that every recruit was exposed to it as he went through boot camp, as in the following four years I never heard any Marine repeat that error.

Boot camp consisted of four weeks at the base, mostly practicing close order drill, attending lectures, training with the bayonet, and being taught military courtesy and discipline. We then went to the rifle range for two more weeks which was a lot more fun. We had to qualify with the rifle in the offhand position, the kneeling position, the

sitting position, and the prone position. Later, I would wonder why, as I never saw anyone use even one of those positions in combat. All of our practice firing was done at long range, and we would soon be fighting in the jungle where visibility was usually only a few feet. We also practiced with the .45 caliber colt automatic pistol, model 19llAl.

We still were not allowed to go to the PX except for the one mandatory trip, but life was a bit better at the range. On Sunday we had a light schedule and a civilian was allowed in camp to sell newspapers and cough drops. We immediately bought both, and luxuriated lying on our bunks reading the funnies and eating cough drops for candy.

Upon completion of duties at the rifle range, we returned to the base where all of the platoons that had been undergoing training marched in our first parade, inspection, and review. It was now April 29th, I had been in the Marine Corps for almost two months, and it may be hard to believe, but when we passed in review I saw the first officer I had seen since joining!

The following day we anxiously awaited receiving our assignments as recruit training was now completed. We were then informed that our entire platoon was assigned to mess duty at the rifle range for the next month. This was very demoralizing as everyone was anticipating going to a combat unit. Although menial and boring, the month

passed rather quickly. At least we were no longer boots so we could go to the PX, the movies, and on liberty in San Diego. San Diego was so full of servicemen that liberty was not very special except for one incident. Hundreds of service personnel; Army, Navy, and Marine, were milling around the bus depot preparing to go back to their camps when a very young, obviously newly commissioned, second lieutenant walked by. Everyone saluted him, of course, except for one Marine who didn't notice him as he passed by. The lieutenant immediately called him back, read him off, and told him he would have to salute him twenty-five times to make up for the omission. This the private did, while the lieutenant stood there glowering at him. Quite a crowd gathered around to watch, obviously hostile to the lieutenant's response to an unintentional error. After the private completed the required number of salutes, the lieutenant turned to go, but a salty gunnery sergeant with hash marks all the way up his sleeve reminded him he had to return the salutes. The lieutenant then saluted the private twenty-five times while the mood of the crowd improved immensely!

Upon finishing our month on mess duty we again returned to the base for assignment. We were sent to all different units and I never did see any of the platoon members again. My best friend during this time was a man from Portland, which was rather surprising as he was 28 years old and I had just turned 18 while in boot camp. We were hoping to be stationed together but he was informed he was too old for the Fleet Marine Force

Figure 3. Len not long after the completion of Marine Boot Camp.

and that he would be assigned to a defense battalion guarding supply dumps in the California desert. I was sent to K Company, 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, stationed at Camp Elliott, north of San Diego. I reported for duty June 3, 1942. I was the only new recruit in the company, the rest of the men having been in the Corps for several months. With the exception of one corporal, all of the non-coms (non-commissioned officers) in the company were old salts, having served in China and most of them in Nicaragua.

The Second Marines were considered fully trained and ready for combat (except for me, whose training had mostly been in marching and washing dishes). They were expecting to be shipped out, and during my first week with them we did absolutely nothing except to run the bayonet course one time, which took about fifteen minutes. On June 10th, we went aboard the U.S.S. President Adams in San Diego Harbor. This was a President class attack transport capable of carrying 1550 troops.

Every company was supposed to have a specialty, and K Company was designated the rubber boat company. Our ship went off the California coast and we practiced dropping rubber boats over the side, climbing down cargo nets onto the boats, then paddling ashore. As we neared the beach we would go over the side and drag the boat out of the water onto the sand. The surf was fairly high and the boats often turned over on their way in so we had

the additional experience of trying to right them. Because we knew we would be in the water a lot, we left all equipment aboard ship and just wore our undershorts. We spent the whole day doing this. The water was warm and I had an absolutely great time. In the course of this, however, I received probably the worst sunburn I have ever experienced. Our bunks aboard ship were stacked four high which meant the only position for sleeping was flat on one's back. For me this meant the next two nights were pure misery.

The word came to load the ships for embarkation. We spent a week loading supplies at Camp Elliott and elsewhere, then trucking them to the dock and stowing them aboard. Then came a change of orders which was to unload the ships and return to Camp Elliott. For three days we did this, and with the ships partially unloaded, another change of orders came to reload, as we were leaving immediately. We had one day to return all the material we had carried ashore during the last three days.

Because of military secrecy we had not been told our destination or why the sudden change. Speculation was that we were intended to re-enforce our Garrison on Midway. But then the battle of Midway occurred and as this was a decisive American victory we were no longer needed there. I don't know if this was true or not, but the urgency of our latest orders showed that we were definitely needed somewhere.

On July lst, we left. The Adams was accompanied by two other former cushy ocean liners, the Presidents Hayes and Jackson, plus the Crescent City, another troop carrier, and the Alhena, an attack cargo ship. Our entire regiment plus reinforcements were aboard. We were escorted by a few destroyers.

We zigzagged across the Pacific Ocean until arriving at Tongatabu, capital of the Kingdom of Tonga, on July 18th. We anchored in the harbor for a week and I had my first chance to go ashore on a South Sea Island. There wasn't much to do, but it was fun to leave the confines of the ship, ogle the women (who were all dressed in shapeless mother hubbards), walk to the Royal Palace, and stuff ourselves on fresh coconuts, a new experience for most of us. Unfortunately, all those who participated in the latter had an absolutely unbelievable experience with diarrhea!

It was about this time that I had my first experience with prickly heat. Our quarters aboard the President Adams were extremely crowded. The bunks were stacked four high with a narrow passageway just large enough to squeeze through every second row of bunks. This was enough to give one claustrophobia, but at least it was bearable when we first left the States. As we neared the equator, however, the heat became almost unbearable.

Fresh air vents mounted topside diverted some air down a couple of decks to where my quarters were located, but

Figure 4. The Royal Palace at Nuku'alofa, Tonga. Built in 1867.

the volume of air was terribly inadequate. The air was not pumped, but had a horn-shaped intake on deck that scooped the air in if the ship was underway. When anchored, unless a breeze was blowing, no air found its way below deck. To further compound the problem, one intake was piped all over the quarters into a myriad of smaller vents. One could barely detect a flow of air from the vent located nearest to my bunk.

The constant heat, coupled with a very high humidity and our tightly-woven, long-sleeved dungaree uniform,

guaranteed perspiration on a 24-hour basis. This formed a rash over a good portion of our bodies that itched incessantly.

Scratching only irritated the situation more. Relief could be found by taking a shower, but only at a high price. As long as the stream of water was hitting the area covered by the rash it felt wonderful. The problem was that our showers consisted only of salty seawater, and when the shower was vacated, the intensity of the itching doubled! This was always a problem aboard transports in the tropics, but fortunately it would clear up a few days after leaving the ship.

On July 25th, we left Tonga, and three days later arrived in Suva, Fiji. Here we met up with the First Marine Division, a force three times larger than ours. Ships seemed to stretch to the horizon and included many destroyers and a few cruisers. We practiced making amphibious landings but didn't actually go ashore, returning instead to the transports.

On August lst, we left Fiji and finally learned our destination was to be the Solomon Islands.

Many years later Joyce and I returned to the Kingdom of Tonga and I enjoyed showing her around Tongatabu. This delightful little country, the only island group in the entire Pacific never claimed by a foreign power, has changed little over the years. Few tourists visit there, and it is not a

Figure 5. Len with Sergeant Major Faleone Vai (left), and other Palace Guardsmen. Royal Palace, Tonga, 1988.

stopover for travelers bound elsewhere. I showed Joyce the modest wood-frame Royal Palace, which still looked exactly as I remembered it. We also had an enjoyable visit with Sergeant Major Faleone Vai of the Royal Palace Guards, and we communicated with each other after our return home.

We have also twice visited Fiji, and on both occasions we had the opportunity to tour this country and see what I had missed on my first trip there.

3 Gavutu and Tanambogo Islands

What were the Solomon Islands? I had always enjoyed reading about the South Seas, but that name did not mean anything. We had briefings, but the officer conducting them didn't know much more. It seemed the Japanese had been advancing rapidly southward across the Pacific, with their ultimate goal being Australia and New Zealand. As the Solomon Islands had been undefended, they were easily seized from the British, and the Japanese were building an airfield on Guadalcanal, the largest island in the southern Solomons. This airfield would make it possible to take the remaining islands southward and effectively isolate both Australia and New Zealand from any outside assistance. It was imperative, we were told, to stop the Japanese at this point.

On August 7, 1942, we arrived at our destination. The First Marine Division was assigned to take Guadalcanal where the airfield was, and which was supposed to be the most heavily defended. The regiment I was in, the Second, was assigned to take a number of islands about 20 miles from Guadalcanal across Sealark Channel. The First and Second Battalions of the Second Regiment, plus the Raider Battalion, were to take Florida Island and Tulagi, the capital of the British Solomon Islands. Tulagi also had one of the best harbors in the South Pacific. The First Paratroop Battalion, landing from Higgins boats, was to take the lightly defended islands of Gavutu and

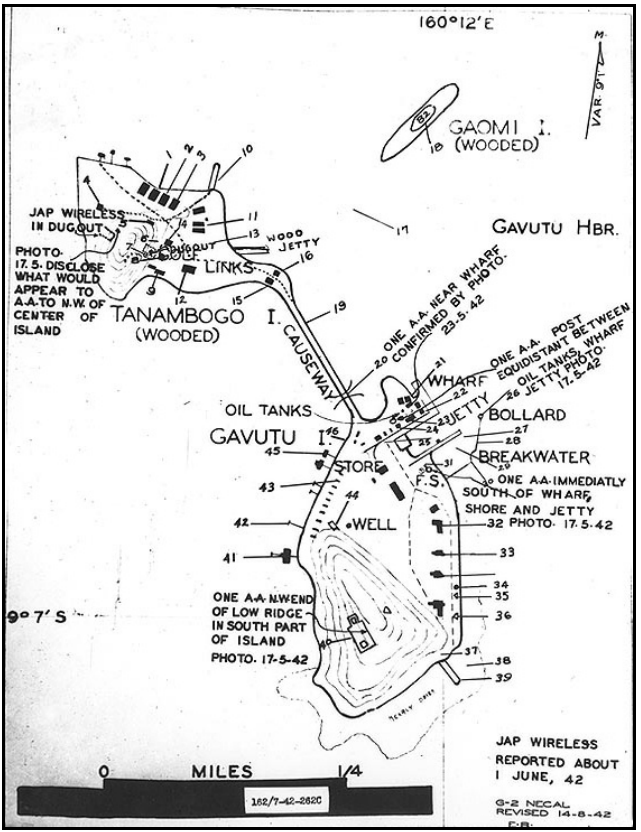


Figure 6. Intelligence map of Gavutu and Tanambogo Islands, July 1942. Photo# NH 97748 from the Navy Historical Center.

Tanambogo. Smaller islands in this area had the strange sounding names of Makambo, Mbangui, Kakomtambu and Songonangong. The Third Battalion, my unit, was to be in reserve.

Intelligence had made a serious error. Guadalcanal was very lightly defended and the Japanese troops that were there dropped back into the jungle. Tulagi had good defenses and the three battalions there saw a lot of action. But it was on the small islands of Gavutu and Tanambogo where the Japanese troops were concentrated. Gavutu was a submarine base and Tanambogo was a seaplane base. The Paratroop Battalion got a foothold on Gavutu, but even with help was unable to land anyone on Tanambogo. Meanwhile, I spent D-day aboard ship, watching our Navy bombard shore installations, until a Japanese dive bomber attack drove me below decks. We then came under a torpedo attack, with the bridge keeping us posted via the public address system. Several torpedoes were fired, but we maneuvered first to starboard and then to port, dodging all of them until the PA announced, "Here comes another one, dead amidships. Standby to take torpedo." The next word was, "Torpedo set too low, it went underneath." You could hear a huge sigh from a whole shipload of men!

I found that being in reserve had its drawbacks because reserves were always sent to where the worst fighting occurred and, sure enough, early the next morning we boarded our Higgins boats and left for Gavutu. We

Figure 7. This tiny beach on Gavutu is where we waded ashore from our Higgins boats. Photo taken in 1988.

Figure 8. Gavutu Island. Only 515 yards long and 255 yards wide. Photo taken in 1988.

neared the beach, the boat grounded, and I went over the side with the rest of my squad into waist-deep water. I surged forward through the water as fast as possible because there was considerable rifle and machine gun fire. Upon reaching the beach I hit the deck, half in and half out of the water, alongside another Marine already lying there. Keeping my eyes to the front I asked him, "What's the scoop?" hoping he might have seen something I hadn't. When he didn't answer I looked at him and saw he was dead. I rose and ran a zigzag course on inland.

Gavutu is a very small island, just over one-third of a mile long. Adjacent Tanambogo is even smaller. Both consist of a low hill, with some flat land comprising about half of each island. We were ordered up the hill which was full of caves, both natural and those dug by the Japanese. Most of the remaining Japanese on Gavutu were holed up in the caves. I reached the top of the hill which had a low, open structure on it made out of corrugated iron. Over this shelter flew the Japanese flag. We set up a machine gun, aiming it at Tanambogo, which was giving us heavy fire. I took up a prone position a few feet from the machine gun where I could also bring my rifle to bear on Tanambogo.

The noise of machine gun, rifle, and mortar fire was very loud and continuous. Suddenly there was even a louder roar and instantaneous explosion, then all went black and quiet. Although I did not know it at the time, an American dive bomber from one of our carriers was

ordered to bomb Tanambogo. The pilot became confused and, seeing the Japanese flag flying over us, dive bombed Gavutu instead and dropped a 500-pound fragmentation bomb square on our machine gun. The gun crew was killed and several other Marines were killed or wounded. I was blown about half way down the hill.

I don't know how long I was unconscious, but it was a little while. As I started coming to I realized something had happened. As everything was black and completely silent, I thought I must be dead. I remember that I wasn't frightened, but was curious as to what would happen next as people often wondered about what took place after death, but no one had ever been able to report it. As I waited to discover this, gradually things started to get light and focused until I realized I was still on Gavutu and lying flat on my back. I knew then I was alive, but as everything was still completely quiet I decided I was deaf. Gradually, however, my hearing started to return so I knew that function still worked all right. I still had no idea what happened but realized I was hit somewhere. As reasoning returned, I knew I had to find out how bad it was. The most difficult thing I ever did was to raise my head and look toward my lower extremities as I was afraid what I would find. As it was, I could see I was completely covered with blood, but both legs looked intact and I could see two feet pointing skyward. I immediately started to feel better as I mentally cleared one serious injury after another. At this time I realized my upper left arm was numb and knew that must be where I was hit. I

was still flat on my back, but turning my head sideways I could observe that the sleeve looked full. I then reached around with my right hand and felt the rear portion of my left arm and discovered there were no big holes there either. My morale was improving by leaps and bounds.

About that time two Navy Corpsmen arrived with a stretcher and placed me on it, then carried me down the remainder of the hill where the former store was located and which was now battalion aid. Keeping me on the stretcher, they carried me to the second floor of this building and placed me on two supports. Doctor Eisenberg rushed over and unbuttoned my jacket. As he removed the jacket, which was absolutely soaked in blood, both he and I stared in amazement at my nice white skin underneath. The blood belonged to some other poor Marine and was not mine at all. The examination showed I had been hit several times by small pieces of shrapnel and other debris, but as they were hot from exploding they cauterized their own entry and I had not bled at all.

As none of my injuries were so serious that they required immediate attention, the doctor told me to just rest where I was for awhile. This was good advice, but it might have proved fatal in this instance. As it was, I was anxious to get back to my unit and the stability of companions in this strange and unfriendly land, so I took my rifle, which I had retained the whole time, and went back to what was left of my squad.

Figure 9. Buildings stood on these pilings during the assault in 1942.

About 1600 hours, just shortly after I left battalion aid, the USS Buchanan came in and fired point blank at the concrete bunker on Tanambogo. Unfortunately, shell fragments from a short fused round ripped through the second floor of the former store near where I had been lying. M Company Sgt. Robert E. Bradley, who was operating a mortar observation post at that location, was not so fortunate as I, and a piece of shrapnel hit him in the throat taking out his larynx and severing his trachea

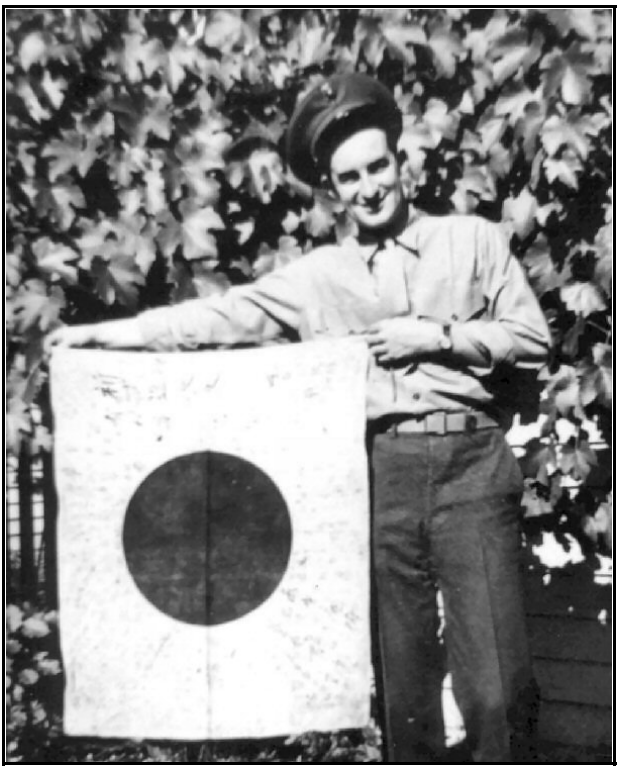


Figure 10. This Japanese flag flew over those buildings.

operating a mortar observation post at that location, was not so fortunate as I, and a piece of shrapnel hit him in the throat taking out his larynx and severing his trachea

and esophagus. Sgt. Bradley would live, but he spent the next year and a half in naval hospitals before receiving a medical discharge. When the official history of the Second Marine Division during World War 2 was published, under the title of "Follow Me," the opening paragraph tells of this incident and the courage of this man. What an honor, but at what a price as his voice was never restored. Bob Bradley still lives with his wife in Magalia, California, and thanks to this story on the web we have met via e-mail and correspond on a regular basis.

Incidentally, it was over three years later at the Long Beach Naval Hospital that I had an irritating piece of the bomb that had injured me removed from my left hand. The hospital was in need of an excuse to have a parade and review so it did so at that time and I was presented wth a Purple Heart medal. I still have one small piece of shrapnel in my upper left arm.

Shortly after rejoining my unit we were ordered down to the beach facing Tanambogo. Some small structures were located there which were built over the water on pilings. One had a Japanese battle flag flying over it. In spite of small arms fire I managed to reach this flag, untie it, and claim it. It is very possible that this was the first Japanese battle flag captured during the war. I kept the flag for over 62 years before returning it to Gavutu for display. I felt that by returning the flag I was honoring both myself as well as the former owner who had lost his

life there. Incidentally, the flag that flew over the hill on Gavutu was eventually recovered and put on display in the museum at the Marine Corps Base in San Diego.

Our position on the beach was near the end of a causeway that connected Gavutu and Tanambogo. The causeway was about six feet wide at the top, three to four feet above the water, and about 400 feet long. The reason for our position was explained to us. I Company was to land from Higgins boats near the far end of Tanambogo, and two light tanks were to land about in the middle. Our unit, the First Platoon of K Company was to attack Tanambogo via the causeway.

At 1620 we fixed bayonets and charged, single file, across the causeway. Enemy machine gun fire started sweeping back and forth, frequently finding its mark. I remembered lectures from boot camp that said in such a situation a person was to run in a zigzag manner, frequently hitting the deck and rolling to a new position before raising up to run again. The narrow causeway prevented any zig-zagging, and the completely exposed conditions (there was not even a blade of grass on the causeway) made the other instructions impractical. A slight curve in the length of the causeway, however, did place Tanambogo to the left side, giving some cover on the right below the pathway on top. Only small Gaomi Island was nearby on the right side. About halfway across I dived to the ground and rolled over the side to break up my long exposure to the Japanese gunners. It was then I

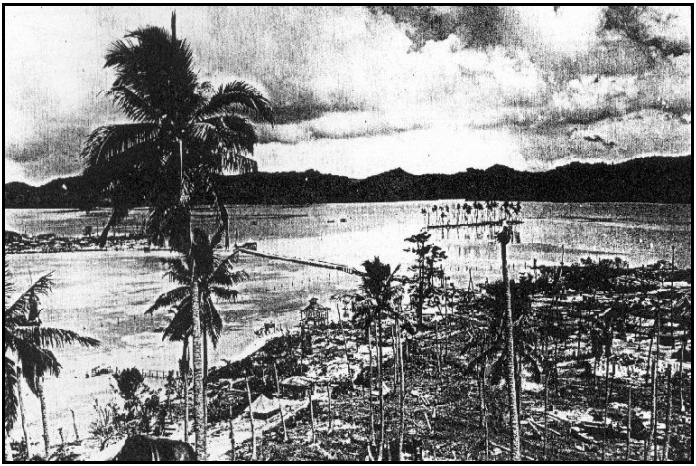


Figure 11. Photo taken from the top of the hill on Gavutu, July 1943. The view shows the causeway to Tanambogo, and just the tip of Tanambogo Island. The little island at right center is Gaomi. Photo is from the US Marine Corps Official Collection, National Archives, via Archaehistoria.

discovered another machine gun was located on Gaomi Island, and this gun was sweeping the causeway from its vantage point. I immediately was back up and continuing the charge.

My best friend at the time, Willie E. Smith, of Brookhaven, Mississippi, was running directly in front of me. Suddenly he made a complete somersault backward, landing flat on his back. I could see blood shooting straight up in the air from a bullet wound through his

throat. Under such conditions, all I could do was just jump over him and continue on. Upon reaching Tanambogo I ran another fifty feet or so and jumped into a shell hole for cover. This hole would become my home for the next several hours.

Meanwhile, Willie was able to get up and run back to Gavutu, holding one hand each over the entry and exit wound to his neck. I felt good being able to see him reach safety. Willie was very lucky. He was treated at battalion aid and returned to the transport where he was eventually evacuated to New Zealand. He rejoined our platoon about four months later on Tulagi, having missed most of the fighting for the Southern Solomons except for the one day. Willie survived the war and lived until 2003.

This bayonet charge is described in a recent 2008 book titled *Hell's Islands: The Untold Story of Guadalcanal*. The book was written by Stanley Coleman Jersey and is part of the Texas A&M University Military History Series (Book 11). I was fortunate to be mentioned by name in pages 177 and 178.

I Company had several casualties but managed to hang on to their position. The next day we would join up with them. The two tanks had worse luck. We could see both of them just overwhelmed by Japanese troops who used pipes to jam the tracks, then dumped gasoline over them and set them on fire. Miraculously, a couple of men did get out and escape.

Shell craters were sufficiently frequent that all of our platoon found enough to take shelter in and fire on the enemy. We retained the position all through the night. The password that night was yellow, picked because the Japanese have difficulty saying the letter "L." Our sergeant was an old-time career Marine named Brogan. He checked on all of us several times during the night, always staying in one shell crater and using the password, his name, and being acknowledged before crawling to the next one. Another good friend, Curly Graham of Minnesota, shared the shell hole with me. Both of us were awake most of the night, but we made certain one of us at least was awake all the time. Just as the first faint light of predawn arrived I was looking out toward Gaomi Island, mentioned earlier, when I detected a movement in the water near the shore. Suddenly, a man's body materialized coming out of the water only a few feet in front of me. I knew it had to be Japanese, of course, and at first I thought I would just be quiet and use my bayonet. I knew he would obviously be armed with a rifle and bayonet too, and while I had confidence in my skill, I also was aware we were fighting Japanese Imperial Marines who had prior experience in China. It crossed my mind that perhaps he would prove the more skillful. I chose to use the rifle.

Just after daybreak I was again watching Gaomi Island when I could see a man in a camouflaged uniform slowly

Figures 12 and 13. Japanese facilities on Tanambogo Island burning on 7 August 1942. Photo# 80-G-19223 (above) and 80-G-11899 (below) from the Navy Historical Center.

moving through jungle growth in waist deep water at the shore. Remembering my training at the rifle range, and because I had plenty of time, I estimated the range, set my sights, and slowly squeezed off a round. On the rifle range the shot would have been called a bull's-eye.

Interestingly, in three more years in combat the two previous incidents would never be repeated. Usually, one never saw the enemy. You would fire at likely places, and later, after you advanced, sometimes you might see a body there. There was no way in ever knowing if other, or how many, Marines had fired a round there on the same presumption.

During the night we could see a fierce sea battle taking place in the direction of Savo Island. Flashes of gunfire lighted the horizon and the noise of battle rolled across Tanambogo. We had no idea who was winning. When the sun rose, the entire area was completely void of all ships. We later were to learn it was the Japanese who won. The U.S. Navy suffered the worst defeat in its history. Three of our heavy cruisers were sunk and one badly damaged. Also lost was the cruiser HMAS Canberra, pride of the Australian Navy. What remained of our Navy headed south at full speed.

About the same time that I was making the bayonet charge onto Tanambogo Island, an interesting development was taking place a couple of miles away in Tulagi Harbor. A man unknown to me at the time, but

who would become a very close friend after the war, was a sailor aboard one of the transports. His assignment was as coxswain (operator) of a motor whaleboat, one of the small boats carried aboard the transports. He was ordered to contact the other naval vessels in the harbor and collect their used brass, which is the collective name for all the empty shell cases from the guns that had been fired during the last couple of days. Brass was in short supply and these would be transported back to the States for re-use.

This man, whose name was Mike Elkins, was maneuvering his small boat around the harbor when a radio message was given all ships that the Japanese Imperial Fleet had been observed heading south toward the southern Solomon Islands. All ships were ordered to proceed south to the New Hebrides at once! There was no such radio aboard the motor whaleboat, of course, so Mike had no inkling that anything unusual was afoot until abruptly all ships upped anchor and steamed full speed out of the harbor. Suddenly Mike found himself all alone in a little boat in the middle of one of the best, and largest, anchorages in the South Pacific. As Mike was to say in later years, it was eight thousand miles to the States, but only one mile to the Tulagi dock, and as he did not have gasoline enough for the first option, he had to choose Tulagi.

Upon reaching the beach, Mike was met by a grizzled Marine Gunnery Sergeant who greeted him with, "Hi,

Figure 14. Tanambogo Island. Adjoining Gavutu, but even smaller. These two islands were so important during the campaign that they cost the Marines seventy lives in the assault, and the Japanese lost hundreds of men defending them. They were completely deserted in 1988 when this photo was taken.

Marine, here's your rifle." Mike was to remain on Tulagi for a couple of months until he was able to get a ride on one of our infrequent ships that was going south, where he was finally able to rejoin his assigned vessel.

By the time the sun had well risen we moved out, using rifle fire, automatic rifle fire, and hand grenades to clean out nearby warehouses. We were assisted in this by mortar and machine gun fire from Gavutu. Around noon we met up with I Company and Tanambogo was pronounced secure.

Figure 15. Wrecked Japanese landing craft.

Figure 16. The same beach as it was in 1988. The causeway formerly lead to Tanambogo Island, left center, but it is almost washed out today. Florida Island is in the background.

We then returned to Gavutu and set up beach defense. Our platoon was stationed on the far side of the island facing Florida Island, with Guadalcanal fully visible to the west. I dug my foxhole with a field of fire facing the channel, then covered it with a large piece of tin, leaving a crawl hole in the back so I could enter. I then camouflaged everything with dirt, grass, and palm fronds. I would live here for the next five and one-half weeks.

The following day we were all assigned burial detail. Seventy Marines had been killed on the two islands, and all were brought near the old Lever Brothers store that had been battalion aid and was now battalion headquarters. All bodies were identified, if possible, and given as good a burial as we could provide. The Japanese had lost at least 476 men, many of whom had been sealed off in the caves and tunnels on both islands by dynamiting the entrances closed. The others were all placed in a large, common grave.

After returning to my foxhole I suddenly realized that in all of the excitement I had not eaten since leaving the transport three days earlier. I had carried three days' combat rations in my pack. The C-rations consisted of six small cans, three of which were called wet and three dry. The wet rations were in a variety of three; meat and vegetable hash, meat and vegetable stew, and meat and beans. The dry rations were all the same consisting of hard crackers, hard candy, a pack of five cigarettes, and toilet paper. In practice maneuvers we ate a can of both

wet and dry for each meal, or a total of six cans a day. Combat rations, however, were only a third as much. Our bayonet was always a handy can opener.

Later in the afternoon we saw a destroyer steaming in our direction. Scuttlebutt (rumor) had it that the Army was supposed to arrive from New Caledonia to relieve us. This must be the vanguard we thought, so we ran down on the beach and waved to it. I saw a white line painted around the destroyer's stack, which was unfamiliar and meant nothing to me. The destroyer slowly came around about a mile offshore and fired a broadside. That was how I learned that all Japanese destroyers had a white line painted around their stack. I also realized who had won the sea battle we had witnessed earlier.

The days moved by slowly. Sanitary conditions on the island were terrible and everyone had dysentery, many of whom were so weakened they could not even rise from the ground. Had the Japanese known it, they could have recaptured the island with hardly having to fire a shot. Of special concern was lack of supplies. We had carried three days' worth of food, ammo, and medical supplies ashore and there was no way to replenish them without a Navy. A limited supply of Japanese material had been captured, but mostly it was up to each individual to find what he could. Coconuts and local fruit were limited and quickly consumed. We scoured the ocean and if anything moved, or looked like it may have at one time, we ate it. Our water supply was not much better. The sole source

was a shallow well which was very brinish. Iodine, when available, was added in an attempt to purify it and made it taste horrible. Even then we were limited to one canteen a day, in spite of the extremely hot weather being so near the equator. We then made a lucky discovery. Near the base of the hill a short distance behind my foxhole, we found a wet spot. By digging into it we increased the flow of water to a slow drip. A canteen cup placed under it would fill in a couple of hours. A small number of us guarded this treasure and kept changing the cups day and night so not a drop was wasted.

Today when watches are so cheap and reliable, one tends to forget that was not true in the 1940`s. When I graduated from High School, my folks had given me a wrist watch, which was the only thing I now owned from my previous civilian life. After securing Gavutu, it was soon noted that watches were not designed for the rigors of war. Repeated dunking in the ocean, plus occasional tropical rain showers, disclosed that "water resistant" was not the same as "waterproof." One by one, the watches ceased to function.

A large number of men were always on guard duty at night in the company area. As we stood two-hour tours, not knowing the time created a problem. When it was found that my watch had proven reliable, it was used every night to notify the men on guard when it was time to awaken their relief. This developed into a procedure that sounded as if it were taken right out of medieval

times. Every hour the man with my watch would call out the appropriate hour, such as, "Post number one, three o'clock and all's well." This would be taken up by the next guard with "Post number two, etc." and this call would go almost all the way around the island, with the calls gradually fading from hearing.

Although there was nothing very pleasurable about Gavutu, I did enjoy the ocean and went in every day. The water was very warm and clear and it felt good to take off my uniform, wade out to where it was about waist deep, then just sit on the sandy bottom. There were never any waves here, being completely sheltered, and I would slowly rock back and forth in the gentle swells. One day while so seated and about half asleep, I experienced an extremely sharp pain in a very sensitive area that brought me straight up out of the water. I was skinny-dipping, of course, and attached to me was some type of hairy South Sea crab with the biggest pincers I had ever seen. He had mistaken me for dinner. In the future I was very careful where I sat.

Just about seventy or eighty feet offshore, directly in front of my foxhole, rested a huge Kawanishi seaplane. This was a Japanese long-range reconnaissance plane that had been based at Gavutu, but was sunk by our aircraft on D-day. It was still quite shallow at that location and most of the plane was above water. On the first night in my foxhole, a Japanese soldier had gone out to the plane and turned its machine guns on us. We replied with

Figures 17 (above left) and 18 (above right). Specification plates from the 1941 Kawanishi seaplane, also known as the MAVIS. A translation of the plate indicates that it was manufactured by the Kawanishi Aircraft Company and that the aircraft was a Type 97 No. 2 Flying Boat Model 3 with the serial number Kawanishi 2120. The verified date was October 1, 1941. Credits for the translation of the specification plates above and the picture of the aircraft below go to Ewan M. Stevenson (Archaehistoria).

return fire and the following day we removed the guns so such an incident could not happen again. I removed the two aluminum specification plates from the plane for a souvenir, and also cut a section out of the red rising sun painted on the fabric-covered wings.

A physical description of my part of the island is necessary to appreciate the next story. My foxhole was

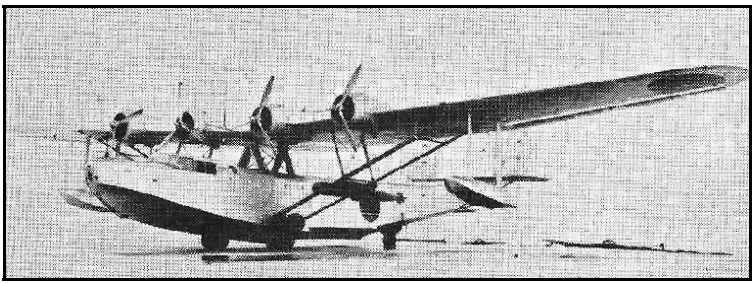


Figure 19. The illustration of the MAVIS (above) is from Japanese Aircraft of the Pacific War by Rene J. Francillon (page 301).

just inside an area covered by coconut and other trees. To the west was a small, white, sandy beach completely exposed and devoid of any vegetation. Directly behind the beach rose the hill, which was bare and almost cliff-like in this location. In the center of the little beach was a wooden box, perhaps two feet high and six feet long. We were told not to do anything to change the appearance of the island so the Japanese would not know if we were still there or not. In accordance with those instructions we dug a latrine under the box, cut a hole in the box top, and we now had a reasonably comfortable toilet. Although this location did not provide any privacy, it did offer a wonderful view of Sealark Channel and Florida Island.

One night a very good friend of mine, Jim McCrory, from Lemoore, California, needed to use the toilet. I happened

to be on guard duty at the time. Jim called out softly and identified himself, as no one moved from his foxhole after dark without the sentry on duty in the squad knowing it first. I acknowledged him and Jim moved out. It was pitch black with no moon or other lights visible. Jim found the box and was utilizing its purpose when suddenly a bright light came on. A Japanese destroyer had silently moved in about a hundred yards offshore and then switched on its searchlight which happened to be centered on Jim sitting on the box. The ship was so close the beam of light was still quite small in circumference; it just covered Jim like a spotlight on a stage illuminates a performer. Jim froze, imagining all of those five-inch guns pointed at him, enough firepower to blow a warship out of the water! I was likewise frozen with fear as I knew a salvo fired at Jim would eliminate me too. The light held unwaveringly for what seemed like an eternity (it must have been a full minute) before swinging on down the beach. Although I could not hear anything, I could imagine both the unbelief and laughter aboard the ship. As soon as the light moved, Jim did too! Jim and I have remained very good friends over the years and keep in frequent contact via e-mail. We can now laugh over this incident.

The following day we were told to prepare to make Gavutu a second Corregidor, which was not very pleasant news as Corregidor had just fallen to the Japanese and all military personnel had been either killed or captured. Being

Figure 20. The Japanese battle flag taken by the author on Gavutu on August 8th, 1942.

Figure 21. Steve Goodhew (on right) holds one side of the flag. Steve attempted to build a resort on the island, but the venture was unsuccessful. I had returned the flag for permanent display on Gavutu. John Innes, a Solomon Islands historian from Guadalcanal, stands on the far right. The other two men are veterans visiting the island. The photo was taken at the Gavutu end of the causeway that connects Tanambogo and Gavutu (also pictured in Figure 11). Gaomi and Florida islands can be seen in the background.

abandoned and without supplies, we knew we would not have much chance of a different outcome. It may be of interest to some that never once did I hear a Marine

discuss the possibility of surrender. We knew all too well the fate of prisoners held by the Japanese and no one planned to be one.

The night following the visit by the destroyer it returned again, continuing to use its searchlight but not firing any shots. On the third night it was back again, apparently just keeping an eye on things. The next day we were ordered to open fire with everything from thirty-caliber machine guns on up if it showed again. I didn't really appreciate this reasoning, as up to now no one had fired a shot and no one had been injured. The biggest gun we had on the island was a captured three-inch cannon mounted on the hill. The crew of that gun estimated they could get off three rounds before being knocked out. Other than that, we had a couple of 75 MM howitzers, a couple of 37 MM anti-tank guns, two or three .50-caliber machine guns, and our .30-caliber machine guns. None of these were any match for a destroyer that could just lie offshore and blow our whole island out of the water. Fortunately, the destroyer never returned.

We had one man in our platoon who had a fascination with high explosives. He was always carrying artillery shells and such items back to his foxhole, where he would proceed to dismantle them in order to see how they worked. As he had never had any training in this very dangerous pastime, we seriously questioned his IQ and made certain he had a foxhole by himself and some distance away from the rest of us.

Figure 22. John Innes holds the flag on top of a small hill on Gavutu. This hill is the same one mentioned in the text that was accidentally bombed by an American aircraft. The other man is an American veteran visiting the island.

In the early part of the war, American torpedoes were notorious for failing to explode due to defective fuses. This high failure rate was contributing greatly to severe losses among our submarines. As Gavutu had been a Japanese submarine base, a number of Japanese torpedoes were stacked near the causeway leading to Tanambogo. As opposed to American, Japanese

torpedoes were famous for their reliability. Our curious private had spotted them, of course, and at his first opportunity he had taken one completely apart and studied it.

Two munitions personnel on Tulagi heard about our torpedoes so they came over to acquire a couple of them so they could be sent back to the States for study. These experts carefully stood at a distance contemplating how they were going to render these highly explosive items inert for shipping, especially as little was known about their assembly. Someone informed them of our man, so they came seeking him. He happily agreed to show them how things were done. Several of us accompanied these three people back to the torpedoes as we were now suddenly very proud of our resident expert. Upon arrival at the scene, we of little faith remained at a considerable distance and watched. Our man confidently sat astraddle the torpedo, bent over and removed the detonator. The real experts watched, but remained almost as far away as we were. They were so impressed, however, that they arranged to have him transferred to their unit. I never saw him again, and it is possible he ended his career with a real bang.

Shortly before our five and one-half weeks on Gavutu were over, a World War I four-stack destroyer arrived. This was the first American ship we had seen since the big sea battle. Our government figured this ship was expendable and we were told the crew had all

volunteered. The ship had supplies for us as well as for our two battalions still stationed on Tulagi. A destroyer does not have much space to store supplies, and sharing among so many men meant that we would not receive much and starvation would continue, but at least we appreciated the thought. As the destroyer left across the channel, we were told it was sunk by Japanese aircraft.

We received orders to go to Guadalcanal to reinforce the First Division. The fighting there had started out slow but had become very ferocious as Japan was successfully reinforcing its troops. We had an old YP boat at Tulagi that would transport us. The YP was a converted fishing trawler with a wooden hull and slow speed, but it was all we had as our Navy still had not returned. On September 15, we left Gavutu, which was starting to feel like home, and departed for the 'Canal.'

Forty-six years later Joyce and I returned to Gavutu and Tanambogo. The islands that were so important and that cost at least 546 many lives were completely deserted, with not a soul living on either. Gaomi Island had a native Melanesian family living there. The islands have completely recovered and were cloaked with jungle growth. I walked right to my foxhole site and pointed it out to Joyce. Both islands are beautiful and peaceful. One would never guess the horror that occurred there. Joyce could not believe how small the islands were.

4 Guadalcanal

When we reached Guadalcanal we were assigned as reserve to the First Division and set up as beach defense at Lunga Point. Our position was in a large prewar coconut plantation. We still were without supplies so lived off the coconuts. We had ripe coconuts as the main meal, coconut bread (the congealed milk in old coconuts) for dessert, and drank coconut milk in lieu of water which we also did not have. We were shelled frequently by naval gunfire, but this provided us a bonus by knocking trees down so we could get at the palm cabbage. This is located in the heart of the palm fronds and is called millionaire's salad, as to cut it out destroys the tree. Of course the Japanese had already destroyed the tree so we could eat it with a clear conscience. We spent two weeks here and during that time not a thing passed my lips that had not come from a coconut tree. Miraculously, our digestive systems adapted at least partially to this fare.

We were then moved to a position deep in the jungle. Guadalcanal is a large island, ninety miles long and twenty-five miles wide. The Marines occupied only a small portion of this, having established a perimeter running from the beach, encircling Henderson Field (the airport), and then back to the beach in sort of a horseshoe-shaped formation perhaps five miles long and two miles deep.

The part of the sector assigned us was that which was located the farthest inland. One major drawback to this was the fact it was all dense jungle, no coconuts!

We dug our foxholes, but the first big chore was to clear a field of fire since visibility was only a few feet in the jungle. Our platoon was assigned an area running from the top of a small ridge, then most of the way across a little valley. Our only equipment consisted of small entrenching tools and bayonets. The first Marines to reach the Canal had requested machetes, but these were not in the Marine Corps' supply inventory. Somewhere in the States had been located a number of old cavalry sabers. These antiques had somehow found their way across the Pacific, and a few of them managed to make it all the way to us along with the infrequent supplies received. While the cavalry sabers were much appreciated, we would rather have been given the cavalry horse--we could have eaten that! As it was, about the only food we had was what we could capture from the Japanese, and that was pitifully insufficient.

We chopped away on the vegetation to clear our field of fire. It was very hot and tiring work, which brings me to Jake. I have forgotten his last name, but he was from Wisconsin and was the platoon's self-appointed comic. When morale was low, Jake felt it was his obligation to raise it. To see Jake would help you believe in the theory

of evolution. He was shorter than average, with a large chest. His entire body was almost covered by thick hair. As none of us had a shave or haircut in about two months, you could only see his nose and his eyes. We were working on the side of the small ridge and had the undergrowth cleared away. Trees too large for a bayonet or saber were left standing, of course. Some of these trees were very large and jungle vines were attached to branches high in the air. We had cut these vines off near the ground and now they were just left hanging. One of the fellows got one of these vines which was as large as a rope, and swung out over the valley and back. This looked like fun and probably all of us tried a swing or two.

This was not enough for Jake and he saw a possibility to raise morale. Clutching a vine in one hand he beat upon his chest and made loud noises. It was easy to imagine you were in Africa watching one of the great apes. When he felt he had everyone's attention, Jake swung out over the valley still beating his chest. At the apogee of his swing he reached out and took another vine, transferring to it in the best Tarzan style, and commenced swinging in a second arc. In typical Jake fashion, he had not planned beyond this. Directly in his path was a large tree, probably fifty feet tall. I don't know the name of the tree, but it was completely covered with thorns. Small branches were like a rose bush, with larger thorns on larger limbs, culminating with two-inch spikes on the trunk. Jake crashed right through the smaller limbs and

impaled himself on the trunk over half way up. While his Tarzan act received only minor interest, he now had everyone's undivided attention and shouts of encouragement as we watched a rather subdued and bloody Jake try to climb down the tree.

This is probably a good place to mention a couple of other episodes involving Jake. Although covering our sector of the front lines was the primary assignment, we were continually going on patrols behind the Japanese lines or making drives against the Japanese in some other sector. On one such drive we had been moving through the jungle all day during continuous heavy rain. We reached a large river and were preparing to dig in for a most uncomfortable night lying in a foxhole full of water. Morale was as low as it could get; time for Jake to do something. Standing on top of the muddy bank, Jake was probably ten feet above the water. He started hollering and waving his arms around as if losing his balance, then as soon as he saw he had his audience, Jake fell into the river. This was so obviously contrived no one thought it even mildly funny. As we were all soaked to the bone, Jake could not get any wetter anyway. He swam back to the bank and started climbing up the steep, muddy slope. About halfway up he slipped and skidded right back into the river. This was getting a little better now. As Jake got back to the bank we noticed a crocodile that had been awakened by all the noise. The

crocodile started swimming toward Jake to investigate the source of all the commotion.

We happily pointed out this new development to Jake. Jake, quite concerned over this turn of events, scrambled up the bank. As he neared the top he slipped again and down he shot. This was really getting good now and everyone was gathering on top of the bank. The crocodile was coming in fast and a wild-eyed Jake was really motivated. Up the bank he came looking over his shoulder to see the crocodile also reach the bank just beneath him. A slip now would deliver Jake right into the crocodile's open mouth. One of the men calmly took his rifle by the muzzle and extended the butt toward Jake who grabbed it and was safely pulled up. Jake was strangely quiet for awhile after that.

On another occasion we were on a patrol behind the Japanese lines. We did this about twice a week, normally taking a day to infiltrate the Japanese lines and go up onto the high mountain range that runs the length of Guadalcanal like a backbone. We would spend a day there trying to spot Japanese artillery and then a third day going back through the Japanese lines, which fortunately were rather loose, then infiltrating our lines which was the scariest part of the three-day patrol as anything moving in front of our lines was always considered enemy. We took turns being the first to

Figure 23. These Marines are on patrol crossing the Lunga River. Fortunately, most rivers were rather shallow, but with our feet constantly exposed to water from the ocean, rivers and seemingly constant tropical rain, our feet were very abused and suffered accordingly (Marine Corps Photo 3-11).

contact our lines so this dangerous job would be passed around. On one patrol we were walking single file on a trail near the top of the mountains about five miles out from our lines, keeping about twenty-five feet apart. Now, try to visualize Jake, who happened to be in the lead at the time. His helmet was dented, rusted, and well back on his head. All the buttons had rusted off his jacket, which hung open like a vest. The sleeves were

quite tattered from his experience with the thorn tree, plus it seemed much of the jungle vegetation had thorns which tore at our bodies and clothing. The buckle had rusted off his belt, and his pants were barely held up. Actually, all of us fit this description but it was more startling on Jake with his hairy features. Rounding a curve in the trail, Jake suddenly came face to face with a Japanese soldier walking in our direction. Both men threw their rifles to their shoulders in order to fire. We always carried our rifles loaded, cocked, and with the safety on. Jake's safety had rusted tight in this position. He started making animal-like sounds and beating on the rear of the bolt with his right hand trying to free the safety. The first three or four of us behind Jake had our rifles up but were afraid to fire as Jake was directly in front of the Japanese soldier and blocked our line of fire. The Japanese soldier saw this apparition bellowing and pounding on his rifle and dropped his own rifle in disbelief and ran off the trail, going over a small drop off perhaps fifteen feet high and disappearing in the jungle. We could hear him thrashing around for a few minutes, with the sounds fading out. The whole incident had only taken a few seconds. I would have given anything to have heard that soldier describing this event to his buddies when he got back. Every platoon needed a man like Jake.

We finally began getting supplies as a few of our ships started coming through. One day a few PX supplies reached us. These were extremely limited, but we divided

them so each man could get one item. These were numbered and we drew lots. I got a tube of toothpaste. I searched for a man who had gotten a toothbrush and we shared. How great it felt to brush my teeth after all those weeks!

Jim McCrory and I had become best friends by this time. One day when he had a bit of free time he had gone to Henderson Field and traded some souvenirs to a pilot for a pound can of hard candy. The pilots were always desperate for souvenirs as they had no way of obtaining them. Because of their aircraft, however, they did have frequent contact with our rear echelon bases located in the New Hebrides. Consequently they were able to get supplies the rest of us couldn't. Being as we were buddies, Jim shared this precious treasure of hard candy with me. When the can was down to where just barely the bottom was covered, another Marine happened by and saw it. He looked at it longingly and asked Jim if he would sell it to him. Jim replied, "No." The other Marine said, "I'll give you a hundred dollars for it." Remember, this was at a time when our pay had just increased to fifty dollars a month. Jim replied in disbelief, "Do you think I'm crazy?" This is how erratic one's thinking can become after starving for months.

About this time we received shelter halves. Priorities seemed a little strange at times, as food was still in short

supply, but the thought of sleeping in a shelter half did seem very pleasant. A shelter half is a piece of waterproof canvas, a folding pole, and a couple of pegs. Two shelter halves could be buttoned together to form a small, two-man tent just big enough to crawl into. It was closed at one end and a couple of inches longer than your body when you laid down. It might not sound like much, but after sleeping exposed to the elements for weeks, it seemed luxurious to us.

Jim and I put ours together and erected it. It looked wonderful and I could hardly wait for night so I could try it out. I wandered over to visit another couple of fellows putting theirs together when we suddenly were attacked by mortar fire. I hit the deck, but the attack did not amount to much--only two or three rounds fired. I returned to my shelter half to find one of the shells had made a direct hit. There was nothing but a few fragments of canvas to be found. Luckily, Jim was not in it and he was okay.

Two or three weeks later I would receive another shelter half. By this time we had been moved to a different location near the airport. This was a terrible spot as we averaged over three air raids a day, plus nuisance raids at night where a single plane would drone around for hours, occasionally dropping a bomb or flare, just so we could not sleep. Although the airport was the target in all of

these raids, many of the bombs would hit our bivouac area. Within an hour of erecting my second shelter half we had a bombing that left my little tent blown to bits, with pieces hanging from trees high overhead. The next day I got my third shelter half. I actually got to go to bed in this one, but a couple of hours later we had a nuisance raid again so it was back into my foxhole. The plane dropped a flare, which was a common occurrence. Normally, a parachute would allow the flare to float down gradually and thus provide illumination for a long period. This time, however, the magnesium flare tangled in the parachute, burned through the shrouds, and fell straight down. You guessed it. It hit my shelter half dead center and continued to burn itself out until all that remained of my little tent was a charred fringe. I never got another shelter half on Guadalcanal.

But enough of shelter halves. Back to our position on the front. On one occasion we were pulled off the lines to make a push north along the coast. It rained all day and progress was slow. Much of the time we actually had to cut our way through the jungle, taking turns whacking at the undergrowth as that was very tiring work in our starved condition. We would climb steep ridges, using vines to haul ourselves up, frequently slipping in the slick mud and losing precious steps.

Almost everyone had malaria. It would turn out that I was the only one in the battalion who would not get it. Dysentery was considered a normal aspect of life. Food was still very scarce and some of our forays were just to capture rice from the Japanese supplies. Everyone's health was bad and we were all extremely weak. Often men would drop by the side too exhausted to move. Standard practice in that situation was to remove the bolt from his rifle so it would prove useless if a Japanese captured it. He would then be left lying there. Hopefully, the man could catch up later and get the bolt back. As we were following a small stream through thick jungle into the hills, we were ambushed. The Japanese opened fire with rifles and machine guns and threw grenades at us. One grenade landed near several of us and the closest Marine threw his body on it as it went off. That was what we had been instructed to do in boot camp, as this could save the others near you. When we fought off the ambush, this man was still alive so he was told to go back to the lines to find medical aid as we had no corpsman with us at the time. The fellow got up and, holding his insides in with both hands, started back on about a five-mile trek through rugged terrain. We heard he made it back to the front and was going to be evacuated. I never did hear anymore about him. Sometimes men did receive medals for performing an act like this. Usually they were awarded posthumously.

We stopped for the night and I dug my foxhole, which filled with rainwater as soon as I finished. That was one of the most wretched nights of my life, lying submerged in water in a continuous downpour, using my helmet liner under my head to keep my face above water so I could breathe, and my helmet itself over my face to keep the water off. I told myself at that time that if I survived the war, and ever had occasion to feel sorry for myself, I would remember that night and realize just how lucky I presently was. Later in life there were a few instances when I thought things were going badly, but I always recalled the miserable night on Guadalcanal, which immediately put things in their proper perspective. I guess it proves that out of adversity comes good.

On the second day of the drive a machine gun squad attached to our platoon was hit. The gunner was killed and the assistant gunner was seriously wounded, leaving only the squad leader, Jack Smith, of Lockport, Louisiana, and three ammunition carriers. I was temporarily assigned to assist. The caliber .30 Browning air-cooled machine gun and tripod were normally carried by a gunner and his assistant. I was made an ammunition carrier and had to carry a rather heavy box of ammo in each hand, along with my rifle and all my other gear. When we stopped for the night we set up the gun on a ridge with a good field of fire. I would pull a watch like the others, so I told Jack I had never had any instruction on firing a machine gun. He showed me how

to load, aim, the proper length of bursts, and how to clear a jam. I never listened more attentively to anyone in my life, and all of these years later I still believe I could almost quote him verbatim. Jack made quite an impression on me. I had never met him before this time, but many years since we have become good friends and e-mail each other regularly.

From our position we had a good view down to a lower ridge about half a mile away. Below us and off to the right we could see one of our companies setting up for the night. While some of them dug in, a patrol went out forward to reconnoiter. From our vantage point the patrol showed clearly as they went forward and made a circle toward the left to reenter the lines two or three hundred yards from the place where they had left. I realized the unit they were now approaching had not seen them as they went forward as a small knoll would have blocked their view. I knew what was going to happen, but could do nothing about it. Sure enough, as they came into view the second group opened fire. Several men fell before they could be identified. Unfortunately, in war mistakes like this were not uncommon.

After we returned to our lines, my career as a machine gunner was over and I reverted to my usual assignment. Every man in the squad had a certain position and I was made scout. This really didn't amount to much of

anything as a scout was really just another rifleman. In our static position on the lines, however, and the frequent patrols we made behind enemy lines, scouting began to become a necessary function. A platoon had four squads of ten men. As I happened to be in the first squad that automatically made me the first scout. Ours happened to be the first platoon of K Company. That meant when we were on the move in conditions that required a scout, such as reduced visibility when traveling in the jungle, I would usually be point man in front of the entire Company.

My ultimate experience in this capacity occurred during the third battle of the Matanikau, commencing October 8th. Our battalion was selected to lead the Seventh Marine Regiment. K Company was to lead the battalion. Good old you-know-who would probably be the first in a column of about four thousand men.

It was back up north again, holding well inland from the coast. We crossed several ridges en route. Typically the ridges were barren while the valleys between were jungle. We stopped the first night on a ridge almost as far north as we would go, as on the next day we would swing right to Point Cruz and the coast. I dug in on a ridge and shortly thereafter an artillery spotter moved in beside me. He had a radio and was talking with his unit almost seven miles behind us. I heard him call for a strike at

zero-two, and asked him what that meant. He answered that the artillery knew his exact position. Zero meant they should line up on him, and two meant they should impact two hundred yards in front. In came the strike with shells screaming just barely overhead. The ground buckled and jumped as they impacted. I shrank low in my foxhole.

He then picked up his microphone and called, "Zero-one." I didn't have to ask what that meant. He had more confidence in his people than I did and I just wished I had dug my hole deeper.

We pushed off early in the morning. The first portion was down an open hill toward the coast. As I started down a barren hillside, a machine gun started firing at me. I dropped to the ground, lying mostly on my back, and since the hill was very steep I could stay almost flat and propel myself rapidly downward toward the cover of the jungle below. The Japanese gunner followed me right down the hill and I could see his tracers going by not more than eighteen inches over my head the entire distance. I couldn't figure out why he didn't lower his muzzle a fraction. It was just as if he couldn't traverse the gun down any farther, yet he was able to follow me down that steep hill. Whatever the reason, his poor performance sure had no complaints from me.

I entered the jungle and moved forward. Two scouts were just behind and on either side of me, then a connecting file of about six men followed them at wide intervals, just keeping each other in sight. Behind them was the main body of the Company. This was always the way we traveled so as to offer maximum protection to the main body. About a mile from the coast everything broke loose just behind me. I had unknowingly gone right through the Japanese lines!

In the thick jungle, the Japanese had permitted us three scouts and the connecting file to pass, thinking they could always deal with us later. The best target, of course, was the main body of troops so they had waited for them. We knew immediately what had happened, and also knew our best course of action was to continue forward as not only were we surrounded by enemy troops, but all of our own people were firing in our direction also. We reached the coast and found a small native village of four or five thatched huts. There were a few Japanese soldiers in this area but no large groups. We had occasional brief firefights, but nothing of any significance.

We knew we had to keep moving, and I was still leading when we came to a clearing. I didn't want to enter the open, but as I could not see any enemy I started across. About half way someone began firing at me. I dived into a

Figure 24. Len and much of K Company take a break during a push behind enemy lines. This photograph was published in the February 20, 1943, edition of the Saturday Evening Post.

convenient shell hole, but was trapped. Every time I poked my head up a bit it would draw a shot. I knew if I didn't get out of there my time was very limited. One of the fellows behind me saw the situation I was in, and circling around the clearing he located the sniper. One shot and I was free to go! My rescuer was Jim Hines. Jim was about 21 years old, older than most of us. He

was from the Midwest and was one of the most reliable and responsible persons I ever met. I will be forever grateful to him. Unfortunately, he would be killed about a year later on Tarawa. The world lost a wonderful man.

It was four or five hours later when the battalion broke through and we joined up again. In the meantime, I had a chance to go look at the sniper who had me pinned down and found he was a Japanese captain wearing combat ribbons. I took the ribbons and still have them.

After a brief mopping up, the following day we took an easier way back down the coast toward our usual position on the lines. Although we had not suffered very heavy casualties, we were in such poor shape that the entire battalion was exhausted and we took our time returning. By the night of October 10th we still had not reached our position, but bivouacked on a small slope. The slope was between us and the channel, and as we were well behind our lines we did not anticipate any trouble. In the middle of the night we were awakened by heavy naval gunfire. This was not unusual, and although our ships came in occasionally, the Japanese Navy still ruled the sea and shelled us frequently. This time was different as we were being shelled by battleships.

Figure 25. Machine gunner guards Marines taking a bath in the Matanikau River. 1942. U.S. Marine Corps photograph.

While some aircraft carriers may have been longer, battleships were the largest and heaviest warships made. They carried the largest guns that have ever been placed on ships. The ships shelling us had main batteries of

Figure 26. The same river in 1988. Looks peaceful now, but watch out for crocodiles.

fourteen-inch rifles. Since we were on the reverse slope, I knew they could not hit us so I wasn't afraid. They did work over the other side of the little ridge, however, and the shock of each salvo was so great it would throw us clear up in the air. I laid on my stomach, placed a finger in each ear, opened my mouth wide to equalize the pressure on my lungs, and used my forearms on each side of my chest in an attempt to absorb some of the force of the ground hitting my chest. After a couple of hours of

this pounding it felt like being run over by a truck. Truly, one must be on the receiving end to appreciate the brutality of a battleship barrage.

A short time after that came one of the darkest moments on Guadalcanal. The Japanese had been landing troops on Cape Esperance and their generals and admirals had been ordered to take back Guadalcanal at all cost. This was the first time in World War 2 the Japanese had not experienced victory. They realized that defeat here could ultimately lead toward losing the war.

Our platoon was on another patrol and we had stopped for the night near the top of the mountain range that runs the length of Guadalcanal. We were probably seven or eight miles behind the Japanese lines on the night of October 23rd. From our elevation we could see Henderson Field and the entire portion of Guadalcanal held by the U.S. forces. Suddenly, in the darkness we could see gunfire erupt along the entire perimeter of the front lines. At the same time, Japanese aircraft appeared overhead and Japanese ships started bombarding our positions, especially the airport. We had a bird's-eye view of everything and it was readily apparent this was a major Japanese offensive.

For once, being deep behind Japanese lines was good. There was no enemy around us and neither side was shooting our way. Although it was completely dark, the flashes of gunfire and the brilliance of explosions revealed everything clearly to us. The fighting lasted throughout the night and all the next day before dying down. The only problem was we were not sure who had won as we had no form of communication. We actually took a vote to decide whether to return to the lines or move deeper into the unexplored interior. By a slight margin the vote to return won. This we did the next day and to our great pleasure found victory had been ours.

Although once again we had escaped injury by the enemy, no one escaped tropical ulcers. Ankles were especially susceptible to scratches from thorns in the jungle, and these would often fester and turn into ulcers. We still had no medical supplies to use on something this insignificant, so we just suffered. I had several ulcers, some of which created such large holes in my leg that I could actually see the white bone at the bottom. Flies found this fresh food very attractive and they would bite into the exposed raw flesh in a manner that was quite painful.

On one patrol behind enemy lines we surprised some Japanese troops and captured a small amount of supplies. In addition to the usual rice, which was always

Figure 27. Japanese bombers score direct hit on Henderson Field hangar (Marine Corps Photo 3-13).

Figure 28. Grumman fighter landing at Henderson Field (Marine Corps photograph).

Figure 29. "Pistol Pete". This 108 MM Japanese rifle was effectively hidden in the mountains. It was the object of most of our patrols behind Japanese lines, but we never found it. It was used to provide harassing fire on Henderson Field and vicinity.

welcome, were some other items including a few very small tins of something that looked similar to Vaseline. As all the writing on the tins was in Japanese, I had no idea if this was a medical ointment, a rifle lubricant, or whether it was meant for a completely different purpose. As the flies were especially bothersome, I hoped this might be a medical ointment, and put it on my ulcers, completely filling the holes. The very hot and humid climate meant treatment was needed frequently as the

ointment tended to drain out, but at least with the holes filled it kept the flies and other insects from the raw wounds. Eventually, after leaving the jungle environment, the ulcers healed without any other medical treatment, although I carried the scars for years. I still have absolutely no idea what was in the tins, but it did provide relief. I included this example to show the desperate measures we took when lacking almost any supplies.

As our battalion had accumulated considerable casualties since landing in the Solomons, we were pulled off the line and placed in what was deemed a safer spot near Henderson Field. This was a mistake, as daily bombing of the airport meant near misses hit us instead and our casualty rate continued to climb. We were not to remain on Guadalcanal much longer, however, and on October 30th we were moved by YP boat to Tulagi.

My most vivid recollection of this was a tiring march to the beach, during which many of the fellows collapsed alongside the roadway, some due to diseases, but mostly because of malnutrition. Upon reaching the beach we were astounded to see fresh troops. They were Army soldiers and they looked so fat, healthy, and clean shaven. Their uniforms were neat, clean, and had all their buttons. In contrast, we were in rags, had shaggy hair and beards, were skinny, and had eyes yellow from

jaundice. As we stumbled by I could hear one pink-cheeked soldier say to his buddy, "Geez, those men are killers." Personally, I felt more like the victim.

Several years ago Joyce and I traveled to the Solomon Islands, now an independent country. We landed at the airport which is still called Henderson Field. The capital has been moved from Tulagi to the town of Honiara on Guadalcanal. We stayed in Honiara in first-class lodging, the Hotel Mendana, complete with pool, bar, restaurant, and entertainment. Honiara is located where the little native village was that we found during those nerve-wracking hours spent trapped behind the lines during the battle of Matanikau. Although now a modern little city, the Matanikau River and Point Cruz, a small headland jutting into the channel, provided landmarks so I could orient myself to my position of long ago. The location of the shell hole I was trapped in was about three blocks from the hotel. This spot now is probably the busiest intersection in town. A bank is on one corner, the post office on another, a modern supermarket on the third, and a hardware store on the fourth. The hardware store had a large display of machetes for sale. Where were they when I needed them?

One day we rented a car (a Japanese model, of course) and drove to Cape Esperance near the north end of

Figure 30. Paramount Chief Fred Kona and Len.

Guadalcanal. Relics still abound in this area where the Japanese created their largest build-up of troops in the attempt to recapture the island. Along the road we stopped

and visited with a local woman. She was topless such as most of the women are outside of Honiara. She was smoking her pipe and carrying a machete without which she would really have felt undressed.

We followed signs directing us off the road to the Guadalcanal Museum of war relics. The museum consists mostly of a collection of crashed airplanes, wrecked tanks, and abandoned cannon. We were greeted by the owner, Fred Kona, a native and paramount chief of Guadalcanal. When he learned I was a veteran of the campaign, he threw his arms around me and said it was people like myself for whom he had collected all the artifacts. I could see over his shoulder at a slightly startled Joyce, as this stocky, black, rugged man continued to hug me while tears streamed down his face. One would hardly know his grandfather had probably been a head hunter.

Before returning to Honiara we took photos of Savo Island across a body of water which became famous during the war as Iron Bottom Sound. The definition for this name will be explained in the next chapter.

5 Tulagi

The First and Second Battalions of our Regiment had been on Tulagi as beach defense ever since landing there on D-day and securing the island. Having been there that long they had ample time to develop what we thought to be rather luxurious living quarters of shacks, tents, and other shelters. They were being sent to the Canal, while we were to take over their duties. As we numbered less than half as many men, we could be quite selective in our choices of shelter. K Company was assigned the area farthest from the harbor. The first squad of the first platoon was given the most remote part, which was fine with us. There were four or five of us in a six-man tent. No one was stationed past us, and it was about a hundred yards in the other direction to a comfortable shack housing another four or five fellows who were our closest neighbors. This would be our home for the next three months. A small beach was just in front of our tent, and we went swimming almost every day. Of special interest was a giant clam almost five feet long that lived in our swimming hole. All in all, it was not a bad life after what we had been through.

We were assigned working parties on most days, the more common being retrieving 55-gallon drums of gasoline from Tulagi harbor. Supplies were coming more frequently now and Guadalcanal had no harbor.

Figure 31. 1st Platoon, K Company, 3rd Batallion, 2nd Marines, on Tulagi in January, 1943. There were 42 of us in the platoon when we landed 5 months ago. Len fifth from left, back row.

Additionally, the Canal would be subject to three or four bombings a day and was more dangerous. Supply ships would enter Tulagi harbor under cover of darkness and dump their load of gasoline which was destined for the airplanes at Henderson Field as well as for the PT (motor torpedo) boats. The base for the PT boats was hidden under large trees at the far end of Tulagi harbor nearest Florida Island. The supply ships could unload rapidly that way and try to get as far away as possible before sunrise since any ship caught in daylight was liable to be sunk. We would swim out into the harbor, grab a

gasoline drum, and holding the drum with both hands we would kick our feet to propel ourselves to the small dock. This was rather tiring work, especially as our physical condition still left a lot to be desired, although we were improving under the current higher standard of living.

One day while rolling the drums up onto the dock, Jake, our old friend of Tarzan-playing and Japanese-frightening fame, decided morale was seriously in need of a boost. He came up to me and said, "I'm going to call you a name. This will make you mad and you will hit me and I'll go end over end off the dock and into the harbor. That will make everybody laugh." I agreed, and we played our little charade.

Jake yelled the name loudly and got everyone's attention. I struck him and he hit the water hard, going clear to the bottom. As usual, Jake had not looked very far ahead and his bare feet landed right on top of a sea urchin. A sea urchin is a marine animal that looks more like a plant. They were about the size of a person's fist and covered with long, sharp spines, which would enter the flesh and break off as they are very brittle. Deep spines cannot be pulled out; they must be cut out. We carried Jake to sick bay where he and the surgeon became quite well acquainted. I lost track of Jake during the war. I hope he survived, but if the Japanese didn't get him I'm afraid one of his jokes may have.

Meanwhile, back to the procedure with the gasoline drums. It would take quite awhile to retrieve the drums and then we would load them onto the old YP boat, also kept hidden at the far end of the harbor, and take them over to the Canal after dark. The YP boat could come closer ashore than the supply ship. We would then roll the drums overboard while other Marines stationed on Guadalcanal would move them ashore onto the beach. While this procedure took about the whole Company on the Tulagi end, only a few of us were needed aboard the YP boat for the night crossing.

I made the night crossing three or four times. Usually the crossings were without incidence, but on one occasion it got pretty exciting. It was the night of November 12th and we were about halfway across en route to Guadalcanal when I could feel the boat increase to top speed, turning back to Tulagi as it did so. A sailor came rushing by and I asked him what was up. He said they had just received a radio message that said the Japanese fleet was heading south and the U.S. fleet was traveling north. They were due to meet right about here, right about now. He had not more than said those words when both fleets opened fire with us right between them, and shells were roaring overhead going in both directions.

Of all the ships out there, our little boat was absolutely at the bottom of the list of targets, which I kept telling

myself. On the other hand, we were a wooden-hulled boat armed with only a machine gun. Even though traveling at top speed, we were only going about ten miles an hour. Every inch of our deck was covered with drums of high octane aviation fuel, except for where I was sitting on the fantail. My seat was a rack of highly explosive depth charges used to fight submarines. Although we didn't amount to anything, I was afraid someone would pop off a small round at us just for the fun of it. Top speed also meant sparks were flying out of our stack, which illuminated us quite nicely, though it was not necessary as both fleets were firing starshells overhead which lit up the night sky. It was an hour before we entered Tulagi harbor and I knew we had made it.

This was the first time our Navy returned in force since leaving us over three months earlier. Both sides retired before daybreak, but both fleets returned again for the next two nights in the same location. Our losses were very heavy, especially since our Navy was still trying to recover from Pearl Harbor and the defeat they had the night after our landing. At least Japanese losses were also very heavy this time. These were the famous battles of Savo Island and the origin of the term, "Iron Bottom Sound," for that portion of Sealark Channel. To this day, this location has the highest number of sunken warships resting on the sea bottom than does any other place in the world.

Figure 32. Iron Bottom Sound as viewed from Cape Esperance, with Savo Island in the background.

Our little PT boats, which had been the only Navy assault ships in the area until this time, went out all three days after the night battles and retrieved survivors and the bodies of those who did not survive. I was on burial detail for three days at the cemetery on Tulagi which was rapidly expanding. On both the second and third nights of the battles, I sat on the small beach in front of our tent and watched. We could see all the gunfire, and every now and then a ship exploding, but we could never tell whose ships were being hit.

On the third morning the destroyer Aaron Ward came into the dock. It had been hit and the refrigeration unit was knocked out, so perishable stores were going to be unloaded. I was in the working party. Just before we went aboard, the crew got the unit repaired so the ship prepared to pull out immediately. Before leaving, however, the quartermaster opened the ship's stores and individual sailors bought cartons of cigarettes and boxes of candy bars with money out of their own pockets, came to the rail and dumped them over into our welcoming arms. We had seen neither for a long time and I just hope those sailors realized how much we appreciated this gesture.

There is a sad ending to this story. Less than five months later, on April 7, 1943, the Aaron Ward was escorting LCT's (landing craft, tanks) to Tulagi when the ship was attacked and sunk by Japanese Val dive bombers. She rests in 70 meters (230 feet) of water less than one mile off Tinete Point, in the Tulagi-Gavutu area. Some of her crew are still with her. A future president of the United States, Lt. John F. Kennedy, was in one of the LCT's and a witness to this action. Also sunk at the same time was the USS Kanawha and the HMNZS Moa.

Today the Aaron Ward is a goal of experienced scuba divers, such as Glen Mitchell of New Zealand, who told me

the destroyer is still an awesome presence as she rests upright on the bottom with her guns still trained skyward.

We were still getting very few supplies in the way of food, but fortune was to smile on us. The Army was due to relieve us eventually, and in the meantime they started shipping in food supplies so they would be prepared. Several food dumps were established. The mistake was in placing a Marine guard on each one. We would go to each dump in turn and ask the guard what he had. He knew exactly and would bypass rations that were not so tasty and point out canned fruit, which was always first choice. We would each take a case and head home. I know the Army didn't starve when they got there, but they did have to eat a bit austere. There was not a man in the whole unit who had not lost at least thirty pounds, but now we started putting on some weight.

A decision had been made to set up a seaplane base on Florida Island. I use that term rather facetiously as there were only two planes available. One was an SOE5, called a duck, which was a plane with a single float and carried on cruisers. This was a biplane which traveled very slowly. Its ship had been sunk while it was aloft so the pilot had landed at Tulagi. It wouldn't last ten seconds if spotted by a Japanese fighter plane. The other aircraft was a twin engine PBY patrol bomber. This type plane had been called obsolete years before war broke out but

turned into a real work horse in the early days of the war. Fifteen men from our Company were detached to the native village of Halavo to establish a camp and provide security. This place had been picked because of the remote location and the hope that the planes would not be spotted there.

In early December we went to Halavo by Higgins boat. This was my first experience with the natives, a black race called Melanesian. There were no other Marines on Florida Island but we weren't sure about the Japanese, so the first thing we did upon arriving was to form two three-man patrols, one going along the beach in each direction, while the remainder set up camp. I was in one patrol, and after about three miles we came to a large fresh water river. We couldn't remember the last time we had a bath in fresh water as there were no streams on Tulagi, so we turned upstream perhaps a mile to get away from the brackish sea water. We came to a beautiful location. There was a large pool with bougainvillea blooming and orchids hanging from the trees. It looked like a set from a Hollywood movie. A large eucalyptus tree had fallen over and the roots provided a great spot to dive from. We drew straws to see who would stand guard while the other two went swimming. One of the other fellows lost, so he climbed up on top of the roots of the eucalyptus tree and sat cross-legged with his rifle across his lap while the other winner and I stripped and dived in.

Figure 33. Tulagi Harbor as seen today.

We were having a wonderful time when the guard called softly to tell us that someone was coming. We immediately started swimming toward shore and our rifles when the visitors appeared walking down the trail. They were two teen-aged native girls wearing only a skirt. They were talking and giggling like young girls everywhere, and upon reaching the pool off came the skirts and in they went. Our guard was still sitting on the tree roots with his mouth hanging rather open. The other two of us were trying to cover up under water. This was 1942 and in our society such things just didn't happen. To the girls this was completely normal, and after a refreshing dip they retrieved their skirts and continued on their way. We had a comfortable camp in Halavo. I was especially impressed with the source of drinking water. A huge boulder was by the trail at the village edge and from a hole in the boulder ran a continuous stream of water.

Under the hole a large basin had been carved into the stone, which permitted the water to be easily dipped up. It was cool and very tasty, especially after much of the stuff we had been drinking.

We each hired a houseboy to do all of the manual work for us and paid them five cents a day for their services. My houseboy was named John. As he was the son of the chief he was called John number one, to distinguish him from all the other "Johns," as all of the males shared a very limited number of Christian names. He was saving his money to buy a wife. He had a high priced one picked out and she was going to cost him the equivalent of thirty dollars.

Living among these natives was very interesting. They had been cannibals as recently as thirty years earlier, and it was believed some in the more remote areas might still be practicing this custom.

Our PBY arrived and started flying morning and afternoon patrols. Normally, the plane carried two machine gunners, but since there was a shortage of personnel the pilot asked us for volunteers. We all volunteered as this sounded like a lot of fun. The day for my turn came and I was to fly in the afternoon; however, the plane never returned from the morning patrol. We later found out the

pilot had landed at Guadalcanal, and for some unknown reason had crashed into the side of a transport ship, killing or injuring all aboard the plane.

Years later, Joyce and I were taking a fall foliage tour in New England and met a New Zealand man about our age. At dinner one evening he mentioned that he had served in the Pacific area as a radioman-gunner aboard a two-seated floatplane. I asked him where he was stationed and he replied that no one had ever heard of the place. When queried further he said, "Halavo, Florida Island." My reply was, "Know it well." He had arrived just after I left so we had never met, but this was still a real coincidence as it had to be the very smallest allied base ever established in the Pacific Theater of War.

Shortly before Christmas the members of our outpost were rotated and I returned to Tulagi. On Christmas Day we had a real treat. We had a Company mess hall of sorts, but nobody used it because we were doing okay off the Army chow we were appropriating. On Christmas the Company cook found the ingredients to make doughnuts, and that was our holiday dinner, coffee and doughnuts. Everyone was present for that treat and the cook basked in his moment of glory. Believe it or not, that was the first actually cooked food I had since arriving in the Solomons.

The rest of my time on Tulagi was quite uneventful. On January 30, 1943, the President Adams steamed into the harbor with the long-awaited Army troops and we went aboard this same ship that had brought us here six months, and a lifetime, earlier. Of all the troops that arrived here on D-day, our regiment was the only one still remaining in the Solomon Islands. On the next day we sailed, bound for New Zealand. The Second Marine Regiment did receive the Presidential Unit Citation from President Roosevelt, and we were authorized to wear that ribbon on our uniform. The whole Solomon Islands Campaign had been quite an experience to an 18-year-old Marine.

The cost in manpower of capturing Guadalcanal and the surrounding islands was expensive to all the branches of allied military personnel. Total casualties were 7,100 men. This includes 420 in the air; 1,769 on the ground, and an additional 4,911 at sea. The losses for Japan were even more severe, and totaled at least 30,343 men.

Upon our return to the Solomons, Joyce and I hired a boat on Guadalcanal to take us to Tulagi as there is no scheduled transport. This island, once the capital of the Solomons and the home of the Governor, is now an almost deserted back-water port.

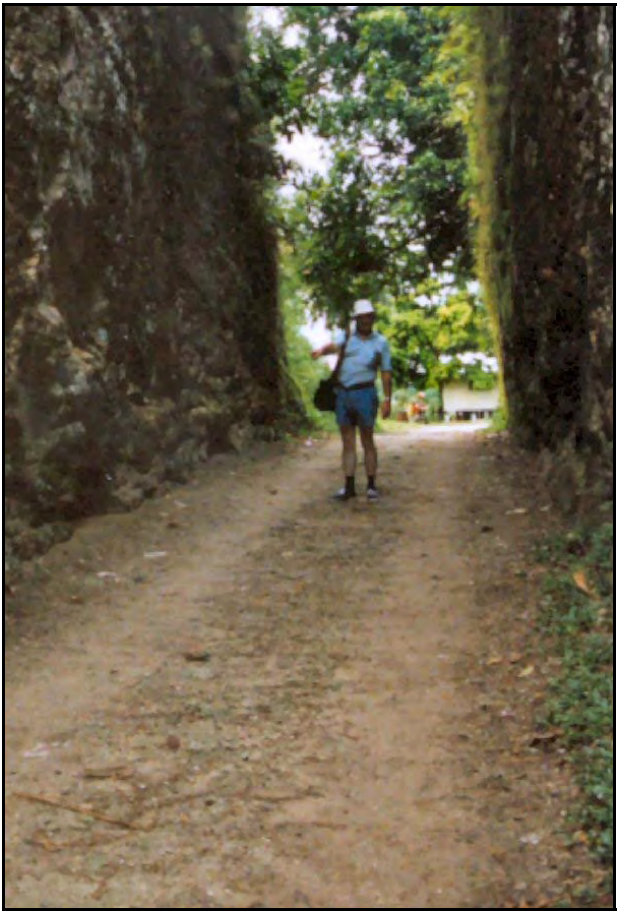


Figure 34. Len shows Joyce a tunnel leading to an air raid shelter he used during the war.

Although still one of the best anchorages in the entire South Pacific, only one small inter-island copra schooner was tied up at the dock. The operations manager of the harbor, Juvence Selevale, greeted us warmly. He was a native, born on Savo Island, and was very appreciative of what the Marines had done. He later corresponded with us.

There was little left that I could show Joyce. The small Chinese business area was long gone, as likewise was the PT base where John F. Kennedy assumed command of PT-109 shortly after I had left for New Zealand. I did show her an air raid shelter I had used many times during the war as it is still located in a road-cut near the dock. I also had a chance to try out my rusty Pidgin English on two young girls who were living aboard the copra schooner. I would have enjoyed showing Joyce the most unique store I had ever seen. It was a rather large, ramshackle, wooden building that occupied an entire islet in the harbor. It was just a couple of feet above water, reachable only by boat. Regrettably, it was no longer there.

One of the most interesting things about having my story on the web is receiving e-mail from those who have read it. Sixty-three years after the events described in this, and the previous two chapters, I received such an e-mail from Dodson Smith, of Winston Salem, North Carolina. He had joined Hq-3-2 in New Zealand in July 1942, and had also

served as company radio operator for K-3-2 after I had left. He subsequently fought at Tarawa, Saipan, and Okinawa, having missed Tinian because of wounds. He was in possession of a copy of the official report of Colonel Roy G. Hunt, the commanding officer of the Third Batallion, Second Marines, during the Solomon Islands campaign. The report is titled: DETAILED REPORT OF OPERATIONS GUADALCANAL, TULAGI, AND GAVUTU SECTORS SOLOMON ISLANDS.

The report had been acquired from Herbert R. "Bud" Brown, company clerk of Hq-3-2 during the last half of the war. Brown brought it home upon his discharge. When he passed away his widow sent the report to Dodson, who then sent it on to me. Needless to say, I greatly appreciated it and have referred to it frequently.

6 New Zealand

We arrived in the harbor at Wellington, New Zealand, on February 6th, 1943. We then boarded a train to our camp located about thirty miles out of town at McKay's Crossing, Paekakariki. The camp consisted of four-man huts. There was just room for two cots lengthwise on either side, a door at one end, and a window at the other. A small, coal-burning stove stood between the cots, and a single bare light bulb dangled overhead. We thought these were fantastic accommodations.

Our sea bags were waiting for us and we dug out our 'greens,' the wool dress uniform. We did not have long to wait for liberty. Paekakariki and the other small towns in the area did not offer much, so we caught the train to Wellington. I disembarked from the train and started through the station, eagerly looking forward to my first liberty since leaving the States. My attention was attracted by two very pretty girls approaching, one a blonde and the other a redhead. The blonde especially caught my eye and I made my move. I found her name was Peggy Seerup and the other girl was her sister, Pat. They were at the station because Peggy was catching a train to her home in Ohura, a small town that she said was about 250 miles north. They did not have much time, but we did go into a nearby milk bar and had a soda. The girls then left and I continued on my way.

Figure 35. Peggy in 1943.

Liberty in New Zealand could not have been better. The people were very friendly and we all spoke English, although sometimes an interpreter was almost needed, especially with the slang expressions. The New Zealanders were extremely grateful to us for stopping the Japanese advance because they knew they were on the list of places to be overrun, and most of their soldiers were fighting Germans in North Africa. Money also went a long way. For example, our favorite meal was steak and eggs, which cost one shilling, six-pence; or in our money, twenty-five cents. Almost everything else was comparable. Four of us went together and rented a hotel room downtown on a permanent basis. We rarely had overnight liberty, but we did have liberty every day and this gave us a place to get together and take a break.

Shortly after arrival we had payday, the first we had experienced in seven months. The normal procedure for this was that we lined up alphabetically in company formation, then one at a time stepped before the company commander, announced our name and stood at attention. The battalion paymaster would check the record and state how much pay we had coming. He would then count out that amount and pass it to the company commander, who in turn counted it out again to the man receiving it. All the while we remained at attention, which wasn't bad as it usually didn't take too long. In this case, however, before they got to "S" for Skinner, they ran out of money except for one dollar bills. Although our pay

Figure 36. The good luck ivory elephant.

was just fifty dollars a month, when seven months' worth was slowly counted out twice in one dollar bills, it made one realize how exhausting standing at attention can be. As soon as I got my money I went to a bank in Wellington and had six months' worth sent home to my folks, who put it into an account for me.

On February 19th I got a ten-day furlough. I spent the first two or three days enjoying myself in Wellington and

getting some good out of our hotel room. I then decided this was a wonderful opportunity to see some of a foreign country. I had no idea where to go when I suddenly remembered the blonde I had met when I first arrived. I recalled she lived 250 miles away and that sounded just right, so I walked straight to the train station and bought a ticket for Ohura.

The train traveled up the west coast of North Island making frequent stops at every small town. I met a New Zealand soldier on the train who had been seriously wounded in North Africa. We exchanged war stories and he took a small ivory elephant from a cord around his neck and gave it to me. He said that was his lucky talisman and it had kept him alive through North Africa. He said he did not need it any longer as he would not be going overseas again, and he wanted me to have it so I, too, would be able to return to my home. Not only did I carry it through the rest of the war, but all these years later, I still have it.

The conductor stopped by and told us everyone was very interested in the two of us, as there had been no other Solomon Island veteran in the part of the country we were traveling through, and the New Zealand soldier was one of the first of their men to return. There was always a small crowd at every station where we stopped, and the conductor asked if we would go to the rear platform of the

train and make a short speech at each stop. By day's end the two of us had repeated our speech quite a number of times.

I had to change trains at Stratford, and when I found it would be midnight before reaching Ohura, I decided to spend the night in Stratford. I bid my soldier friend goodby, departed the train, and looked for somewhere to eat. Absolutely everybody I met on the sidewalk stopped me and wanted to talk, so it took quite awhile to travel two blocks until I found a restaurant. I had a good meal and waited for the bill, which never came. Finally, I went to the cashier and told her I had not received a bill and wished to leave. She replied, "Oh, there is no charge. You are our guest, but would you mind signing our guest book?" I was beginning to see how a celebrity lived, but the biggest surprise was yet to come.

As I stepped outside, I saw the local Salvation Army band on the sidewalk. As soon as I appeared they played the Marine's Hymn! I knew then the town was mine. I crossed the street to a hotel and was not surprised at all when the manager insisted he carry my bag and informed me there was no charge for their best room.

In the morning I caught the train to Ohura, and upon arriving in this little town I inquired where I could find

Peggy's address.In the morning I caught the train to Ohura, and upon arriving in this little town I inquired where I could find Peggy's address. You can imagine her surprise when a Marine she had met for only a few minutes a couple of weeks earlier suddenly appeared unannounced on her doorstep. She was very gracious and her family could not have been any nicer. I spent the rest of my furlough there until having to return to camp. I did see her one other time when I made a fast trip to Ohura on a three-day pass.

Back at camp we started doing some training, but it was still mostly rest and recreation which included going to Wellington almost every night. I had met another very nice girl there and I dated her exclusively for the rest of my stay in New Zealand. She had a brother who was overseas in the New Zealand Army and she lived with her parents in the Miramar suburb of Wellington. Her parents made me very welcome and treated me as if I were one of the family. I would usually pick her up when she got off work and our date would end when I took her home by tram. I would then return to the train station about 10:30 pm in order to catch the Paekakariki train back to my camp where we had to be checked in by midnight.

About this time we had some promotions announced, the first since I had joined the regiment in the States. I have

always been amazed at how some branches of the service had so many promotions. The Fleet Marine Force, I am sure, had less than anyone. I was promoted to Private First Class a little more than one year after joining the Corps. This was considered as good and as fast as could be expected.

I was concerned about having an attack of malaria. Shortly after landing in the Solomons, members of the battalion started coming down with this disease. By the time we left, most of the fellows had experienced attacks two or three times. It seemed the longer it took to get it the worse the person was hit. Within a week or two after our arrival in New Zealand, I was the only man left in our entire battalion who had yet to experience it. I figured that when it hit me it was really going to be something. In the first part of the war, malaria was a bigger enemy than the Japanese and sent more men to the hospital. During our entire stay in New Zealand a large number of men was always in the hospital at Silverstream recovering from recurring seizures. I never did get it. A doctor told me about one person in a thousand is born immune.

As we were without a platoon leader at this time, Lieutenant Fred Riggs was temporarily transferred from another platoon in K Company and assigned as commanding officer of the first platoon. Lt. Riggs, who appears in the center of the front row in Figure 37, was

Figure 37. 1st Platoon, K Company in New Zealand. Len is third from left, middle row.

also a veteran of the Solomons Campaign and had been injured by a bomb on Guadalcanal, but had now recovered. He had a special interest in scouting and would go out in the hills above our camp and lay out a compass course which would consist of several legs before reaching his position. I was supposed to determine where he was hiding and locate him before he could see me. As the hills were quite barren this was a challenge, but I enjoyed the exercises and got fairly good

at them. Shortly after I left New Zealand, Lt. Riggs was again transferred, this time to H & S Battery of the 10th Marines, where he served throughout Tarawa, Saipan, and Tinian.

Sixty-two and a half years later I received a phone call from Brian Reilly of Woodstock, Illinois. He identified himself as being married to Judith, the daughter of Lt. Riggs. Brian had been searching Google for information relating to Gavutu and had found my story. He added that now retired Major Riggs and his wife lived with them and was downstairs at that time. Subsequently, Fred Riggs corresponded with me.

By June 8th our training schedule had intensified and we went aboard the troopship George Climber for practice landings on the coast near Paekakariki. This ship was manned by a Coast Guard crew who were mostly inexperienced. We made a night landing, utilizing landing craft that had a ramp that dropped in front so we no longer had to climb out over the side, which exposed us more to enemy fire. The surf was fairly high, and as soon as the landing craft beached, the coxswain dropped the ramp and out we went. By that time the next swell arrived, which picked up the boat and moved it several feet further ashore. The fellows on our boat all escaped injury, but several men were hurt or killed that night by being crushed as the boat moved ahead. This would not

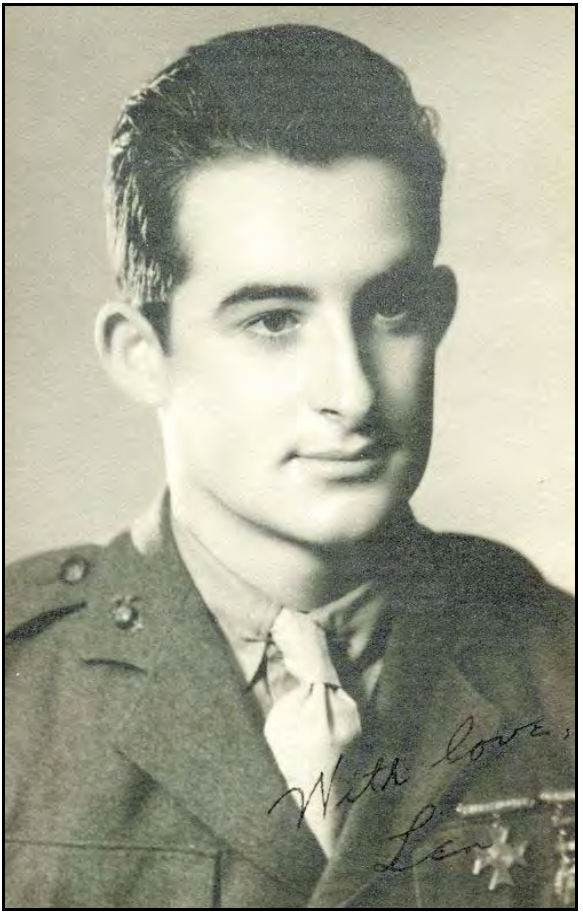


Figure 38. Leonard in New Zealand a few days after his 19th birthday.

have happened with an experienced coxswain, as he would have waited for the next swell and would have gunned the motor at the same time in order to get as close into the beach as possible, which would have stabilized the craft.

The landings were called off, and in the morning we searched the beach to be sure we retrieved all the bodies. On June 22nd we repeated the process, but with a daylight landing this time and a lot more instructions to the coxswains. After landing we marched back to camp.

During late afternoon on July 9th, the Company was assembled and the first sergeant read off the names of fifteen men who were to report to the company commander. This was unusual procedure and often meant bad news. We gathered in his office and he stood scowling at us for a bit, then said we were on a list to go stateside, leaving early in the morning. He then asked if anyone did not want to go, and you could have heard a pin drop. He then grinned and said, "I can see none of you are too patriotic," and dismissed us.

This surprise was completely unexpected. There was almost always scuttlebutt going around that we were going home, but this time there had been none. It turned out that we would be getting replacements the next day

Figure 39. Marie on her first visit to us in 1971.

and the captain had been told to take the fifteen men he had who were in the worst physical condition and send them home. I was probably never in better physical shape in my life than I was in New Zealand, but it happened that only fifteen of the original Company were on duty and available to leave immediately; the other remaining original members being in the hospital in Silverstream because of malaria attacks.

Early the next morning we boarded the USS Rochambeau in Wellington harbor. This was a French passenger ship

that was confiscated by the U.S. when war broke out. The French crew was given the option of signing into the U.S. Navy for the duration of the war. We were really a polyglot bunch. There were no organized units aboard, just small groups from Army and Marine units, a contingent of British soldiers, a few Free French and Dutch troops, and even some prisoners of war.

As we sailed out of the harbor, the song "Now is the Hour" was played over the ship's loudspeaker system. This is a very popular New Zealand song as it was originally sung by the Maoris, the Polynesians who were the local inhabitants when the islands were first discovered by European explorers. The Marines aboard, who were leaving the land they had grown to love, were very touched. Even though we were headed home, there was probably not a dry eye among them. I know that I stood by the rail for a long time watching Wellington fall behind and out of sight.

The following day the ship sustained the worst rolling I ever experienced. I have never been so seasick in my life. When I was able to eat, the food was horrible. We were fed only twice a day. Breakfast was rice and dinner was rice and jello. We were told someone was needed to work in the galley, and I volunteered in the hope of finding something better. Did I ever luck out. The captain had his own personal chef and I was assigned to wash dishes

Figure 40. Joyce and Peggy in her hometown of Napier.

for him. I never knew how one chef could dirty so many dishes to prepare a meal, but the captain sure ate good. Naturally, the chef ate the same food, and there was always plenty left over for me.

The ship had obviously really deteriorated since it had been placed in service. It had a large rock garden on deck, but the flowers had been removed and the whole garden painted navy gray. We steamed in a straight line, which was frightening as always before we zigzagged so as to be a more difficult target for submarines. One time we broke down and just drifted for most of the day. Much later I was to find out that on its outward trip the Rochambeau had carried a Lt. John F. Kennedy, delivering him to Tulagi where he was to operate a PT boat. The name would not have meant anything to me at the time should I have heard it. A few years later, however, I did have the opportunity to meet him when I was assigned as his personal security officer when he spent the day in Salem campaigning for the Democratic nomination as President of the United States.

After a rather uneventful eighteen days we reached the States, landing at San Diego.

New Zealand will always hold a special place in my heart and 1 have returned there twice with Joyce. During our second trip, on Christmas Day 1984, we visited the site of my old camp. We had been staying with a long-time friend and she drove us there. The name of the old friend? Peggy. Yes, in all the intervening years the blonde whom I met on my first liberty has remained a close friend. She has been to see us twice and we have visited her the same number of

Figure 41. Memorial showing the location of the camp at Paekakariki, used by both the First and Second Marine Divisions in 1942 and 1943.

times. Although Peggy is now deceased, she had a son and two daughters of whom we are very fond.

One daughter, Marie, came to see us in 1971 and became especially close. We then went to England about four years later to see her. Peggy made a trip there at the same time so we were all together. We started calling Marie our adopted daughter. She subsequently married Paul Reid and they established a family consisting of four daughters

Figure 42. The shoulder patch worn by the Second Marine Division. Note the stars of the Southern Cross which became part of the shoulder patches of both the First and Second Divisions.

we now call our adopted family. We could not love them more if they were actually our own, but sadly Marie has now passed on and we must do without her.

At that time there was just a simple marker showing the location of the camp, but it has since been replaced by a larger memorial. Photos of the current memorial were taken by Marie and Dave Kenchington, sister and brother-in-law of Paul, who live in nearby Paraparaumu.

After leaving our camp site at Paekakariki in 1984, we stayed with Marie, Paul and family. They were then all living back in New Zealand and their home was just a few miles from my old camp site.

We later visited them a couple of times in Australia as they lived there for several years. When their oldest daughter, Anna-Marie, turned sixteen, her present was to come to the U.S. and spend a month with us. She has also since returned to visit. Marie, Paul and the rest of the girls, Elizabeth, Jessica, and Bridget, have also been to visit, with Paul having last returned by himself in May of 2008. On my last visit to them in Brisbane, I was accompanied by our son Craig and his wife Linda, so the friendship is passed on to succeeding generations. Our families have become very close, and all from such a casual encounter many years ago.

Because of the interest in the relationships that developed between the Marines and New Zealanders, at least three books have been written on this subject since 2000. The

books are: A String of Pearls and Follow Me Back in Time, by Joan Ellis, and New Zealand in the Pacific War, by Bruce M. Petty. I have been honored to have had my story told in the latter two books. For those of you that may wish more information on these publications, refer to the last chapter in this story titled "About the Author".

I will always be grateful for my stay in New Zealand and from my friendly encounters with all their people. Those remembrances, and the many letters that I received throughout the rest of the war from both girls I had dated, gave me the strength to meet the challenges that were yet to come.

7 Stateside

The Rochambeau landed in San Diego on July 27th; just a week later I left on a thirty-day furlough. While I had been overseas my folks had moved from Myrtle Creek to Monmouth. I spent most of my time with them, but also went to Myrtle Creek to look up friends. Most of those friends were girls, as by this time almost everyone else I knew was in the service.

While at Monmouth, the American Legion Post in Corvallis learned that I was home and asked me to make a speech. This rather pleased me as there was a whole Army division in training just outside of town, but at this time of the war very few men had returned yet from combat duty.

On September 4th, I returned to San Diego and was assigned to Guard Company at Camp Elliott. When it was discovered I could type I was made a clerk in the office. The major benefit of the job was that I was given a bunk in an adjoining room so I would be more available in case of emergency. It was wonderful to have a room of my own as one of the major drawbacks in the service was the constant lack of privacy.

Figure 43. Leonard and his father. Rollo, while on leave in Oregon.

Figure 44. Leonard on leave in Oregon.

Jim McCrory, my good friend from the Solomons, had also been sent back to the States and was stationed at Camp Elliott. Jim had married just before enlistment and he and his wife, Thelma, had a small apartment a few miles north of camp. I frequently went home with him in order to get a few more hours off the base.

About this time the sergeant's exam became available and I was declared eligible to take it, which I did. I passed, and while I never learned my score, I was told I did quite well. I had visions of becoming sergeant by the time I had two years of service, but that was not to be as I wouldn't be around long enough.

When I returned to the States we were guaranteed at least six months of stateside duty before being sent overseas again; however, the Marine Corps was experiencing heavy losses and replacements were badly needed. When I had been back just over four months, the length of stateside service was shortened to three months. In just a few days, on December 7th, I was transferred to a casual company. The only thing that could stop me now from going overseas again would be to flunk my physical. I knew I would pass that, but I didn't realize I would do so by such a margin. When I appeared before the doctor the conversation went like this. "Can you breathe?" "Yes, sir." "Can you walk?" "Yes, sir."

"Next man." That was it - two questions. I knew then how desperate the Fleet Marine Force was for men.

On December 14th, I was sent to a replacement battalion, and on the 21st I went aboard the aircraft carrier USS Langley, bound for Hawaii. We were jammed aboard the carrier, which of course was never designed to carry troops, and were assigned three to a bunk--one sailor and two Marines. The sailor had priority, and depending on his duty hours he got to pick his choice of which eight hours he could spend in his bunk. The two Marines split the remainder into two additional eight-hour shifts. That was not for me so I went into the hold and found a huge pile of sea bags. I picked a soft spot among them and slept whenever I felt like it.

On Christmas Day, December 25, 1943, I sailed into Pearl Harbor, Territory of Hawaii.

8 Hawaii

It was still Christmas when we disembarked from the Langley and traveled a couple of miles from Pearl Harbor toward Honolulu. The entire casual battalion was housed in a newly erected camp. We lived in six-man pyramidal tents, while outside there was either bare ground or mud, depending on the weather. After the big rush to get out of the States, I was to spend the next two months here.

Every day we were assigned to working parties, all having to do with the construction of camps. The first part of the war was fought in the South Pacific, and Hawaii was outside the mainstream of traffic. Now, the war had shifted to the North Pacific, which made Hawaii the major staging area. Obviously, the building of camps was important, but we didn't have our hearts in it as that was not the reason for joining the Marine Corps. We had liberty on the weekends and while liberty was much better than working, Honolulu was a very poor liberty town due to the huge number of servicemen. They outnumbered the civilians.

I made three very significant discoveries. First, the casual battalion was very poorly organized. While they had a roster of names, they actually had no way to keep track of anyone as there was absolutely no chain of

command. After breakfast there was company roll call, then we would just be split into groups to go work. Secondly, all it took to go on liberty in Honolulu was an ID card, which I had at all times anyway. Thirdly, there was a big hole right in front of my tent.

At the bottom of the hole was the end of a large concrete pipeline, but for some reason construction of it had stopped. After breakfast and roll call I would return to my tent, change clothes, drop into the hole, duck my head and walk right out of camp, underneath the fence and the highway, and emerge into the civilian housing area for Pearl Harbor employees. There I would catch the bus to Honolulu. I had liberty every day after that, returning in time for dinner.

Being as records were so incomplete it also affected payroll. We received only a fraction of the money due us during those two months so I was always broke. Most days I would simply go to Waikiki Beach where I found a bathhouse. For five cents I could rent a locker and a swim suit. My clothes would go in the locker and I would go into the ocean. Waikiki Beach was not as wide as it is now as much of today's beach was brought in by truck. You also needed to avoid the barbed wire on the beach that had been placed there to protect it from Japanese invasion. Joyce and I have been to Waikiki Beach a couple of times since those days and I have enjoyed

Figure 45. On liberty in Honolulu. January, 1944. Len is on the right in the back row.

seeing the girls in their skimpy bathing suits. Unfortunately, I don't believe I ever saw a girl on the beach during any of my wartime excursions. On the other hand, it was not crowded either. A few times I appeared to be the only person enjoying it.

Both of my older brothers were in the service. Lyndon was in the Army in Panama, and Gaylord was in the Navy in a Seabee Battalion (construction battalion). Gaylord had been in the Aleutian Islands and I had been informed by letters from home that he was now in Hawaii. I went to the Red Cross in an attempt to find the location of his unit, but was informed this was classified information. Every sailor I saw in town with the Seabee insignia was stopped and asked if he knew where Gaylord's battalion was but no one could help me. One evening he suddenly showed up at my tent. His unit was not only stationed adjacent to mine, but our tents were on the same corresponding side. If I had stepped outside and shouted his name real loud he would probably have answered! We went on a few liberties together after that.

On February 28, 1944, I was transferred out of the casual battalion. I went aboard the USS Doyan and traveled to Hilo on the big island of Hawaii. The following day I went 65 miles by truck on a very winding, rutted road, and rejoined the Second Marine Division.

This time I was assigned to Headquarters and Service Company, 8th Regiment. Since leaving New Zealand the division had fought the Battle of Tarawa, suffering extremely heavy casualties. Thank goodness I had missed that or this book might not have been written. The camp, called Camp Tarawa, was located high in a saddle between the Kohala Mountains and snow-capped Mauna Kea.

Joyce and I have been back to the Big Island of Hawaii and it is a wonderful and interesting tourist destination. It is hard to believe what a dull, desolate, and isolated location the Parker Ranch could be in 1944, especially when there was no available transportation.

Because of the elevation it was cold. Our source of water was from melted snow and it was ice cold. As there was no hot water, showers were brief and infrequent. We were outside the small town of Kamuela on land owned by the huge Parker Cattle Ranch. While we were given liberty, there was really no place to go. I would be there about three months and I think I went on liberty twice.

There were two reasons for picking this location. One was that it was believed after all the combat the division had been in, it might be best if it was separated from more civilized folks, especially as many residents of

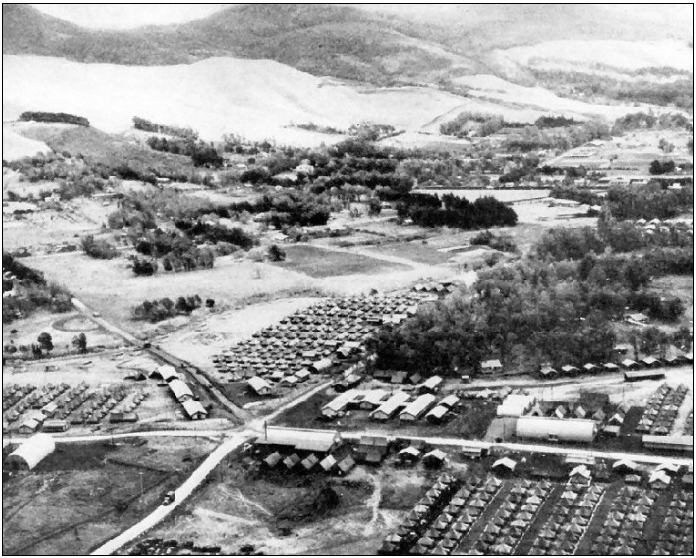
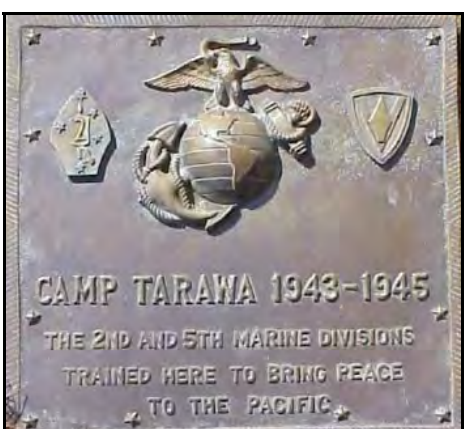


Figure 46. Camp Tarawa in Hawaii. Len's tent was in the lower right unit.

Figure 47. A view of the location of Camp Tarawa in 2001.

Figures 48 (above) and 49 (below). This memorial is all that remains of Camp Tarawa today.



Hawaii were of Japanese ancestry. Secondly, this was supposed to be a healthy area, especially for all the Solomon veterans who still kept having recurring attacks of malaria.

The first few days at Camp Tarawa I was kept busy handling supplies. Then our group of new arrivals was asked for a volunteer. This was always met with great skepticism, but as I was bored with moving boxes, I stepped forward. I was met by the man I was to replace and he assured me this was a good deal, which I found out to be very true. I was supposed to operate a sterilizing unit, which was a large four-wheeled trailer that could be pulled behind a truck. A small gasoline engine drove the pump and other mechanism. A diesel-fired burner turned water into steam which could be used for several purposes, but primarily to sterilize hospital bedding or medical equipment.

My tutor fired up the unit and gave me very basic instructions on how to operate it. He then demonstrated one of its uses. A shower unit was nearby and he ran a hose to it and showed me how to run a steady stream of hot water. He then invited me to have a hot shower. I did so and it felt wonderful. He then asked me to run it for him while he did the same. When he finished his shower he told me to shut it down and from now on I would be on my own. I had been holding the temperature at 105

degrees, but as the gauge went much higher I was curious how hot I could make it. I spun the wheel that controlled it and a scream came from the bathhouse. Although the entry door was visible, some poor Marine had entered without my seeing him. At least he had a story to tell his buddies that night as they shivered under their cold showers.

Running the sterilizing unit was a good deal. All I had to do was standby in case it was needed, and many days I did nothing at all. On those occasions when I was working I always had a number of people stop by and ask questions as it was a rather unique piece of equipment. I always tried to answer the inquiries, but in truth I knew very little about it as my instructions had been so rudimentary and I didn't even have a manual to refer to.

One day a lieutenant stopped by. He barely acknowledged my salute and greeting and just poked his nose around in a most obnoxious manner, acting as if I were not even there. I thought if his mother had not taught him any manners, perhaps I should. Two vents for releasing the steam were located about waist high in the middle of the unit. The valves that operated them happened to be on the opposite side. By getting down on the ground I could see the lieutenant's feet. When they stopped in front of the vents, I stood up and spun the valves open. There was a very satisfyingly loud yell. I ran

around to that side and found the lieutenant in a freshly steam-cleaned uniform. I apologized profusely for the accident, while he grumbled something about the fact that he shouldn't have been there anyhow and hobbled off in the direction of sick bay.

On March 12th, I celebrated my birthday by going to Hilo and boarding the troopship USS Calvert. We spent the next few days making practice landings at Maalaea Bay on Maui. This was the first black sand beach I had ever seen.

By the end of April preparations were seriously under way for another campaign. My days of leisure were over and I was working every day now. My main task was to provide steam for steam-cleaning truck engines. The trucks were to go ashore and land from tank lighters after the initial invasion. Mechanics were busy cleaning the engines and equipping them with a snorkel, which was a pipe extending upward from the carburetor so that the engines could be practically submerged for a short period as the trucks came off the tank lighters into the ocean and before reaching more shallow water.

Early in May I was busy generating steam. Pop-off valves on top of the two boilers were supposed to release excess steam so the pressure would not reach an unsafe level. I

had been having trouble with the valves sticking so I tried to keep an eye on the pressure gauges and release the steam manually when the pressure became too great. This day my attention was diverted, the steam built up, and there was a loud explosion. Parts of my sterilizer rained down over the immediate area. This was not too serious a loss as the heavy piece of equipment would be left behind anyway and my work was nearly completed.

Years later, while a police officer for the City of Salem, Oregon, I took my patrol car to the city shop to have some minor work done on it. While talking to the mechanic I learned he had also been a mechanic with the motor pool for the 8th Regiment in Hawaii. While reminiscing about our experiences, I mentioned the subsequent landing on Saipan. He stated he had missed the invasion because just before leaving Hawaii some yahoo had blown up a sterilizing unit and he was left behind to repair it. I told him he should thank me for possibly saving his life.

On May 13th, we boarded the troopship USS Cambria for more maneuvers in the islands. On May 22nd, we went into Pearl Harbor. We stayed for about a week while other parts of our convoy gathered. On May 30th, we put out to sea. On June 9th, we entered Eniwetak lagoon in the Marshall Islands and learned our destination was the island of Saipan in the Mariana Islands. The Second Marine Division was joined by the Fourth Marine Division

and the Twenty-seventh Army Division, which made our convoy the largest I had ever seen.

We left two days later, and in the darkness of early morning, June 15, 1944, we reached Saipan.

9 Sapian

The pre-dawn darkness of the morning of our arrival was shattered by the gunfire of six battleships and cruisers as they pounded beach defenses. Actually, the Navy had been shelling Saipan for four days already, and our carrier based planes had been bombing it. Additionally, we had a new weapon. This was a specially built ship called an LCI (landing craft, infantry). These ships had been armed with rockets, the first I had ever seen.

They had shallow draft and could go fairly close to shore where they would fire volleys of rockets at installations on the beach. All of this combined fire, along with continuous bombing and strafing by aircraft, raised a cloud of smoke, dirt, and other debris over the beach. One would believe no one could live through this, and the recruits among us thought we would be able to go ashore without a shot being fired. We veterans knew better.

The Eighth Regiment was designated as part of the assault troops. The line companies went ashore in the first two waves. That is when we found the Saipan landing was going to be different. Saipan is a fairly large island, being seventy-two square miles in total. Most of the Japanese troops had been drawn back from the beach, so all of our bombardment had done very little

Figure 50. Coming ashore in amtracs on Green Beach 1. U.S. Marine Corps photograph.

damage. The enemy had a lot of artillery and mortars, and as each wave headed in, the Japanese were exploding a shell every twenty-five yards, every fifteen seconds, along the beach and its approaches. Our first two waves were having very heavy casualties, and were moving inland without seeing many of the enemy or finding targets for their light weapons.

In mid-morning I went ashore in the third wave, our destination being Green Beach I. Unlike our landings in the Solomons, we now had amphibious tractors (amtracs)

to take us ashore. These vehicles consisted of a large open cargo space with a small cab in the front. They were all metal and the hull was solid all the way around. When on land the top of the open bed was about eye level. Entry was gained by climbing over the side. A door permitted the driver and one other person access to the cab. They were propelled by means of a full track running the length of the vehicle, similar to that of a tank, only lighter. Cleats on the track would move the vehicle in water, and upon reaching the beach the amtrac could emerge and continue on dry land. Our unit was in two amtracs. I reached shore safely, but our other amtrac received a direct hit and all were killed or wounded, consequently we were reduced fifty percent before even reaching the beach. Those of us who were left immediately started providing support to the front line troops, moving supplies up to their positions a short distance inland. Trying to keep the front lines supplied with food, water, and ammunition would be my job during this campaign.

Normally, the front line is the most dangerous place to be, becoming progressively safer the farther one is to the rear. For the first few days on Saipan there was really no difference as our casualties were from shell fire, not rifles or machine guns. Officers of higher rank, lieutenant colonels and majors, are battalion commanders and their aides. They are usually well to the rear. D-day on Saipan set a Marine Corps record in the number of officers of

such rank being killed or wounded. In my regiment, every lieutenant colonel and almost every major was hit the first day of the invasion.

The Japanese had an advantage in that they held Mt. Tapotchau near the north end of the island. Observation posts near the summit permitted them to keep our positions under scrutiny throughout most of the operation. In addition, they had pre-sighted their artillery so their fire was very accurate. On D+2 (two days after our landing), I was unloading an amtrac near the beach when we came under heavy fire. I jumped into the nearest shell crater and was hugging the ground when suddenly there was a loud roar and crash of a large Japanese shell landing in the crater right beside me. The impact threw me into the air, and when my feet hit the ground they hit running. It turned out the shell was a dud, but my first thought was that it might be a delayed action round. If it had been, I would probably not have heard it as I left the crater about as fast as the shell had come in!

A grove of coconut trees separated the beach and the Charan Kanoa fighter airstrip, which was located a couple of hundred yards inland and which ran parallel to the coast. A tank trap, which consisted of a trench about ten feet deep, had been dug in the grove of trees and was about the same length as the mile-long airstrip. This

tank trap gave us problems on D-day as it stopped the amtracs. One of the first things we did was fill in some places so we could cross.

On D+3, I was in an amtrac gathering supplies to take up to the front. It was just the driver and myself. We stopped at the water dump and I loaded several five-gallon cans of drinking water. We then proceeded to the ammo dump which was located in a small grove of trees just across the airstrip. When we arrived we found another amtrac being loaded. As there was just room for one at a time, we paused on the edge of the runway to await our turn. The driver stepped into the rear where I was and started to get a drink from one of the cans of water when suddenly Japanese artillery opened up on us. The first salvo hit the ammo dump and the whole thing started exploding. The driver spun around a couple of times as if he couldn't find the door back into the cab so I gave him a shove inside. He landed in the driver's seat and the amtrac leaped forward at the same time.

He made a turn on the runway, ran full speed down the airstrip, then turned into the grove of coconut trees. He was still going full speed when we hit the tank trap. We dove into it and hit the bottom nose first. As I was in the open bed, it catapulted me into the air, and it seemed like I flew an incredible height and distance before landing in a shell hole right on top of another Marine who had taken

shelter there. My airborne excursion should have wrecked me, but the adrenalin was flowing so fast I did not feel a thing. Both the other Marine, who didn't know what had hit him at first, and myself huddled in the hole for another half hour until the bombardment let up. The driver had been injured and the amtrac was destroyed, but my lucky star was still shining, or perhaps it was the little ivory elephant hanging around my neck.

On D+5, I had another interesting experience on the airstrip. By now we had finally got our trucks ashore so we were using them instead of the amtracs. These were standard military trucks with dual rear wheels. Detachable canvas tops covered the truck bed, but we never used them in combat as they slowed loading and unloading. Again, it was just a driver and myself and we had stopped on the edge of the runway to wait for an opportunity to load some drinking water. I was standing in the open truck bed, facing toward the rear and leaning against the cab when I saw an airplane approaching with its wheels down preparing to land.

This was highly unusual as the runway had not been used since our landing because it had many shell craters in it. The approaching plane was a SBD dive bomber, which carried a crew of two - a pilot and rear gunner. As I found out later, the gunner had been seriously wounded

and the pilot had decided to land on Saipan for medical help as his carrier was a long distance away.

The truck driver was totally unaware of the approaching plane as he was facing in the opposite direction. In fact, he was in the process of lighting a cigarette just as the aircraft touched down, probably not more than fifty yards away. As the wheels hit the runway, the left one dropped into a hole, spinning the plane around and heading it right toward us. I dived over the side of the stake-bed truck and was still in mid air when the plane struck us. I was looking over my shoulder and saw the fuselage go right by the opposite side of the truck, with the wing going over my head as well as over the truck cab. The pilot had landed tail down as in a carrier landing. The leading edge of the wing just cleared the cab, while about halfway to the trailing edge it hit. The impact just tipped the truck cab forward and tore the whole thing off, windshield, roof and all, with the wing just clearing the truck driver's head. Everything happened so fast I had not even time to shout a warning and the first thing the driver knew was a roar, a crash, something huge shooting past him, and he was sitting in a convertible. As long as I live I will never forget the look on his face, which had turned instantly white with a cigarette frozen halfway to his lips. He did not even receive a scratch, although the wing could not have been more than an inch or two over his head.

After hitting us the plane left the runway, went into a large shell hole, flipped completely over, and slid to a stop upside-down in a battalion aid station. That pilot wanted medical help and he sure got it as it was a doctor who slid the canopy back, unbuckled the gunner, and lowered him onto a stretcher. The pilot was also a lucky man and appeared to be uninjured.

For the most part the truck drivers were a bunch of characters. One in particular I often rode with took his truck to impossible locations. He used to tell me to hang on and help him watch for communication wire as that was the only thing he would try to avoid. In those days the radios we had were very undependable, so the communication section would follow the front line companies and unroll wire onto the ground from a reel carried between them. This permitted telephone communication between the front line and the rear echelon units and was more reliable.

Since the Solomon Islands, the Marine Corps no longer used the old and obsolete 1903 Springfield rifles, but had replaced them with modern, eight-shot Garand semi-automatic rifles. That was the weapon I was issued, but as it was quite heavy I exchanged it for a lightweight carbine which was easier to carry on the truck. We never rode inside the cab but stayed outside where we could watch for snipers. If there was just one of us and the

driver we would ride in the back so we could see to both sides as well as to the rear, as a favorite trick of snipers would be to allow the truck to pass, then step out into the road and fire at it.

Often there would be two of us in addition to the driver, in which case the second person would usually sit on one of the large front fenders so he could help watch ahead. This became increasingly important as the front lines moved forward, as we would have an area near the beach where a number of Marines were located, and a second large number of Marines on or near the front lines. In between were now several miles of no man's land and, although the area had been swept, many Japanese had been by-passed or had since infiltrated.

On one occasion we were traveling down a dirt road and I was riding on the left front fender, sitting cross-legged with my carbine in my lap. I glanced down and saw a land mine in the road just as the wheel I was sitting above went over it. I thought, "Here we go," but nothing happened. I yelled at the driver to stop, and even though we were not going very fast, the rear wheels had also gone over the mine before the truck came to a halt. A recent rain had washed the dirt enough to partially expose the mine and the plunger was clearly visible. Our front wheel had just missed it, while our rear dual wheels had straddled it. I cut a stick and drove it into the ground,

attaching some cloth to it like a flag, so the mine could be avoided until it was taken care of. Very likely we had been the first vehicle to use the road since the mine was planted.

About this time we were moved to a location roughly halfway between the beach and the front lines. This was an area that was mostly open, flat land. I dug my foxhole under some trees and set up a Japanese machine gun so as to cover the field in front of me. This was not a choice location as a battery of 155 MM guns were also brought in. These were the largest guns in the Marine Corps inventory and were choice enemy targets. Fortunately, much of the Japanese artillery had been knocked out by now or we would have been shelled incessantly. The nearest gun was not over fifty feet from my foxhole, and of course it made a terrible noise every time it was fired. A harassing gunfire would last sporadically throughout the night to keep the Japanese awake. Unfortunately, it had the same effect on us.

On the other side of the open field in front of me, perhaps half a mile distant, were some supposedly deserted houses. Thinking it might be advisable to be certain they were empty, I took my carbine and checked them out. No enemy troops were there, but I did gather up a variety of clothing I thought interesting. I came back into camp wearing a jaunty Panama hat, a Japanese silk kimono,

and for a real show stopper, a grass skirt over my dungaree trousers. I thought this might give my buddies a laugh, but it turned out a couple of war correspondents had just arrived and they found me fascinating. They took pictures and one said, "What will we call him?" The other suggested, "Let's name him the mayor of Saipan." The subsequent article appeared in newspapers throughout the United States.

Also, about this time we had our first mail call since leaving Hawaii. There was only one small bag for the entire company, but I did have one letter. I was rather disappointed when I found it was from Joyce, as I would much rather have had a letter from my folks or one of my girlfriends. At this time Joyce and I had never even met, but we knew of each other only through mutual friends, namely, my sister, Wanda, and my sister-in-law, Alice. Joyce was doing her bit by writing to the boys in the service as the government was encouraging them to do, but we had corresponded only a few times and I know both of our letters were quite uninteresting. Little did I dream I would marry her in two years.

After the first week of July we had taken most of the island and were anticipating a banzai charge. Typically, the Japanese never surrendered, and when pushed clear back and low on personnel and supplies, they would stage what they thought was a glorious attack. In truth,

it was mass suicide as it was just a wild frontal charge. We would suffer casualties, too, but in the process we would just about eliminate all resistance. Consequently, we always looked forward to the banzai charge as that would signal the fighting for that island was just about over.

We moved our artillery forward to a position just behind the front lines as we were making a push the next morning, but on the night of July 7th the Japanese attacked. They came faster than our front-line troops could shoot them and our positions were overrun. They swarmed toward our artillery whose gunners were firing shells with less than four-tenths of a second fuses. That meant the shells just barely cleared the muzzle before exploding. The call came back to regimental headquarters for more ammo.

We immediately started loading the trucks, but by the time we completed that and drove to the front it was already daylight and the banzai charge was over. I was very used to dead bodies, but I never saw such carnage in my life. There was a clear hillside that was completely covered with Japanese bodies, sometimes piled two or three deep. There must have been two thousand bodies in that one field alone. I was certainly glad I had not been present a few hours earlier as we lost quite a few men.

Figure 51. Suicide Cliff, where many Japanese, both military and civilian, committed suicide.

Figure 52. Banadero. The cave in the cliff was the last command post of the Imperial Japanese Army on Saipan. Lt. General Yoshitsuo Saito, Commaner of forces on Saipan and Tinian, and Admiral Shuichi Nagumo, the man who led the attack on Pearl Harbor, committed seppuku (suicide) here.

A couple of days later Saipan was declared secure. Our losses for the Division were 1,313 killed; 4,914 wounded; and 106 missing, or about one-third of our personnel.

On July 21st, I went aboard the USS Knox to prepare for the invasion of Tinian Island, separated from Saipan by a three-mile-wide channel.

Figure 53. A now peaceful Green Beach 1. Even in 1995, a pillbox remains.

In 1995, Joyce and I returned to Saipan. We stayed at the Pacific Islands Club, a five-star resort on the beach where the Fourth Marine Division landed. Ninety-five percent of the guests were Japanese as this is just a three-hour nonstop flight from Tokyo. It is especially popular with newlyweds and is called the Japanese Riviera because of its climate.

While there we visited the beach where I landed. There are still two Marine tanks, lost on D-day, resting offshore with

Figure 54. Yellow Beach 2 where the 4th Marines landed.

Figure 55. This photograph was taken from our luxury hotel room and shows the same beach in 1995.

just their gun turrets above water. Later, we drove to the location of the banzai charge. A Japanese memorial is now located there. I revisited Suicide Cliff and Banzai Cliff where many Japanese, mostly civilian, committed suicide by jumping over. I also got to the very top of Mt. Tapotchau where I had never been before. This mountain is actually the highest mountain in the world as measured from its base. While its elevation is only 1,545 feet above sea level, it is located by the Mariana Trench, at 38,635 feet the deepest ocean depth. This makes Tapotchau 10,000 feet higher than Mt. Everest.

Of special interest to me was visiting Banadero, the last Japanese command post. It was here that General Yoshitsuo Saito committed suicide. General Saito was commander of all Japanese forces on Saipan and Tinian. Also committing suicide here was Admiral Chuichi Nagumo, who had led the attack on Pearl Harbor. I had heard about both of them shortly after they had committed seppuku, but I had not seen the command post before.

Saipan and Tinian, along with the island of Rota and some lesser islands, make up what is now the U.S. Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. While Joyce and I were visiting Saipan, the Honorable Froilan C. Tenorio, Governor of the Northern Marianas, heard I was there and invited us to visit him in his ceremonial office at

Figure 56. The Honorable Froilan C. Tenorio, Governor of the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, presents Len with a commemorative medal recognizing his efforts in World War 2.

the Capitol. We did so, and he presented me with a medallion recognizing my efforts during the war. I greatly appreciated this honor.

10 Tinian

Tinian is only slightly smaller than Saipan, but was not as heavily defended, although there were an estimated 8,000 Japanese fighting troops on the island.

There were two good beaches to land on and two very small beaches which were on the northwest end of the island. The Japanese had strongly fortified the good beaches but had largely ignored the two smaller ones as they thought them too impractical. That was why the small beaches were selected for the landing.

On July 24, 1944, some units made the first landings on White Beach 2, while the rest of us, including myself, made feint landings on the good beaches near Tinian Town. The following morning I landed on White Beach 1 in the first wave, coming ashore in amtracs. We immediately pushed inland, with our first objective being Ushi Field, considered to be the finest Japanese airport in the Central Pacific. Our main objective in taking both Saipan and Tinian was to use them as air bases, as up until this time there was no way for our planes to bomb the main islands of Japan.

Figure 57. D-day on White Beach 1, Tinian. July, 1944. U.S. Marine Corps photograph.

The first couple of days we moved quite rapidly. Although we were supposed to be in supply, because of manpower shortages we were used like infantry at times and for a couple of days we acted as frontline troops, advancing on foot just behind our tanks. We were traveling through fields of sugar cane and the tall cane prevented seeing ahead, so the tanks just kept up an almost constant chatter of machine gun fire, sweeping everything in front of them. Our main injuries during that time were from cutting ourselves on the razor sharp edges of the sugar cane.

Figure 58. Coming ashore on White Beach 1. U.S. Marine Corps photograph.

In just a few days the distance had grown sufficiently between the front lines and supply dumps that I started working full time on the trucks again. On D+8, the front line had reached a high plateau near the south end of the island. I hadn't been up to the front for a couple of days, and when I went that afternoon I was amazed how rapidly and how far the lines had been extended. Fortunately, our truck driver knew where he was going as the road system on Tinian was quite rudimentary. All of the roads were just dirt, and they seemed to wander around with

Figure 59. The first objective on Tinian was Ushi Airfield. Note the bomb shelters. U.S. Marine Corps photograph.

The greatest emphasis spent on following property lines rather than facilitating the movement of traffic. As most of the roads were mined, it paid to always be certain which fork to take.

I went to bed that night and slept a couple of hours when we were rousted out. The lines were experiencing an all-out banzai attack and were in danger of being overrun.

Figure 60. The bomb shelters are still there over fifty years later.

More ammo was desperately needed immediately, especially for the 37 MM anti-tank guns and the mortars. We rapidly loaded a couple of trucks and the drivers asked how they could get up to the front as neither of them had been there recently. No one had the answer, then someone remembered I had been there earlier that day so I was ordered to lead. I climbed into the first truck wishing I had paid more attention to roads instead of watching for snipers. I remembered how earlier in the day I had marveled at the driver's ability to recall all of the correct turns, and now I was charged with that responsibility. In addition, it was dark and of course no lights could be used.

Fortunately, there was sufficient natural light that we could see well enough to roll along at five to ten miles per hour. Many of the crossroads I could recall, but a couple of times I just crossed my fingers and guessed. I also mentally wondered how big an explosion a truckload of ammunition would make if we hit a land mine. My guesses were all correct and never were we welcomed so profusely.

The Japanese expended all they had that night, and the next day Tinian was declared secure. Declaring an island secure, however, did not mean all worries could cease. Official Marine Corps records show that 542 Japanese soldiers were killed after the secure date on Tinian. Actually, there were more than that.

As the battle ended, we were moved up on the plateau at the south end of the island. A fairly intact farm house was located and regimental headquarters moved into it. The rest of us camped anywhere in the area. The farmer had some livestock before the war and three of us claimed a low, ramshackle building that had apparently housed goats, although we called it a pigpen. It actually had a wooden floor in part of it, and near the center one could even almost stand up. I'm sure the former, and shorter, Japanese owner could. We cleaned it up and put a tarp over the roof to keep the rain out. For the first time since landing on Saipan we could sleep with a roof over our

Figure 61. White Beach 1 as it looks today - beautiful and peaceful.

heads! We felt we were living in the lap of luxury. Another fellow, spotting an unused area along one wall, asked if he could sleep there and we magnanimously allowed him. His portion was just large enough to lie down in and was too low to sit up in. It was separated from ours by a fence-like series of wooden slats, and he had to crawl in from the outside. He was still grateful to share such comfortable quarters.

Figure 62. Japanese gunner's view of White Beach 1 as seen from a blockhouse still on the beach.

Unlike the Solomon islands where we had starved for so long, we had plenty of all necessary supplies this time. Even a new type of field rations had been developed. The old cans of C-rations, which nobody liked, had been replaced by K-rations, which came in a waxed box and provided one meal. Newest to appear were 10-in-1 rations. These came in a large cardboard box and contained a wide variety of canned and prepackaged foods. It was just about like shopping in a store. The name signified this box would feed ten men for one day,

or one man for ten days. Those of us in the pigpen made our main meal an early dinner. We would take turns with one man leaving work early while the other two of us covered for him. By the time work had ceased we could go home and have a hot dinner waiting for us.

We cooked by means of a high explosive called C-2. This compound came in one-pound blocks that were similar to a large bar of laundry soap. They were meant for demolition work but no one wasted them in that manner. A detonator would make them explode, but we would pinch off just a small piece and light it with a match, which would then burn with a white-hot flame. A piece no larger than a dime would heat a whole canteen cup of coffee.

One night while we were in the pigpen we were awakened by a lot of yelling and shooting. Two Japanese soldiers staged their own personal attack on us by shouting banzai, running into camp, and shooting wildly. One of the fellows on guard duty took care of them, but not until one had made it all the way to the rear of our pigpen.

We were told we would remain on Tinian and this would be our rest camp until we were built back up to strength. Two of us, and a driver, were sent out to explore Japanese supply dumps and see what we could find that

would be useful in building a camp. Along the northeast coast of the island were high cliffs that were just riddled with natural caves. We figured this would be a likely place to start looking.

We were correct in our assumption that this would be where the supplies had been stored. What we didn't know, however, was that when the line companies had swept through this area, they had by-passed the caves as they felt it too dangerous to secure them. We started by taking the normal precaution of throwing a couple of grenades in first, then jumping inside and spraying a few bullets around. As we found no Japanese, we disregarded this procedure and were soon racing from cave to cave to see who could find the best things.

This worked great for awhile as most of the by-passed Japanese had dutifully committed suicide, but after awhile we hit a cave where they had not been so thoughtful. We then went back to the hand grenades.

When our truck was fully loaded we returned to camp. Included in our loot were several cases of canned crab meat which was very tasteful, but our greatest find was a large case of black rubber raincoats. The only rain gear the Marine Corps issued was a poncho, which was a waterproof canvas square with a hole in the center from

which a person's head protruded. It did the job, but was universally despised. Rubber was in short supply in the U.S. inventory anyway, as the Japanese controlled almost all the world's rubber producing areas. Not only were the raincoats much appreciated, but I even used mine the first few years I was a police officer after the war.

Shortly after this trip we were sent back to the caves again. Intelligence wanted an assortment of all Japanese weapons, ammunition, and explosives we could find, which would be shipped back to the States for study. We took two trucks this time, filled them completely, and gingerly drove to the dock in Tinian Town where we loaded them aboard a ship. As we finished loading, the ship's baker came to the rail with several loaves of fresh bread and gave them to us. This was the first fresh bread we had seen in weeks and we could not have received a finer gift. The pigpen crew ate good that night.

As more equipment arrived, we set up our regular camp and moved from the pigpen into six-man pyramidal tents. During the war the Japanese had enslaved many Korean laborers to work for them and several thousand had been moved to Tinian. When we took the island, we also took the laborers, and every day I would be assigned anywhere up to a couple of dozen of them to assist in preparing our camp.

As we could not talk each other's language, I worked the hardest of all trying to explain what to do, such as one day when we were supposed to bundle up tent pegs in groups of a hundred. I had to first count them out slowly while they followed in Korean, then I would show how to tie them. Often, it seemed the job involved digging ditches. First, I would dig the ditch to the correct depth, while their whole group would stand and watch. Then I would take the shovel and draw a line on the ground showing where the ditch would go. They were good workers when they knew what they were supposed to do.

I picked one older fellow who seemed very intelligent and decided he should teach me how to communicate. All of them understood Japanese, and I felt that would be the most advantageous for me, rather than using Korean. I learned enough key words and phrases that in a few days I could simply sit in the shade and shout out commands.

Life settled into something of a routine, with our biggest problems being medical ones. Combat forces one to live in filthy conditions, which in turn brings about an interesting assortment of diseases. Solomon veterans were getting few in number and, with me still being the sole exception, all the rest kept having recurring attacks of malaria. Almost everyone had dysentery, dengue fever, and yellow jaundice. A combination of the latter two put

me in bed for several days and made me so sleepy I could barely be awakened long enough to eat.

After getting our camp in fairly good shape, we were told we were moving back to Saipan for the remainder of our time in the Mariana Islands. On October 24th, we did so.

When Joyce and I returned to the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands in 1995, we flew from Saipan to Tinian on a small plane of Pacific Island Air just for the day. While Saipan is booming, Tinian was just the opposite. Possession of most of the island has been retained by the U.S. military, and the civilian population is much smaller than it was during World War 2.

We rented a car and had a look at most of the places I had been familiar with. First, we drove to White Beach 1, which has now been named Chulu Beach. On the way we passed an old rusted amtrac still sitting by the side of the road. Next, we went to Ushi Field. Navy Seabees had gone to work on this airport as soon as we had captured it, and had built four runways capable of handling the new, long-range B-29 bomber. It is hard to believe, but in 1945 this was the busiest airport in the world, with a plane departing every 38 seconds. Now it is completely deserted.

Figure 63. Rusted out amtrac (amphibious tractor) remains abandoned near White Beach 1. This is like the one I came ashore in. Could it even be the same one?

It was at this airport on August 6, 1945, that the Enola Gay loaded the first atomic bomb, which was dropped later that day on Hiroshima. A few days later, Bock's Car loaded the second atom bomb here and dropped it on Nagasaki. At the time of those bombings, I had returned again to Saipan and was living about four miles from the loading site. This is designated a U.S. Historic Landmark and a monument has been erected at both atomic bomb pits. Joyce and I were the only visitors, although we did see a Japanese tour group drive by.

Next, we went to Tinian Town for lunch. Even its name has been changed and it is now called San Jose. We then visited Suicide Cliff where a number of Japanese, mostly civilian, had jumped to drown in the ocean. Not nearly as many jumped here as they did on Saipan, as word had reached a lot of the people that the Marines would treat them humanely, rather than as the Japanese government said. We even visited a now-deserted monument the Korean workers had built for themselves. I was unable to find the location of the pigpen, though, as there were no roads into that area.

11 Back to Saipan

We were not real enthusiastic about going back to Saipan, especially as this was supposedly our rest and recreation area. Our first rest area, New Zealand, had been so wonderful it spoiled us for anything else. Next was Hawaii, which we thought was pretty bad, especially where we were stationed. But Saipan - it had nothing to offer. That is rather amusing today since it has become a prime vacation destination.

I had grown rather tired of Headquarters and Service Company, so I requested a transfer back into a line company. On December 18, 1944, my request came through and I was transferred to K Company, Third Battalion, Eighth Regiment.

Our camp was located near Magicienne Bay, which did not even have a beach where we could swim. At least mail came through regularly these days, including Christmas packages from home. One of the most popular presents was fruit cake, and even though some of them arrived looking much the worse for wear, they tasted mighty good compared to the food the mess hall turned out.

Figure 64 (left). Len explores up these steps ...

Figure 65 (below) ... to a Shinto shrine at the top.

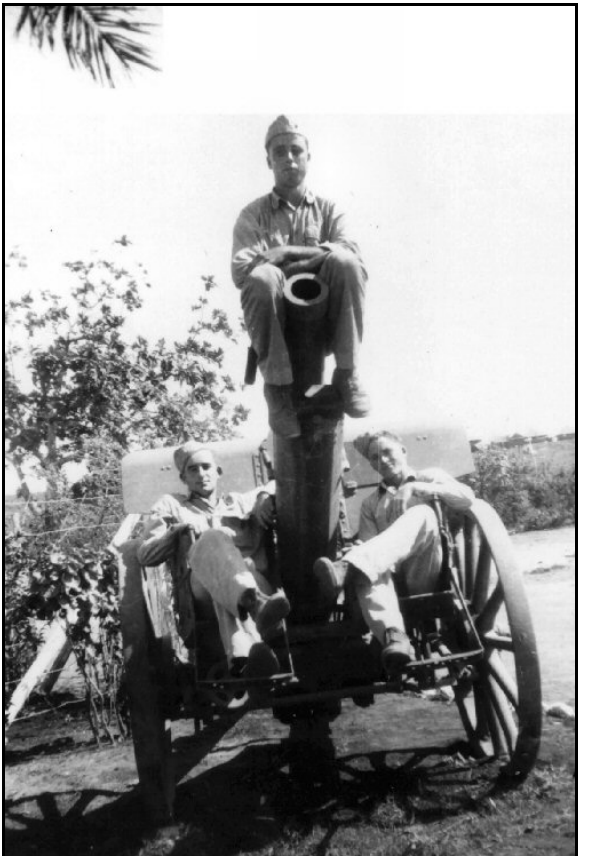
Figure 66. Meditating at the shrine.

One of the packages I received was from a girl I had gone to school with. Not only did it contain a fruit cake, but it also had a lot of other goodies in it. One of the items was a roll of 620 film, which certainly did me no good as we were not allowed to have cameras. Then I discovered that one of our newer recruits had arrived with a size 620 camera. No one had been made aware of this, so it had not yet been confiscated. I immediately borrowed his camera, and on my first day off I wandered around the island taking photos. When I had shot the whole roll, I went to the airport where there was a photo lab for

developing pictures taken from the B-29's. For a few Japanese souvenirs I got my roll developed and printed. These were the only pictures I was able to take during my entire time overseas.

Upon arrival in K Company I found they were delighted to have an experienced Marine, and I was immediately appointed an acting sergeant. Finally, I thought, I would get the promotion I had almost received over a year earlier. I remained acting sergeant for about two months during which time recruits gradually built up our strength. I knew when our company reached full strength my promotion would become effective. Our final recruits arrived, all nine of them, and all nine were sergeants! This was disappointing and was very unpopular with the men, who naturally wanted someone who had lived through three campaigns to tell them what to do in the next one. All nine of our new sergeants were fresh out of the States and not one had seen combat.

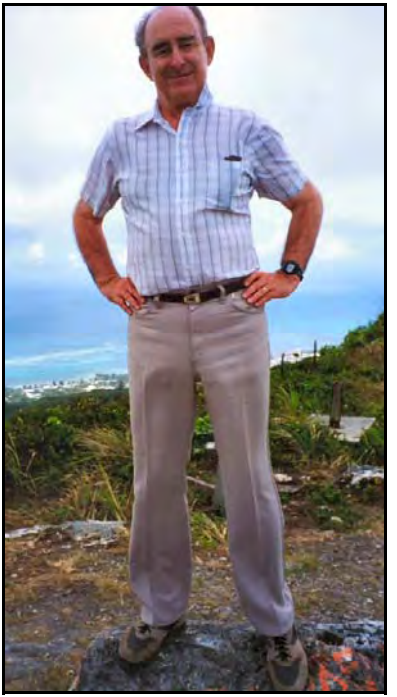
As mentioned earlier, recreation was minimal. We did have an outdoor theater which was built on a sloping hillside and had sandbags for seats. The movies were changed two or three times a week and we always saw all of them.



Figures 67, 68 (previous page) and 69. Len and two buddies play around some captured Japanese cannons.

About the only other entertainment we had was going to the airport. The B-29's were now flying regularly to bomb Japan, and while Saipan only had one runway, it was interesting to watch them take off. The runway ended at the edge of a cliff, which dropped about fifty feet to the ocean below. The planes were loaded to their maximum with bombs and fuel as it was still a long flight to Japan and back. Most planes were barely airborne when they reached the end of the runway, and many flew directly off the cliff. Usually, those that did this would settle down a little lower as they tried to build up air speed. All of the planes had to struggle to get airborne, and even the successful ones were probably not over a hundred feet high by the time they were five miles out. Once in awhile we would see a plane jettison its bombs to reduce weight and remain airborne. Sometimes even that didn't work and the plane would just gradually keep losing altitude until we would see a splash about ten miles offshore. Pickup boats were always kept in that area when the B-29's were being launched.

One day I met a pilot who flew a twin-engine C-47 on a mail run between Saipan, Tinian, and Guam, which by now was back in U.S. hands. Some work had just been done on his engines and he was going to make a short flight to be sure they were okay. He invited me to go along and I jumped at the chance, as the only time I had been up was for about ten minutes at an air show in



Figures 70 and 71. Fifty years separate the two photographs of Len taken on Mt. Tapotchau, Saipan.

Roseburg a few years earlier. It was just the pilot and his radioman-navigator, who rode in a seat at the rear of the cockpit. As there was no copilot, I got to sit in his seat.

We took off and climbed a couple thousand feet, then leveled off. The pilot asked if I had ever been up before, and not wanting to appear too inexperienced I said, "Sure." He then replied, "Take over." I took the wheel in both hands and placed my feet on the rudder pedals. I had always been interested in flying and had read books on the subject, which I was now trying hard to remember. At this time we were flying over Tinian and he said,"Let's see you take a turn around Tinian." He never asked if I knew how, but as I recalled from the books, I gave it left rudder and turned the wheel left at the same time, completed the turn as instructed, and leveled out again. His reply was, "Good job." With that he unbuckled his seat belt, got up and left, walking somewhere to the rear. I immediately started looking at the instruments as I knew I must be skidding, climbing, descending, or doing something I shouldn't. I never did find out as I couldn't locate all the gauges. I'm sure the pilot had not gone far, but it seemed like forever before he finally returned and took over. It was an experience I would not forget, and was so enjoyable that three years later I had my own pilot's license.

About this time I started having problems with my stomach. Marine Corps chow, although plentiful, was not the most tasty in the world, especially when cooked in field kitchens such as were used overseas. Even the thought of eating that greasy food got to where I was nauseous. Often, after eating I would simply lose it. I

went to sick bay, but they didn't really do anything for me. I became resigned to this problem and hoped it would go away, but it was only to get worse as time went by.

One day we were practicing out at the rifle range when a Zero came into view. This was very unusual as we had not seen a Japanese plane for several months. It came diving down out of the sky followed by three U.S. planes; a Lightning P-38, an F6F Hellcat, and a Corsair. It immediately became obvious that this was more of a battle between the branches of service than it was a fight between nations. The Lightning P-38 was flown only by the Army. The F6F Hellcat was a carrier based Navy plane, while the Corsair was flown only by the Marine Corps. Most likely none of the pilots had seen combat before and this was their first opportunity. The poor Zero did not have a chance.

It looked at first like the Army pilot was going to win as his plane was the fastest and he was in front. Unfortunately, he was too fast. He shot right past the Zero and had to pull up out of his dive to avoid crashing. The Hellcat and Corsair were both on the tail of the Zero and firing their guns. We couldn't tell who got him, but the Zero crashed right at the end of our range. I'm sure both pilots claimed victory, and no doubt each was given credit for a half kill.

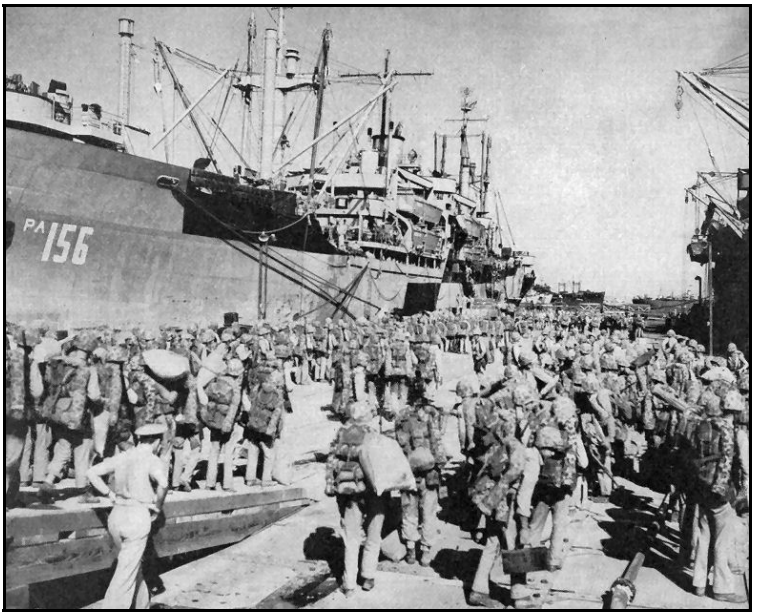


Figure 72. Second Division Marines boarding attack transports in Tanapag Harbor, bound for Okinawa. Marine Corps photo from Follow Me by Richard Johnston (1948).

Some of the elements of the Fourth Marine Division stopped in Tanapag Harbor on the way to another campaign. We overheard the general commanding the Division addressing his men. He informed them that where they were going it would be rough, but they should

consider themselves lucky as he also knew where those fellows were going, pointing at us, and stating that our destination would be rougher.

A few days later the Fourth landed at Iwo Jima, which turned out to be the bloodiest battle the Marine Corps had fought during the entire history of the Corps. That didn't sound like good news to us.

By the first of March 1945, we were packing up ready to go on the offensive again. On March 25th, we were trucked to Tanapag Harbor and I went aboard the USS Newberry. The USS Newberry was a Haskell Class Attack Transport (APA158) with a compliment of 56 officers and 480 enlisted personnel. After putting out to sea, we learned our destination would be Okinawa, Ryukyu Islands.

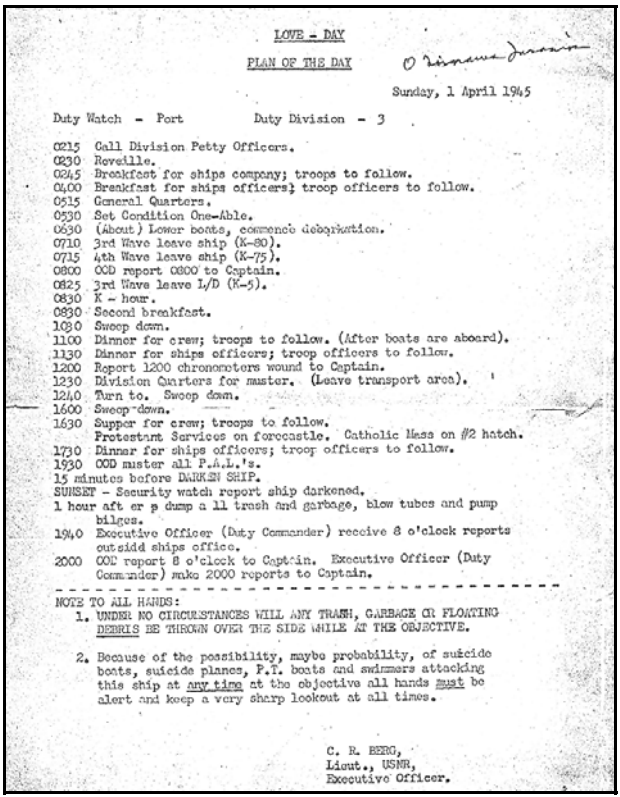
12 Okinawa

Okinawa is a fairly large island, seventy miles long and between three to fifteen miles wide. There were at least 75,000 Japanese troops stationed there. This was by far the largest operation in which I had participated. Six divisions were involved, including three Marine Divisions and three Army Divisions, plus a large number of attached units.

We arrived off the island on the first day of April. The Second Marine Division had been placed in reserve. As usual, the Navy was bombarding enemy installations and had been for several days.

Just as first light was breaking, I went topside to see what was going on. This I should not have done, as we were at general quarters and my position was below deck. Somehow I had not heard the call to general quarters and I was curious as to why not as this was always standard procedure in a combat zone. In this instance, my mistake may have saved our ship.

I opened the hatch and stepped out on deck just in time to see a kamikaze plane diving on our ship. Not only was the plane almost there, but it was lined up exactly on me.



LOVE - DAY

PLAN OF THE DAY

Sunday, 1 April 1945

Duty Watch - Port Duty Division - 3

0215 Call Division Petty Officers.
0230 Reveille.
0245 Breakfast for ships company; troops to follow.
0400 Breakfast for ships officers; troop officers to follow.
0515 General Quarters.
0530 Set Condition One-Able.
0630 (About) Lower boats, commence debarkation.
0710 3rd Wave leave ship (K-80).
0715 4th Wave leave ship (K-75).
0800 OOD report 0800 to Captain.
0825 3rd Wave leave L/D (K-5).
0830 K - hour.
0830 Second breakfast.
1080 Sweep down.
1100 Dinner for crew; troops to follow. (After boats are aboard).
1130 Dinner for ships officers; troop officers to follow.
1200 Report 1200 chronometers wound to Captain.
1230 Division Quarters for muster. (Leave transport area).
1240 Turn to. Sweep down.
1600 Sweep down.
1630 Supper for crew; troops to follow.
Protestant Services on forecastle. Catholic Mass on #2 hatch.
1730 Dinner for ships officers; troop officers to follow.
1930 OOD muster all P.A.L.'s.
15 minutes before DARKEN SHIP.
SUNSET - Security watch report ship darkened.
1 hour aft er p dump a ll trash and garbage, blow tubes and pump bilges.
1940 Executive Officer (Duty Commander) receive 8 o'clock reports outsidd ships office.
2000 OOD report 8 o'clock to Captain. Executive Officer (Duty Commander) make 2000 reports to Captain.

NOTE TO ALL HANDS:

1. UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES WILL ANY TRASH, GARBAGE OR FLOATING DEBRIS BE THROWN OVER THE SIDE WHILE AT THE OBJECTIVE.

2. Because of the possibility, maybe probability, of suicide boats, suicide planes, F.T. boats and swimmers attacking this ship at any time at the objective all hands must be alert and keep a very sharp lookout at all times.

C. R. BERG,
Lieut., USNR,
Executive Officer.

Figure 73. Love Day "Plan of the Day" for the USS Newberry. From the phonetic alphabet, in which "L" becomes Love." Plan through the courtesy of Dr. Jack Runninger, one of the ship's officers at the time of the initial assault.

I had no time to run, but sweeping my right arm wide I gave the pilot a wave-off. It worked! He pulled up and flew past just barely overhead, leaning over to look at me as he did so. He flew right through some of our rigging and was so low I could clearly see his face and our eyes made contact in that brief period. He then shoved his plane over and went into the side of another ship about half a mile away, causing a tremendous explosion.

The kamikaze was Japan's newest weapon. Everything was stripped from the plane that was not absolutely necessary and the plane was loaded with high explosives and enough gasoline for a one-way trip.

The pilots were inexperienced with just enough training to be able to take off, find their target, and dive into it. They were very accurate and deadly, and as we were only 300 miles from Japan it was easy to reach us.

I have often wondered why my wave-off was successful, and I think it was just because it was such a surprise to the pilot that he reacted before he had a chance to think. A similar situation would be if you were driving down the street and someone suddenly stepped in front of your car. You would automatically jerk the steering wheel to the side before even realizing that you had done so. The pilot had picked a blank side of the superstructure to line up

Figure 74. The USS Newberry, the ship that was spared from the Kamikaze attack. The photo was provided by Harold Jacobs who reports that the ship survived until 1983 in the James River fleet in Virginia when it was finally scrapped.

on, then just before impact a person was suddenly there. It was all just a matter of timing. The little ivory elephant had proven its worth again.

There are a couple of interesting sequels to this story. Years later, on the twenty-first anniversary of Pearl Harbor, a group of fellow police officers was telling war stories and I related that one. One of the police officers present, James Corey, exploded. It turned out that he was a gunner on the

ship that was hit. Corey stated they saw the kamikaze diving on our ship, then unexplainably pull up and go into theirs, which was the USS Telfair. He had never known before why the pilot had suddenly changed his mind. Their ship was severely damaged, but did not sink. Corey had some pictures showing the damage which I found interesting to look at, being as I had helped cause it. Both Salem papers heard of the story and each ran a good-sized article about the incident, complete with pictures.

The next I heard about the USS Newberry was many more years later in January 2004, when I received e-mails from two of her former crew members who had found my story. One, David E. Beneze, stated he was a QM3C at the time and was stationed in the secondary Conn, which was on the poop deck aft of the bridge and just short of the stern. He said they saw the plane coming in and thought they would be hit, and in fact had passed that information on to the men who were in the after-steering engine room. He had never known why the plane had pulled up at that last second until reading my story.

A full two years later I received a follow-up on that information in the form of an e-mail from Harold Jacobs of Juneau, Alaska. He stated his father, who lived in Sitka, had also been a QM3C on the USS Newberry and had been stationed in the aft-steering room at that time. His father

had read my story and said that when they received word that a Kamikaze was going to strike their ship all of the crew had fled the room, but he had stayed at his post. He told them he was going to put them on report for their action but did not follow through. Unfortunately his father could not elaborate on this as he had passed away a little over a year before the son wrote to me.

Other e-mails were from Dr. Jack Runninger in Rome, Georgia. Jack was the Combat Information Officer and was stationed in the radar shack. As they had no outside view, he was unaware of the close call at the time. But as he said in an e-mail. "Thanks for probably saving my life," as the radar shack was by the bridge and just over my head, about where the plane would have hit.

The Newberry had been named for Newberry County in South Carolina and Jack had written an article for that county's local newspaper telling the wartime history of the ship. In it, he had mentioned my description of the wave-off and kindly sent me a copy of the article along with other interesting material.

In subsequent correspondence with Jack he sent me more information. He is a retired optometrist and award-winning state humor columnist. He sent me a copy of one of his published columns titled "I've never met my best friend," in

which he relates my story of the kamikaze wave off and credits me with probably saving his life.

Although we were in reserve on D-day, it did not mean we had the day off. The main landing was on the west coast of Okinawa, so our transports went around to the southeast coast and conducted fake landings in an attempt to confuse the Japanese. Once again, it did not pay to be in reserve. Several of our ships were hit by kamikaze planes and the Division suffered several killed and wounded. In contrast, the real landings were unopposed and the assault troops had no casualties.

On D+l, we made some more fake landings, while ashore the combat teams were still moving forward without making contact with any enemy troops. Because of the heavy damage being inflicted by the kamikaze planes, the decision was made to move our convoy away from the island. For about a week we just cruised around in the East China Sea. Meanwhile, as things were still going smoothly on Okinawa, we were ordered to return to Saipan rather than remain exposed in such a vulnerable location. On April 16th, we docked again at Tanapag Harbor.

Shortly after moving back into our old camp things started getting bad on Okinawa, which was beginning to

turn into a brutal campaign. Most of the smaller islands in the Ryukyu chain were still in Japanese hands and we were asked to take them. As these islands were rather small, only the Eighth Regiment would be sent and the other three Regiments would remain on Saipan.

On May 16th, I boarded an LST (landing ship, tank), and put back to sea. An LST was a shallow draft ship which could come fairly close to shore. A ramp could be dropped in the ship's bow and tanks could be driven directly out of the hull. In our case we were carrying amtracs, so we would board them right aboard ship, drive out of the front ramp, and disembark on dry land. During the course of the war great progress had been made in the method of getting assault troops onto the beach.

On June 3rd, the 3rd Battalion went ashore on Iheya Shima. We were warned to expect heavy opposition. Two amtracs brought our platoon ashore, landing about seventy-five feet apart, then moving up onto the beach a short distance. Before we could go over the side, however, one of our own planes strafing the beach hit our other amtrac. Two men were killed and our platoon leader lost a leg. The rest of us started moving forward.

Figure 75. An LVT-4, loaded with Marines of the 8th Regiment, launches in June of 1945 from the bow of a tank landing ship and heads for the beach at Iheya Shima, 15 miles northwest of Okinawa. From The Marines, by the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation.

I was carrying a BAR (Browning automatic rifle), and I fired a short burst to be sure it was working properly. Those were the only shots I fired on Iheya Shima. We advanced all day without making contact and dug in for

the night. We were then informed that all of the Japanese troops had been moved to Okinawa prior to the initial landings. Talk about good news!

Iheya Shima was really quite a beautiful island, especially as no one was shooting at us. The civilians were actually friendly. We soon learned to avoid walking through buildings with thatched roofs, though, as fleas by the hundreds would drop off the thatch onto us.

We were on the island for over a week and a half, and it was quite enjoyable. One day, a friend and I were just exploring and we found a trail that led back into the mountains. The trail went through a narrow cleft in the hills, then opened into a hidden valley that was completely unexpected. It was most attractive. There were two farm houses located in the valley and they had their own rice paddies. Once again, I wished I had a camera.

On the 15th of June we went back aboard the LST bound for Okinawa. The following day we landed across the bay from Naha, the capital city, and immediately moved up to the front.

By the 18th of June we were crossing a mountainous area bound for the east coast. There were a few trees and some brush, but mostly the area was quite open. We kept coming under sporadic artillery, mortar, machine gun, and rifle fire. We were following a trail and had just stopped for a break. I was thinking this was not a very good place to be when I saw a small contingent of men walking up the trail toward me. As they passed, I could see the man in the lead had three stars on each shoulder and on his shirt collar. This was Lieutenant General Simon B. Buckner, Commander of the U.S. Tenth Army. To say I was amazed would be putting it mildly. In the first place, I had never seen a high ranking officer on the front lines. Secondly, I had never seen as high a ranking officer as a Lieutenant General in my life. Thirdly, officers never wore their insignia in a combat zone. I recognized two of the other officers who were with General Buckner. They were Colonel Clarence R. Wallace, Regimental Commander of the 8th Marines, and our Battalion Commander, Lt. Colonel Paul E. Wallace, an old-time "China" Marine. Many of the Marines who served prior to the United States entering World War 2 had been stationed in China, and those who could claim that distinction were always respected above all others.

I remained seated by the trail and watched with fascination as this group of five or six people walked past

Figure 76. Lt. General Simon Buckner (right) was killed by artillery fire shortly after he entered this Marine observation post on Okinawa. Also shown in the picture are Colonel Clarence R. Wallace (center) and Major William Chamberlain (left). From Follow Me, by Richard W. Johnston.

me and continued about a hundred yards. I was still watching when a Japanese antitank shell landed right among them. In just another few moments General

Figure 77. This memorial on Okinawa near Naha now sits at the site of Buckner's death.

Buckner came by me again, only this time he was lying on a stretcher. Some reports say he was still alive upon reaching the aid station and died on the operating table, but he sure looked dead and unresponsive to me as he was carried by. General Buckner was the highest ranking U.S. officer killed by direct enemy action, on any front, during the entire war. Ironically, our regiment reached the east coast the next day, which completed the capture of Okinawa. Not only did the next day complete the Okinawa campaign, but this was also the last campaign

of the war as there was no further ground action before Japan surrendered. For all practical purposes, you could say the General was killed just one day before the war ended. Incidentally, after the General was carried out, I began worrying once more.

An interesting comment needs to be added here. In February 2005, I received an e-mail from Paul S. Wallace of Arden Hills, Minnesota. He stated he had read my story with great interest as his dad was the Lt. Colonel Paul E. Wallace to whom I had referred. His father had passed away in 1987 after a distinguished career in which he had risen to the rank of Brigadier General. He added that his dad never talked about his wartime experiences except for the story about General Buckner. He had thought they were stupid for standing in the open and had just started leaving when the mortar round landed. Fortunately he had not been injured.

Paul Wallace (the son) had grown up on Marine Corps bases and had many interesting stories to tell. He thought it was unique that both the regimental and battalion commanders at this time had been a Colonel Wallace. He said that in the regiment they were known as Big Wallace and Lil Wallace. Of course to me, a low-ranking PFC, both men were considered big! Paul added that on December 7, 1941, his father was commanding officer of the Marine Detachment on the USS Pensacola, which happened to be

at sea on that fateful day. The son and his mother, however, who worked for Naval Intelligence, were both at the Submarine Base, Fleet Headquarters, Pearl Harbor, and had a first-hand introduction to the event that drew the U.S. into World War 2. Because of his familiarity with the Marine Corps, Paul asked my permission to print a copy of my story and place it in the Marine Corps Museum at Quantico, Virginia. Of course, I agreed to that honor!

My stomach started bothering me again and I checked into the aid station to see if they had something I could take. To my great surprise, the doctor ordered me to be evacuated. I was taken to Naha and went aboard the hospital ship, USS Relief.

Never was a transformation so complete. I was given a very comfortable bed that had a real mattress on it and even included white sheets. I could hardly imagine such luxury. Not only did my quarters have air conditioning, but it also came equipped with Navy nurses. I added up all my benefits. In all my prior seagoing experience I had either slept on the steel deck or else had canvas bunks, which sometimes were as many as six high, and always located in congested, hot and smelly quarters. I had not even seen sheets and mattresses since leaving the States, and I had forgotten when I had last talked to a woman. The nurses not only looked nice, they even smelled nice. I could hardly wait until I had a shave and a shower as I

knew I reeked. My uniform was discarded, burned no doubt, and I was given pajamas and a bathrobe to wear. Soon after, we sailed again for Saipan.

There was only one fearful aspect of the trip. The Geneva Convention prohibited firing at hospitals or hospital ships, but this provision was not always honored. In accordance with the Convention, the Relief was painted all white with a large red cross on the superstructure. At night all of the ship's lights were left on and floodlights illuminated the big red cross. We did not zigzag, but sailed in a straight line. After having sailed thousands of miles under wartime security, this blatant disregard of everything that had been drilled into me was rather frightening. Nothing happened, however, on our way to Saipan. If any Japanese submarines saw us they honored the Convention. I could not help often standing up on deck, though, looking for telltale streaks of a torpedo.

13 Aftermath of War

On Saipan I was sent to the hospital where I received a thorough examination. The doctor said there was nothing significantly wrong with me, that I had just been pushed too hard for too long, especially since the diseases I had contracted on Tinian. He prescribed rest and good food.

I sure couldn't complain about my treatment. I never left the ward I was in and spent most of my time just lying in bed. A nurse brought me a tray of tasty food three times a day, plus there were snacks available whenever I desired them. When one of the nurses learned of my interest in painting, she located a set of watercolors from somewhere and gave them to me.

I had set something of a record. In August 1942, I was in the Second Marine Regiment, Second Marine Division, which was credited with being the first U.S. unit to land on enemy soil in World War 2. In June 1945, I was in the Eighth Marine Regiment, Second Marine Division, which made the last great infantry drive of the war, effectively ending all land confrontation. As a result I had fought in both the first and last land battles the United States conducted in World War 2.

During the war the Second Marine Division had received 12,395 casualties, or over 150 percent of its total strength. Replacements account for that seemingly impossible figure. While I had been hit my first day in combat, I had not received an injury since.

I spent all of the month of August in the hospital and was told I would soon be going home. On August 6, 1945, the Enola Gay loaded the first atomic bomb on nearby Tinian and dropped it on Hiroshima. On August 14th, Japan surrendered. I had just received double A priority to fly home, but prisoners of war now being released in Japan were given a triple A priority. I knew they deserved this, but I couldn't help but be selfish enough to wonder why, after four years, the war couldn't have lasted two more days so I would have been on my way stateside. As it was, it was not until September 3rd that my little ivory elephant and I boarded a ship bound for the States.

We sailed through the Marshall and Hawaiian Islands, but never stopped until reaching Long Beach, California. At the same time I was going home, the Second Division was en route to Nagasaki, the second city to be A-bombed. Although I did not know it at the time, the Second was scheduled to land on the beaches of Kyushu and assault Nagasaki had not the atomic bombs brought about the end of the war. As it was, the Division landed as an occupying force. In recent years there has been

considerable controversy over whether the atomic bombs should have been used. I can assure you there was no such controversy among the men of the Second Marine Division.

On September 17th, I landed at Long Beach, California, and was transferred to the Naval Hospital there. A few days later I was sent to the Marine Base in San Diego for discharge.

The discharge process took about two days and then the unit fell in to receive our papers. The names were called out, and one by one we went forward, received the discharge, and left the room. At the end, I was the only one remaining. The officer in charge asked who I was and I told him. He checked his papers again and informed me I was not listed. The Marine Corps had lost my record book!

As the war was over and most of the men in the Armed Services had just joined for the duration, we were being discharged on a point system. One received points for length of service, additional ones for overseas duty, more for having been in combat, more if injured, and so on. The number of points necessary for discharge had been lowered to fifty. I had about one hundred and thirty

points, but could not prove a thing. I was afraid I might become a career Marine before things were cleared up.

A skeleton record book was kept in Washington D.C., and being as my regular one could not be found, this one was sent for. In the meantime I was assigned to work in the Separation Center.

For the next month I helped discharge Marines that I considered almost as recruits until finally my skeleton record book arrived. I was finally discharged on November 23rd. My last meal in the Marine Corps was Thanksgiving dinner, which I felt was very appropriate.

I took my time coming home, staying for awhile with my old Solomon Islands buddy, Jim McCrory, and his family, in Lemoore, California. I arrived in Salem, where my folks now lived, on December 5, 1945.

A short time later I was pleasantly surprised to receive a commendation for meritorious performance while serving on Guadalcanal, Saipan, Tinian, and Okinawa. The citation was personally signed by Roy S. Geiger, Lieutenant General, Commander of the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific Area. I guess my record book must finally have been located.

Several times during this narration, I have mentioned being contacted by someone who had found my story on the Internet and corresponded with me. Some of these people were those I had served with, while others were strangers who are historians compiling wartime information; still others were authors writing books on the subject, and even from those individuals leading groups to scenes described herein. While inquiries have come from all over the world, they have been especially prevalent from persons in Australia and New Zealand. I consider myself privileged to be asked and have tried to help if I could. One of the more recent inquiries was from Alex Leithead, a researcher from Flashback TV, a company located in London, England. That organization was in the process of producing a series of television programs for the U.S. History Channel. He was especially interested in my experiences on Saipan, Tinian, and Okinawa, interviewing me over the telephone about those campaigns. All of these contacts have been an unexpected bonus I never anticipated when I wrote about my remembrances.

14 Epilogue

Throughout this story I have referred to Joyce, so this would be a good time to explain just who she is. Many of you reading this know her. Those of you who don't have no doubt deduced by now that she is my wife. A bit more information, however, should be included.

Joyce is also a native Oregonian, having grown up near Oakland. Women were just as patriotic as men were and she also wanted to help in the war effort. The Armed Services had just opened their doors to women, but, unlike men, the minimum age to join was twenty. Joyce turned twenty in June 1943, and the following month got up enough courage to join the Marine Corps, being sworn in July 30th.

She was placed on home standby until being activated on September 17th, when she and eleven other young women from the Northwest were sent by train to Boot Camp at Camp Lejeune, New River, North Carolina.

Boot Camp lasted from September 22nd to November lst. Upon graduation, just as I, her first assignment was to mess duty and she was transferred to Henderson Hall, Arlington, Virginia. Her mess duty was only two weeks'

Figure 76. The future Mrs. Skinner, but then known as Joyce Elinor Thornton.

duration, then she was instructed to report to the new women's barracks at the Marine Base in Quantico, Virginia. She was one of the first women to be stationed at this major East Coast base. She was assigned as a stenographer at the Post Auditor's office for the full period of her enlistment.

Joyce not only performed a necessary function, releasing a man for combat duty, but also she had the opportunity to meet a host of what she describes as "wonderful girls from all parts of the United States." Some of those people she still remains in contact with. She also had the opportunity to explore nearby Washington, D.C., and visit historic sites in the area, which she found enjoyable as well as educational.

In one aspect she beat me as she was successful in being promoted to sergeant. On V-J Day (Victory over Japan), she and a group of other women marines celebrated at the NCO club. Everyone knew they would soon be discharged and were making plans for civilian life, including passing around pictures of boy friends they were planning to marry. Joyce had my picture and passed it around stating this was the man she was going to marry. Remember, we had not even met yet. I thought

Figure 77. This is the barracks where Joyce used to live. It was brand new at that time, but upon our visit in 1993 it had been condemned.

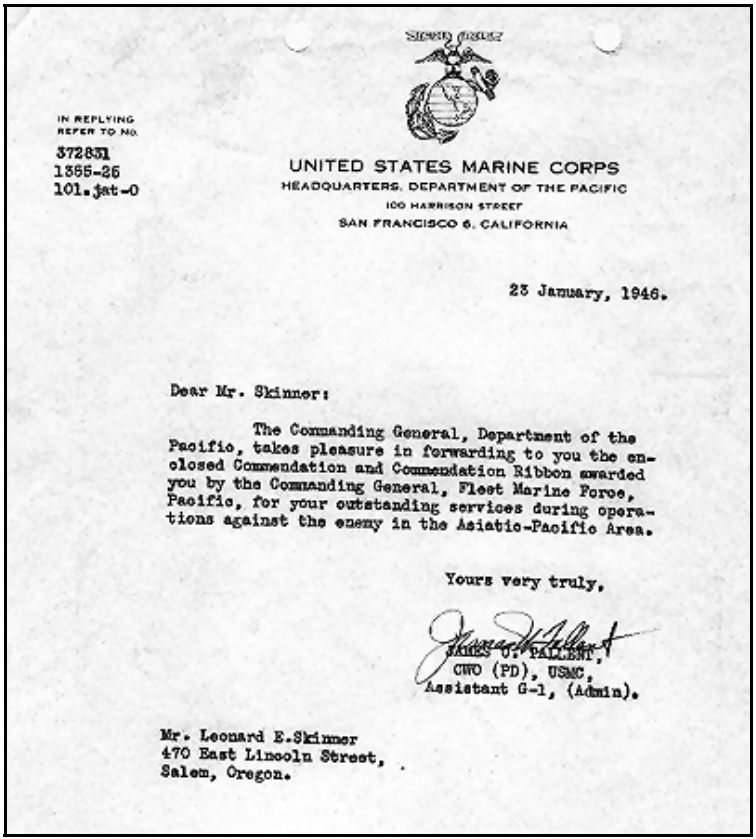
we were just pen pals! In December she was transferred to the Marine Base at San Diego for discharge. She was luckier than I, and the Separation Company had her record book so she was discharged December 20, 1945. One additional coincidence. The lieutenant who signed her discharge papers was the same one who had signed mine. She arrived home just in time for a Merry Christmas with her family.

We met for the first time a week later on New Year's Day, 1946. Her prediction was correct and we were married on August 25th of that year. Not only have we revisited most of the places where I was stationed during the war, but in 1993 we also went to Quantico. Some of the older buildings were familiar to Joyce, such as the one she had worked in. Her mess hall was still in use, but the brand new barracks she lived in now stands empty. It was posted as condemned and was scheduled for destruction. From the front of her old barracks the view of the Potomac River was still beautiful.

One last coincidence for my story. The FBI Academy is located on the grounds at the Quantico Marine Base. While I had never been to Quantico as a Marine, because of my law enforcement career I have been to the FBI Academy on three occasions, the last time as an instructor. I was able to show this complex to Joyce as it was built after the war years.

In 1996, we celebrated our 50th Wedding Anniversary by spending two weeks in Hawaii. We were joined in this by our son, daughter-in-law, grandson and other family members. We spent the entire time on the Island of Kauai, so we were unable to visit my old camp site which is on the Big Island. However, I did take the little ivory elephant along to ensure an unscathed journey and a safe return home.

The End



IN REPLYING
REFER TO NO.
372831
1355-26
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UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
HEADQUARTERS, DEPARTMENT OF THE PACIFIC
100 HARRISON STREET
SAN FRANCISCO 6, CALIFORNIA

23 January, 1946.

Dear Mr. Skinner:

The Commanding General, Department of the Pacific, takes pleasure in forwarding to you the enclosed Commendation and Commendation Ribbon awarded you by the Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, for your outstanding services during operations against the enemy in the Asiatic-Pacific Area.

Yours very truly,

JAMES O. FALLERT,
CWO (PD), USMC,
Assistant G-1, (Admin).

Mr. Leonard E.Skinner
470 East Lincoln Street,
Salem, Oregon.

REFER TO NO.

NH56/P15/MM/CNS/dld
Serial-M

U. S. NAVAL HOSPITAL
LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

22 September 1945

From: The Medical Officer in Command
To: SKINNER, Leonard E. PFC, 372831, USMCR.

Subj: Purple Heart Medal - Award of.

Ref: (a) AlNav. 79 of 28 April 1945.
(b) AlNav. 170 of 26 July 1945.

1. In the name of the President of the United States, and by direction of the Secretary of the Navy the Purple Heart Medal is hereby awarded by the Medical Officer in Command, U. S. Naval Hospital, Long Beach, California to:

LEONARD E. SKINNER
PRIVATE FIRST CLASS, U. S. MARINE CORPS RESERVE

for wounds received in action against an organized enemy in the battle of Gavutu Island, Tulagi Area on 8 August 1942.

2. Delivered with appreciation of your services.

C. N. SHAAR
Captain (MC) USN

Encl.(HM)
1. One (1) Purple Heart Medal

cc:
CMC (2)
Headquarters Dept. of the Pacific, San Francisco, California.
Jacket
File

IN REPLYING
REFER TO NO.

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
HEADQUARTERS,
FLEET MARINE FORCE, PACIFIC,
C/O FLEET POST OFFICE, SAN FRANCISCO.

The Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, takes pleasure in COMMENDING

PRIVATE FIRST CLASS LEONARD E. SKINNER,
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS RESERVE

for service as set forth in the following

CITATION

"For meritorious and efficient performance of duty while serving in a Marine rifle platoon during operations against the enemy on GUADALCANAL, BRITISH SOLOMON ISLANDS, on SAIPAN and TINIAN, MARIANAS ISLANDS, and on OKINAWA SHIMA, RYUKYU ISLANDS, from 16 September, 1942, to 1 September, 1945. During this period, while serving as an automatic rifleman on GUADALCANAL, and as a rifleman on SAIPAN, TINIAN, and OKINAWA, Private First Class SKINNER was at all times cool, capable and efficient in the performance of his duties. Often under fire and always under the most trying conditions, he exhibited those qualities of loyalty, courage and determination that contribute so much to the effectiveness of a fighting force. Through his untiring efforts he aided materially in the successes of his organization in defeating the enemy. His conduct throughout was in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

ROY S. GEIGER,
Lieutenant General,
U. S. Marine Corps.

Commendation Ribbon Authorized

Above: Purple Heart Medal.

Above right: World War II Victory Medal.

Right: American Campaign Theater Medal.

Asiatic Pacific Campaign Theater Medal (with four battle stars).

Navy Marine Corps Commendation Medal.

About the Author

Leonard Skinner is now retired and living in Corvallis, Oregon. After his discharge from the Marines in 1945, he began a long career in law enforcement with the Salem, Oregon, Police Department. Leaving as a lieutenant after 25 years of service, he then moved to the Oregon Board on Police Standards and Training for an additional 13

years as Chief of Management and Research. Following their retirement in 1984, Leonard and Joyce have traveled widely, visiting many of the locations described in One Man's View.

You can now read more about Leonard's experiences in the Pacific in Bruce Petty's 2008 book, *New Zealand in the Pacific War: Personal Accounts of World War II,* and in *Follow Me Back in Time*, by Joan Ellis (2009). For more information about these books, see the *One Man's View* website.