Ei Kie MaLingy!

1942
1943
1944
1945

A World War II Marine
writes of his memories
from those years —

BERNARD LEE
Riggs

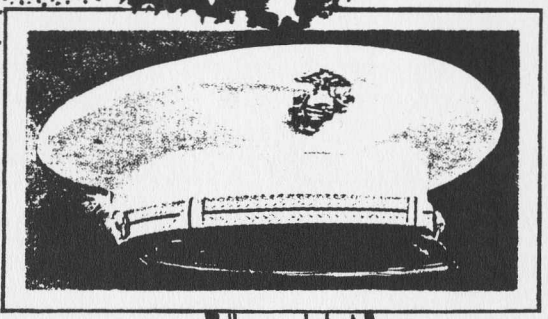
AFC2001/001/57741 (MS01)

AT YOUR BOOK STORE NOW!

There's something ABOUT A MARINE

"Like no other book on the subject... it makes you want to grab your canteen and get going!"

—Col. Henry P. Crowe
USMC (Ret)



By John Russell Day

AUTHOR OF
"THAT'S WHAT I LIKE ABOUT THE SOUTH"

EI KIE MALINGY

A STORY

ABOUT A LEGENDARY

COMBAT INTELLIGENCE SECTION
Headquarters Company
2nd Battalion 8th Marines
2nd Marine Division FMF

By

BERNARD LEE RIGGS

1995

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D E D I C A T I O N

This story is dedicated to my wife. Marie, married me during "War Time", knowing that I might never return, or that I could return maimed in body, or in mind. She is also responsible for much of the data provided in this story. Her dedication and effort by keeping a scrapbook of newspaper clippings, pictures, letters, cartoons and etc. , provided me with a source of documentation during the writing of this story.

Also, to my son Jeffrey, my daughter Janice, and their children. This, will be my legacy to them, in order that they may have a better understanding of a part of history and a means to evaluate and appreciate their heritage. I also dedicate this to the brave young men, and officers with whom I served, and lived with while fighting the war against Japan, on the many different islands, in the Pacific. From basic training, through combat, the occupation of Japan, and then home. This is their story, as well as mine, told in my words as I saw and remember events, during this period in history.

IN MEMORY OF A STORY BOOK MARINE - JOHN RUSSELL DAY

During the final preparation of this book for the printer, I was deeply saddened to hear of the passing of a dear mentor and friend. Lieutenant Colonel John Russell Day passed away at his home in Metairie, Louisiana August 4, 1995, at the age of Eighty One.

He studied to become an accountant, then joined a Marine Reserve Unit. From a recruit he went through the enlisted ranks, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel after serving thirty-five years in his beloved Marine Corps. He married Anna Hall before the start of World War II.

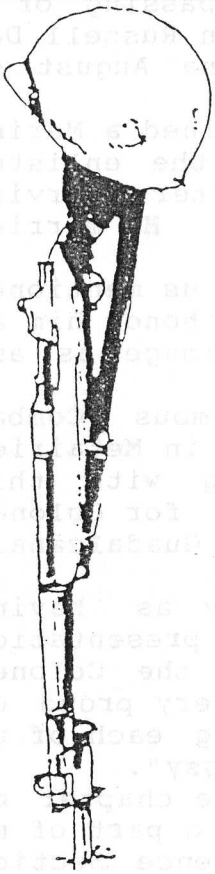
He was liked, loved, respected and those of us mentioned in this story that served under his command, honor him as being the closest to a "STORY BOOK MARINE" image as any Marine that ever served the Corps.

In May, 1992 we, the survivors of his famous Combat Intelligence Section held a 50th year reunion in Metairie, LA. for the purpose of seeing and visiting with this legendary figure, who was the "eyes and ears" for Colonel Henry Pierson "Jim" Crowe during assaults at Guadalcanal, Tarawa and Saipan.

The inside cover depicts Colonel John Day as having written a book. This was a "make-believe" art presentation which Harlan C. Radtke made and presented to the Colonel during our 50th year reunion with him. He was very proud of this presentation, and of our visit, remembering each of us by our full names. YES, he addressed me as "Riggsy".

John Russell Day enters my story during the chapter of NEW ZEALAND on page 28. This was when he became a part of my life. He created a Legendary Combat Intelligence Section that made history, as no other has ever achieved the accomplishments that are described in this following story.

WE SHALL NEVER FORGET - WE WILL MISS YOU JOHN RUSSELL DAY.



In Memory

OF

THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR LAST FULL MEASURE OF DEVOTION, MAY GOD REST THEIR SOULS IN ETERNAL PEACE.

CHARLES R. LINDAHL
PFC. LYSINGER ***
JACK M. FREEMAN
JOSEPH J. RUTKOWSKI
OLE C. WIBHOLM, JR.

Charles R Lindahl
Jack M. Freeman
Joseph J. Rutkowski
Ole C Wibholm, Jr.

THOSE LISTED ABOVE WERE BELOVED MEMBERS OF THE COMBAT INTELLIGENCE SECTION OF THE SECOND BATTALION - EIGHTH MARINE REGIMENT - SECOND MARINE DIVISION - FMF
THEY WERE KILLED IN COMBAT, DEFENDING THEIR COUNTRY AGAINST A HOSTILE ENEMY, DURING WORLD WAR II. THEY SHALL ALWAYS BE REMEMBERED BY THOSE OF US WHO FOUGHT WITH THEM, IN BATTLE.

THESE FRIENDS WHO DIED, FIRST WENT THROUGH THE FIRE OF HELL BEFORE PASSING THROUGH THE GOLDEN GATE OF HEAVEN.

*** PRIVATE FIRST CLASS LYSINGER JOINED US DURING BATTLE, AND WAS KILLED SOON, THEREAFTER. I HAVE NO RECORD OF HIS FIRST NAME OR HOME TOWN.

Semper Fidelis

F O R E W O R D

For over fifty years, I have felt that there was a story to be told, or written about my participation during World War II, and more importantly that recognition be acknowledged and given to a very select group of men. Research, which I have pursued, indicates that no other Marine Corps, Combat Intelligence Section has ever achieved, or surpassed the number of assaults, landings and battles against the enemy, during war time, than those achieved by this legendary group, of approximately fifteen to thirty men, who served within the Headquarters Company, Second Battalion, Eighth Marine Regiment of the Second Marine Division.

This story, while written to cover events that happened to me during my military service, is to be considered fiction. The reason for this classification is for the purpose of attempting to avoid any embarrassment to any individual, family, service group or government. Where possible, I have tried to include the humorous and the good things that occurred from day to day, that kept sanity and made another day bearable. Bad events are also included, as the good and bad are and were a part of a marines daily life. Names, used to describe some individuals, are fictitious, however, geographic names are accurate, as my memory and research are capable.

A man that has been in the extreme heat of a war, will tell you that it is a place that could be compared as being just the opposite of the place that has been described, to us, as Heaven. To survive, or not, is made by a higher authority, and we as individuals have little or no control. It would be untrue if I said that men in battle are not scared. They are frightened and scared, however, they also know that once involved, there is no turning back, and given an assignment, they will make every effort to complete that task. After the first battle with the enemy, a young Marine can be classified as a veteran, if he survives. Each battle thereafter, makes him a more seasoned and respectful Marine, both to the Marine Corps, and also to the comrades with which he serves.

Whether it is for several months, or years that men are together in battle, a bond of friendship, and respect is established, that they will carry with them through out their lives. A Marine, who has tasted the "Hell" of battle, and returns to re-establish himself in civilian life, is more likely to survive, and maintain an attitude of respect for himself, and others whom he has contact. I shall always believe that it was the "SEMPER FIDELIS" attitude, and pride in the Corps, that has made us; "Once A Marine, Always A Marine".

Fifty Years Ago

World War II

United States Marine Corps

HONORS AWARDED

PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION (TARAWA)

QUINTON R. ADAMS
JOHN R. BERGDOLL
KENNETH W. CLARK
STACY C. DAVIS
JOHN R. DAY
N.O. FORT
ED GRANT
RICHARD W. HUTCHENSON
JOHN E. KOHNLE
JAMES D. NIX
WARREN JACK O'BRIEN
ARDEN O. OSTROWSKI
HARLAN C. RADTKE
BERNARD L. RIGGS
JOSEPH J. RUTKOWSKI
MARVIN H. SHEPPARD
RAYMOND H. SIMON
JEROME "JERRY" TUCKNER
OLE C. WIBHOLM, JR.
ROLAND D. WILSEY
GEORGE T. SCHAPENDONK

NAVY CROSS

ROLAND D. WILSEY

SILVER STAR

KENNETH W. CLARK
WARREN JACK O'BRIEN

BRONZE STAR

MARVIN H. SHEPPARD

PURPLE HEART

QUINTON R. ADAMS
KENNETH W. CLARK
STACY C. DAVIS
RICHARD W. HUTCHENSON
CHARLES R. LINDAHL (KIA)
PFC. LINDQUIST (KIA)
JAMES D. NIX
ARDEN O. OSTROWSKI
HARLAN C. RADTKE **
JOSEPH J. RUTKOWSKI (KIA)
THURMAN D. TOON
OLE C. WIBHOLM, JR. (KIA)
ROLAND D. WILSEY **

OCCUPATION RIBBON AND MEDAL FOR JAPAN

CHARLES H. DEE
JOSEPH W. DILEY
GEORGE R. GILBERT
MEADE N. KINZER
RAYMOND J. KNOEF, JR.
MICHAEL P. KOWALCHUK
CARL KUDROSHOFF
ALBERT MILLER
JEROME MEYER
JAMES D. NIX
WARREN J. O'BRIEN
HARLAN C. RADTKE
BERNARD L. RIGGS
JEROME J. TUCKNER
GEORGE T. SCHAPENDONK

ASIATIC PACIFIC RIBBON AND MEDAL

ALL OF THE NAMES LISTED ABOVE RECEIVED THIS RIBBON AND MEDAL INCLUDING THE COURAGEOUS NAVY CORPSMEN, WHO WERE ASSIGNED TO THE HEADQUARTERS COMPANY OF 2-8-2

STANLEY W. BOWEN
FRANK CAMPBELL
JOHN R. COX (KIA)
THERON FRAZIER
ROBERT GOLDSTEIN

(THERE WERE OTHERS THAT I CAN NOT IDENTIFY WITH NAMES)

IMPORTANT NOTE: I HAVE ATTEMPTED TO IDENTIFY WITH AS MANY NAMES AS POSSIBLE, HOWEVER DUE TO THE SPAN OF FIFTY YEARS SOME NAMES HAVE BEEN LOST, TO ME. I HAVE NOT LEFT ANY NAMES OUT INTENTIONALLY, AND APOLOGIZE TO THOSE AND THEIR FAMILIES OF ANY OMISSIONS.

** INDICATES WOUNDED TWICE. (KIA) KILLED IN ACTION

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

I am indebted to many individuals, for their encouragement and support, during the many months that I have spent correlating dates and events, in order to record a three year span of history as accurately as possible. My son, Jeffrey said, "Write it dad, as you remember it happening, through your eyes, and don't pull any punches, tell the good as well as the bad." This, I have attempted to do.

First, I must give thanks to Sergeant, Harlan C. "Dutch" Radtke for his many positive suggestions, and for creating this jacket cover using his gifted artistic talent. Dutch and I entered the Marine Corps on the same day, but at different locations. Being from Sanborn, Minnesota, he was sworn in at Minneapolis on December 12, 1942. Because of the Corps use of an alphabetical roster, we were paired together at the San Diego "Boot Camp" and served together during the entire war. We were both discharged at the Marine Separation Center, Naval Training Center at Great Lakes, Illinois, on December 8, 1945.

We shared the same boot camp platoon, work details, adjacent bunks on ships, the same beaches, foxholes and sometimes food. While service time, during the war, was almost three full years, we spent over eleven months aboard various ships, being transported from and to different locations in the Pacific Ocean, either for training or for action against the enemy, Japan. Three years of being together every day, there were times when, as in all relationships, we became annoyed with one another, yet there was a brother like bond that developed and exists to this day. With the exception of "Guadalcanal", we participated in every war time action of the Eighth Marine Regiment of the Second Marine Division, including the occupation of Japan. While Dutch was wounded twice, I was fortunate only to have had some narrow mishaps, but through the "Grace of God", we survived it all.

Roland D. Wilsey, from Saint Paul, Minnesota, and I first met in New Zealand when he joined our Combat Intelligence Section. After initial training he was assigned to Edsons' famous Raider Battalion, where he would earn the Navy Cross. He was then assigned to the Second Marine Division Intelligence prior to joining our Eighth Marine Regiment. Roland was wounded twice, first on Saipan and again on Iheya Shima.

Through his humanitarian and philanthropic efforts, privately and working closely with the Episcopal Church, Junior Chamber of Commerce, Rotary International, The Boy Scouts of America, the American Trucking Association and many others, he has been instrumental in bringing educational and medical opportunities to many individuals, throughout the world.

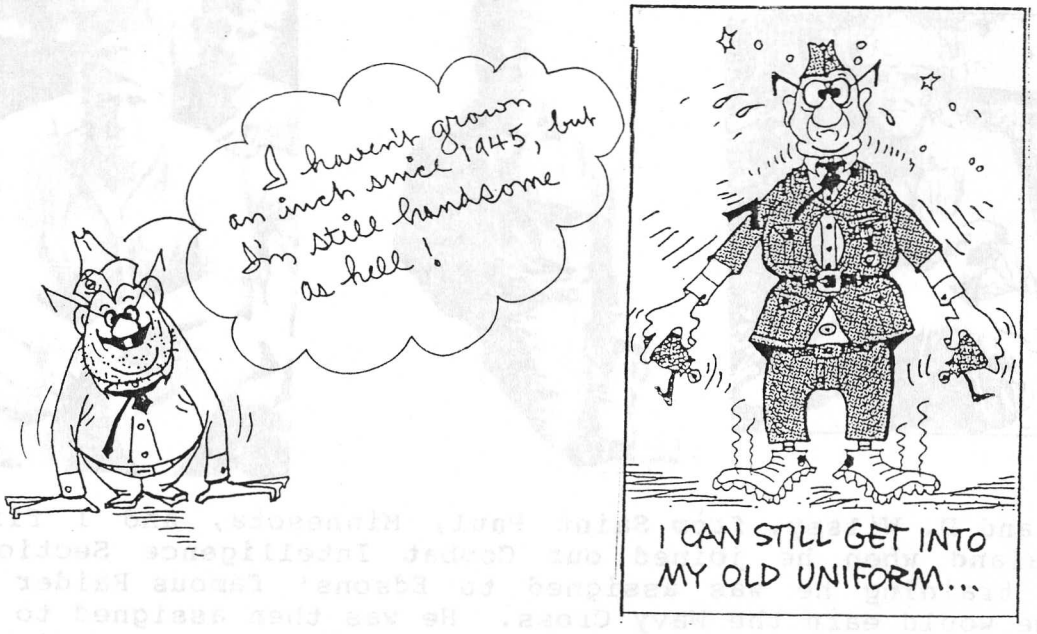
A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

Roland and I have kept in contact over the years, before and since his retirement, as Executive Vice President, of the Indianhead Truck Lines. He used his initive and intelligence training in tracking, and locating most of the survivors from our original Combat Intelligence Section (D-2) group, after fifty some years had elapsed.

I express my heartfelt thanks, and gratitude to Roland and his wife, Darleen, for giving me so many hours of their valuable time in reviewing and making editorial, and other constructive suggestions, to improve this manuscript, before final printing. Much credit for the publishing of this story is to be given to this dear friend.

I must also, thank Joseph "Joe" Diley, now living in Saegertown, Pennsylvania, for providing me with historical documents for my research and verification. "Joe", joined our (D-2) Intelligence Section, while we were fighting on the island of Tinian, along with several others, one being Jerome "Jerry" Meyer. They had arrived as re-placements for the Guadalcanal veterans and survivors, who were soon to be sent home. Joe and Jerry would remain with us until the end of the war, and the occupation of Japan.

Jerome Meyer, from Salmanca, New York was one of the oldest members of our group and therefore was called "Pappy". He was and still is, a person that you can not help loving. He was married and had left his wife and a small daughter behind, while he went to war. "Pappy", provided us with sunshine and laughter, many times, when we had reason to cry. Through his good nature, and his constant drawing of cartoons, laughter and humor, he kept our hearts and spirits, lighter. With Jeromes' knowledge and permission, I have included several of his cartoons, which he drew for me and I would send home. Recently, he drew the items below, to illustrate how he hasn't changed.



The year of 1942, was not a normal year for the youth of America, many were still in their teens. The Empire of Japan had declared war on the United States, by bombing our naval facilities and air bases in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on a Sunday morning of December 7, 1941. Prior to this time, the nation was mobilizing, preparing to help defend Great Britain and others, against the madness of Germany. Our military had been adding to their numbers through, voluntary enlistments and or a National Selective Service System, whereas all eligible young men, of a certain age group, were required to register with a local Draft Board, where they were assigned numbers. Then, when a certain number of men were needed, a National Lottery was held in Washington D.C., and those holding the numbers drawn were automatically drafted into Service. Many, not wanting to be drafted had either volunteered for a Service branch or joined a local National Guard Unit, whereas they could serve with other kin or friends with whom they had grown up with.

Many of the young men, prior to Japans declaration of war, who wanted to fly, and were rejected by our Air Force, went to Canada, where many were accepted, and went on to become distinguished pilots, while flying from England over Germany.

Once, the United States Congress officially declared war on Japan, mobilization efforts, through the United States, Selective Service System (which administers draft laws) re-doubled their efforts to provide bodies (young men) to fill the ranks of the various branches of service. The Army Air Force, Army, Marines, Navy, and Coast Guard, all needed officers as well as enlisted men to fill their ranks. Young men were then inducted into one of the military branches through a network of "Draft Boards" established in local areas, all across the United States. These Boards were generally comprised of local respectable elders of a community, who were to old for military service.

Most of our eligible young men had, either just finished high school, was still attending, or enrolled at some college or university. Some were in a "standby" mode, not knowing what direction their local Draft Boards would take to call them into one of the branches of the military.

Those who were enrolled at a College or University, many times were allowed deferments in order that they might finish their schooling and become Officers in the Service of their choosing. Others, weren't that fortunate, unless they were working where their skills were needed in some military or defense related project. The abnormality of the times side-tracked many from their original goals of college, a career, or marrying their high school sweetheart. Local Draft Boards were constantly being pressured to extract from their numbers and provide recruits for the various branches of service. Thus, the great gathering began to take place, and lives were changed to conform.

I considered myself, during these hectic days, to be a typical example of how career and life changes were being brought about, due to "War Time" needs and demands. Christened Bernard Lee Riggs, I became one of the many thousands caught in this dragnet. Born in Joplin, Missouri, May 11, 1922, and raised in Webb City, Missouri, I was fortunate to graduate from High School as President of the 1941 Senior Class. My goal was to pursue a medical career, and during my last two years, I had been apprenticed to Doctor George Cox, during most afternoons.

My career plans were changed, when it became known that I had been considered to be also, a bright student in engineering design, drawing and drafting, and I was encouraged to take a government sponsored course in engineering design at the Joplin Junior College, then continue at the Missouri School of Mines, at Rolla. Engineers and

draftsmen were needed, at this time, to design and build defense project sites, such as military bases, training facilities, ships. tanks, aircraft, munition plants and etc., that was required.

After some engineering schooling, employment took me to Decatur, Illinois, then to Seymour, Indiana, to help design an Advanced Twin Engine Training Base, for new pilots of the Air Force, until my engineering firm could no longer obtain draft deferments, for me. Now, the young man who had wanted to pursue medicine, but instead, had been trained in engineering, was instructed through an official Selective Service (local Draft Board) letter that he was to report for military induction on or around, the first part of December, 1942.

I had dated my best companion and friend during my high school years, and now that we found ourselves separated by several States, and hundreds of miles, it brought reality into our lives. The world that we had previously known was now "topsy-turvy", and every moment that we could share together, during weekend visits, or whenever time permitted, had to be brief. Time shared together became more precious, and separation was painful, because through the years we had developed a bond of friendship, love and respect for each other.

We knew that a long separation would be a certainty, when I left for war, and a decision to marry now, or wait until the wars end, was a reckoning that had to be considered and dealt with fast. A decision was made to marry, and take advantage of the few remaining months left us. The date of August 19, 1942 was set to coincide with my parents, twenty fifth wedding anniversary. I had obtained a few days leave, from my employer, in Seymour, Indiana, and return home on a Greyhound Bus, to marry and return again to work, and a new apartment, with my bride.

We were fortunate to share three and a half wonderful months together, before my departure in the early morning hours of very cool December morning. As we embraced and said our parting goodbye, we knew in our hearts that we had chosen the right path, by being married.

Knowing now, that I was scheduled for induction into the United States Army on December 14, I felt, that I would prefer serving the U.S. Marine Corps, and by doing so, we could bring the war to a quicker end. Volunteer enlistments were still available, so I enlisted at Joplin, Missouri, and was given final orders to report to Springfield, Missouri, and join with other enlistees, for a free train ride to St. Louis, where physical exams and the swearing-in would take place.

Marie, accompanied me to Springfield, and after saying our goodbye on December 11, 1942, I joined others for the Government paid 230 mile ride. The Marine Sergeant, placed in charge of us, on this trip, was gentle, but authoritative in handling our small group. He was not the norm, as we would learn later. Arriving in St. Louis during the afternoon, we were assigned rooms, at a nearby hotel that was in walking distance to the main recruiting office, located in the Federal Building.

After a night of rest, we knew that before the evening was over we would be sworn-in to the greatest fighting organization in the world, if we passed their examinations. I felt confident that I could pass the physical, as I had gone through the pain of having my home town dentist, Doctor Crocker put fillings where needed, and to make sure my teeth were in the best condition. I had previously been told that this was one condition which the Marine Corps would be looking at carefully, and could result in my rejection. I had played High School football, track and other sports, so my body was in good physical condition, at least I knew of no problems. I could not verify as to my mental condition, due to the uprooting of my life of normalcy.

St. Louis, was a gathering point, as was Minneapolis, and other large prominent cities. On the morning of December 12, 1942, our group joined with others for our final medical examinations, and then for those who passed, the swearing-in. Groups would line up, alphabetically, strip and be examined. One enlistee, near the end of our line asked, the Marine Sergeant in charge, "Sir, what is going to take place?" The Sergeants reply was, "Mac, the Doctor will stick a finger in your rear, handle your private parts, then will stick his finger in your mouth, and look in your ears." Yes, he did do all of these things, however, I can not verify the exact sequence. The examinations were not yet complete, when a gruff voice barked, "OK, now you knuckle-heads will each be given a bottle, with your identification on it, - now get to the Head (a Navy term for toilet) and fill it up with urine." I had no problem, but two guys standing next to me, were overheard saying, "John, GOD, I can't urinate, I just went five minutes ago." Whereas, his friend replied, "Don't worry about it, Charlie, I've got enough here for both of us." Then he proceeded to fill both containers. Sometimes, it's good to have a friend, nearby.

Later, in the afternoon, those who passed the tests, were called by name, and swore their allegiance to the Marine Corps Reserve. Mother, can not help you now, as your body and soul is now in the hands of the Corps, until after the duration of the war. Oh,- by the way, Charlie and John did not make the team, and the reason was never explained to us.

After being accepted as a member of this elite group, I had the sensation of feeling that I was ten feet tall. One reason for this elation was the fact that I was in the Service of my choice, another being that I had received a letter from the Marine Recruiting office dated December 6, 1942, informing that all volunteer enlistments had been banned, until further notice. Then on December 7, the Springfield, Missouri Recruiting office notified that all persons having made application before the 5th of December would be accepted.

I just did make their "deadline", before voluntary enlistments were banned. Volunteers were placed in the United States Marine Corps Reserve, to serve only through the duration of the war.

Now, in Minneapolis, about 450 air miles northwest of St. Louis, young men were going through the same type of induction processing on the same day of December. They would board trains and head west, to eventually join with the St. Louis group in San Diego, California. Marine volunteers had gathered from Wisconsin, South Dakota, North Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota, on this cold winter day, in the old downtown post office. A few names were, James Montgomery, Dick Meadows, Marvin Sheppard and Harlan Radtke. Sheppard and Radtke almost missed the "Swearing-In" ceremony, when a sharp Marine Recruiter found them sitting in a hallway, separated from the main group. The Marine NCO (non-commissioned officer) barked, "Let's get your butts in here and join the rest of the group." Once, aboard the train, the only difference in their trip to San Diego, from the St. Louis group, would be the scenery, looking out of their train windows, and the different route taken to get there.

At St. Louis, as soon as our official induction ceremony ended, and the necessary paperwork complete, we were grouped into various squads, with an assigned NCO, who had the responsibility for our safe delivery to the California training base. Gathering our baggage, we awkwardly marched in formation a few blocks to the Santa Fe Railroad Depot. Again after another "headcount", we boarded a "Pullman Car" where each of us were assigned a sleeper bunk. This train, pulling away from St. Louis, had civilian as well as military passengers and was not considered to be a troop train. The coal burning steam engine was pulling regular day coaches, "Pullman Cars" (Pullman was a trade name for a manufacturer that made daytime coaches that would covert to beds for overnight travel), and a dining car.

Still wearing our civilian clothes, we were one crazy group of lost souls, on a scenic but long unknown journey, not fully realizing the scope of our commitment, and for some, they would never see home or loved ones, again. Our trip was quite an experience, as some had never been on a train, or this far from home, before. We shared the dining car with the civilian passengers, returning then to our assigned cars. A porter was assigned to prepare our sleeping berths, at night. He was an employee of the railroad company, and could supply you with almost anything you might desire, if you could cross his hand with the right cash. Most of us carried only pocket change and therefore could not afford certain privileges, which may have been for our benefit, in that it kept us on the straight and narrow path.

For entertainment, you could look out of the train window, and enjoy scenery of country you had never seen before. Sometimes, there was absolutely nothing but open plains, bare trees, dead grass of winter, and small towns that passed by to quickly for anyone to identify. Then there were deserts, cactus, greenery, trees', mountains, snow and finally California, which had a little bit of all. Card games were plentiful. If you couldn't afford a money game, then you might play for matches or cigarettes. When money was used in dice or card games, you were at a disadvantage, because there was always "sharks', semi-pro players or kids that were pool hall sharper than you. In one way or another, they were "street smart" enough to know how to separate you from your money. There were other things to occupy your time, such as sleep, read a newspaper or book, general conversation with a buddy, or roam through various cars to find a pretty girl to become acquainted with.

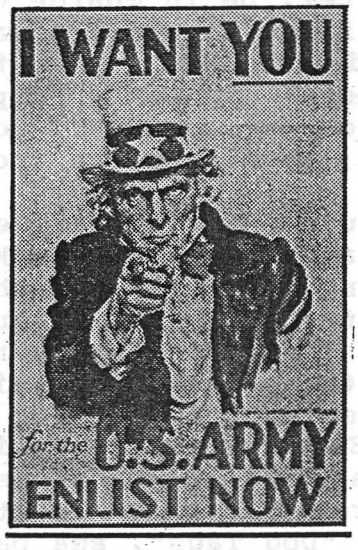
At many of the towns that we passed or stopped, residents were at

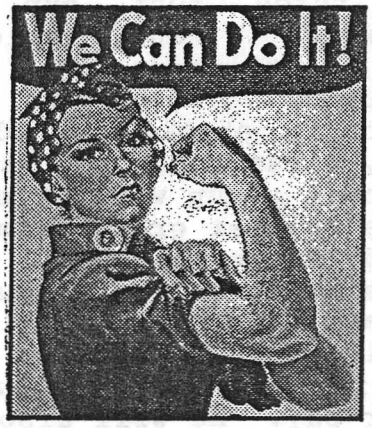
the station to welcome, wave and shout greetings, like "Good Luck" or "Hurry Home". Many would offer us coffee, cookies, soft drinks, fruit, gum, candy and much more. Those who went out of their way, and shared this time and refreshments, with strangers enroute to war, will never know how appreciative and grateful these young men were of their efforts. All was not perfect, because on two separate occasions, we did encounter some quick five minute stops in a New Mexico, and Arizona small desert towns where young boys would take money, through our coach windows, to get us sandwiches, cold sodas or some other item, then would disappear with our money, and hide behind some street corner until our train pulled away from the station.

While those of us from the west side of the Mississippi River had been gathered and routed to San Diego, California, for seven grueling weeks of "Boot Camp" indoctrination and training, those on the east side of this mighty river were routed to Parris Island, South Carolina.

Finally reaching our destination, by way of Los Angeles, we were met with busses to take us, still in our civilian clothes, to the San Diego Marine Corps Receiving and Training Center. Arriving after 8 PM (or 2000 hour-military time), we were provided food at a mess hall, that was expecting our late arrival, and then we were assigned quarters, with some of the Minnesota arrivals until morning.

Little did we realize that our "Fun-Time" was over and the voice of authority would change drastically. After this night, civilian clothes, and our former way of life would be lost, but not forgotten, until the wars' end.





After creating the heaven and earth, in six days, God took the seventh day to rest. He also went on vacation for seven weeks, during my basic training at "Boot Camp". It appeared that His phone was off the hook, or He just wasn't accepting any messages.

Our first full day, in San Diego, began when some nut started blowing a horn, sounding a tune they referred to as reveille. We later found out that this was a recording, and the original "bugler" probably remained in "the sack". Any farmer would have told you, that it was still to early to milk any cows. Then another bad thing happened, an NCO (non-commissioned officer) with two chevrons on his shirt sleeve appeared, turned on the barrack lights. He had a shiny whistle in his mouth and when he started blowing loudly, he used both lungs. The two sounds at this early morning hour was downright frightening for kids who were still wearing their civilian underwear. We were soon to learn, and adjust, that this daily habit would be the norm for the next forty-nine days.

"All right, you recruits, you have five minutes to get dressed and line up out front." This order came from a different type of voice than what we had been accustomed to. It had a rough, hard tone to it. Once outside, in the cool December morning, and darkness, we had "roll-call" for a body count, similar to what we had seen in the movies, concerning prison life. "My name is Corporal J.L. Belanger, and this is Corporal R.E. McMichael, we are going to be your Drill Instructors (DIs'), while you are here. You will obey our every command without question, and when you do address one of us, you will say, Sir. Do you understand?" We replied in unison. "Yes sir." "I didn't hear you." Belanger growled. "YES-SIR." We shouted back at him.

These two "Hells Angels" (D.I's), would hereafter, be in charge of our body and soul for the next several weeks. My first impression was that they had been sired by the Devil and imported from Hell, just to make our lives miserable. They re-invented a special cadence, "hup, two, three, four, hup, two, three, four." Which we marched to, everywhere we went, while in formation. Otherwise, we had to run from point "A" to point "B".

During the first two days our routine would be, reveille, roll-call, shower and shave, eat chow at a designated mess hall, make bunks, clean rooms and head, then re-group. During the first day the St. Louis group were physically joined with the Minnesota recruits and with a smaller group from the wild State of Texas. These two days were called, "Forming Days". These would be the days that the raw recruit is assigned, D.I's, a squad or a platoon, and trades his civies for a military uniform. He is escorted to the Post Exchange where he is supplied, soap, towels, toothbrush, shaving gear and other items. This is not given free, as part will be deducted from his first sixty dollar pay. He will also get a wash bucket, rifle, "Dog Tags", sea bag and a long list of other articles, necessary to a Marine.

Civilian clothes and all other personal belongings, not needed, were boxed and addressed to return home. We also parted with our civilian hair on the second day, and receive our first vaccines and shots. The transformation from a civilian to a Marine was rapidly taking place as identities were being grouped together as a platoon of "look-a-likes".

The alphabetical listing placed Dick Meadows, Jim Montgomery, Harlan Radtke, Bernard Riggs and Marvin Sheppard in the "cadence platoon", number 1234. We assumed that with sixty (60) men within a platoon, then it was probable that 73,980 Marines had been trained before us, at this location.

It was very evident during the first week that we were new, however recruits one week ahead of us, acted like "old-timers", and would shout,"You'll be sorry."

Our routine changed on the second day. We were now in military uniform and a certain amount of time was allowed us for each activity like brushing teeth or making-up our beds (bunks). The D.I's taught us a new game, that they were very fond of. They called it "Calisthenics" and they must have loved it, because we did it a lot.

From this day on, the D.I's were on our tails, barking or shouting instructions, orders, commands and sometimes verbal remarks that I felt was degrading. This went on from reveille until taps (lights-out). A daily routine included, rise, roll-call, shower and shave, breakfast, make bunks, clean head, mop floors, layout gear on bunk for inspection, calisthenics, drill in formation, stand at attention for uniform, and dress or rifle inspection. Of course, we did take breaks for meals, however we were always kept busy with some task, until bedtime.

If you were lucky to not get on the wrong side of, or irritate the D.I's, then your life was a bit easier. Those, with who he took a dislike to were assigned many of the unpleasant chores. In some cases when one member did something to his dislike, then the whole platoon might take some sort of punishment. It wasn't difficult to get into trouble, a mis-step in drilling, unclean rifle,, shoes or uniform not to his liking, or any other thousand of excuses for discipline that he might dream up, in order to show you that he was the "King".

Some recruits were made to push a peanut across the parade ground with their nose, others were forced to run around the parade ground with rifle and full back-pack, until they dropped from exhaustion. They took delight in finding ways to humiliate, control your mind and break your spirit. You could sympathize with wild horses being broken by cowboys, because you were going to be ridden until your spirit was broken.

We were told later that this type of discipline was necessary to make young Marines respect authority. It was true that discipline did accomplish the job of molding us into a team that would follow orders, but the respect for authority was not something to be shoved down ones throat, through humiliation. Respect for authority would come later and be earned by those who respected and showed respect for those under their command.

Every day was a new learning experience, we were informed that the American Flag was to be referred to as "Colors", my issued weapon was not a gun, but a rifle, a sea-going vessel is a ship, not a boat, toilets are "heads", and any Marine that you didn't know by name, would be "Mac". There were many new words that we would pick-up, such as "Boon Docks", then some bad four letter words, used by the Drill Instructors or by some disgruntled recruit.

"At my first liberty, I'm going to break his legs." "What's Meadows mad at now ?" Asked Sheppard. "Oh - Belanger just put him on another one of those head cleaning details." Montgomery replied. Then Radtke spoke-up asking, "Riggs, have you written to Marie, telling her of your new life ?" "No - not yet," I responded, "I try to write her quite often, but I am not about to tell her about all the "crap" that we put up with, because Belanger and McMichael censors all of our out-going mail." Responding to Meadows comment, I said. "Hey - Meadows, since Belanger is always telling us that we should consider it an honor to die for this Country, why don't you ask him if he would trade places with you, during this war."

We were well into our second week, and while drill formation and marching to a cadence was still crude and awkward, we could feel that

we were shaping-up and knew that improvement had been made from the first week. This was a good feeling, but to the D.I's we were still a bunch of farmhands. Now we too would yell at new recruits, just arriving, "You'll be sorry". One day, while marching, a platoon passed by, going in the opposite direction and Radtke let out a shout of glee, and said, "WOW - did you see who was in the new platoon formed this week? I just saw Tyrone Power marching by." He was right, and we all had a chance to see him several more times, during training.

The popular, and well known movie star appeared to be no more than about five foot and eight inches in height, and we noticed that his fine featured face was darkened by his heavy beard, even when freshly shaven. One evening as we were leaving the mess hall, Tyrone was a few steps in front of us, and as he emptied his mess gear scraps into the proper container then proceeded to wash and rinse, an insecure NCO watching the operation, growled, "Hey Mac,- you there, get back in line and wash that gear over, again." There was nothing done wrong, but the young NCO wanted to show that he could order a movie star around. Tyrone was well liked and respected, as he did not ask for favors, although upper "brass" was placing demands on him. They ask that he make public appearances, host and be master of ceremonies for some Camp Shows, therefore his completion of training took a few weeks longer.

During the third week, our "Cadence Platoon" (1234) was on the parade grounds practicing some close-order drill, when I made an error in my footwork. D.I. McMichael brought the platoon to a fast halt, then standing in front of me, he asked, "Riggs,- you've got two left feet, where in the hell are you from?" "Webb City, Missouri, SIR," I replied. He seemed amused with that answer, then after a slight pause, a funny looking grin appeared on his face, he said, "Yeah,- I know where that is, that's half-way up a spiders ass." Then he turned slightly, grabbed his sides with crossed arms, bent over, and started laughing for a few seconds. After that encounter, I decided that I would add his name to that of Belangers, as two people that I never wanted to be friends with.

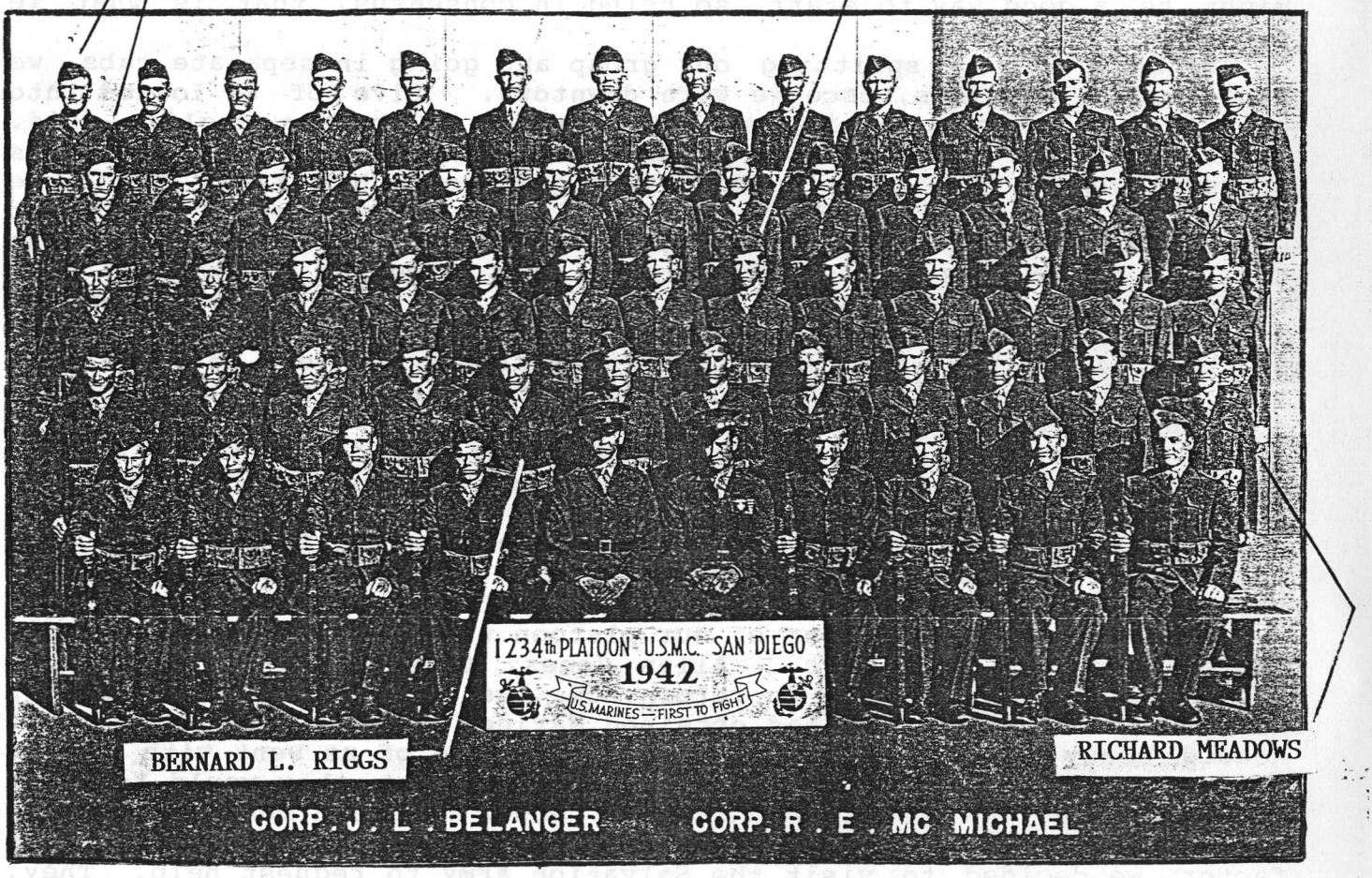
After a lot of blood, sweat, tears and swearing, we finally began to master our daily routine, and we knew that the final week was approaching. We had survived, and were looking forward to shedding (like a snake would it's outer skin) our drill instructors, and moving on. At this point, liberty was uppermost on our minds.

We had just undergone a barracks inspection, when a loud voice was heard, "Give me liberty or give me death." "Who, said that?" Asked Sheppard, "I thought that the man that said those words was dead." "Then he didn't get his liberty, did he?" Meadows, responded. Jack Cobb, a good looking young man from St. Louis, was quiet most of the time, spoke-up, "They are training us to go out in the Pacific Ocean and fight the Japs, but I have a gut feeling that we should punish the D.I's first." Then Sidney Berry, from Minnesota added to the conversation with, "Yes, and someday they may have a memorial made for them." "If they do," responded Meadows, "I hope that it's in a cemetery." Montgomery ended with, "AMEN."

At the end of our sixth week, Belanger told us that the following week would be our last of "Boot Camp", and he outlined what we could expect. There would be many dress, rifle and gear inspections, and on the final day we would participate, in full dress, for a final "Pass In Review Parade", for the Post Command. After that, we would receive our first military pay and be given weekend liberty passes. Then after returning from our weekend liberty, most of us, with our gear, would be transported to nearby, Camp Elliott for additional and specialized training, before being sent to the war in the Pacific.

Belanger gave each of us a survey form to be filled out, signed and returned to him, the next day. "These forms," he said. "will tell us more about your background, and help us to decide as to the best way to use your talent, once you leave here."

Christmas of 1942 had passed, as just another day, with the exception that we did have the day off. We were treated to a special Christmas dinner with a printed souvenir menu to send home, with greetings from James L. Underhill, Brigadier General, USMC, Commanding, and from The Recruit Depot Commanding Officer, Colonel, George T. Hall. Group Platoon pictures were taken the week following Christmas, then it was back to our regular routine, until the early part of February, 1943, when we had completed all of the requirements of this Recruit Depot by exhibiting a well coordinated, and spirited Final Dress Parade Review, which even our D.I's admitted that they were surprised and proud, of us.



Basic training was finally over, and we had some money from our first military pay, and a week-end pass. We were anxious to exit through the "Gates of Hell" and enjoy some freedom, fresh air, the night lights of San Diego, and whatever else might come to mind, as long as it was legal. We also had to keep in mind that we were now Marines, and must act accordingly. Semper Fi, and loyalty to the Corps had been drilled into us, therefore if we were to encounter another Marine in trouble, we were to go to his rescue.

Getting prepared for liberty was a chore, in itself. First you had to find an iron to borrow, then for some kids, who had never ironed before, they had to be shown how to press their new shirt and "Dress Green" uniform. For young kids we did the best we could, but we still looked "un-pressed".

Leaving the Guard Post and the main gate and being in the "World" again, was a pleasant feeling, as though a great weight had been lifted from our shoulders. Ten of us had left the gates together, but we had no idea as to how we were going to spend our free time. "Hey-guys, Sheppard said. "I heard that they have some shops in town that will press uniforms and shine shoes, while you wait." "Who told you that?" I asked. "McMichael." He replied. "Then lets' grab a couple of taxi cabs and head for a press shop." I said. The others agreed that this might be a good way to start, so being in consensus, that is what we did.

We knew that by splitting our group and going in separate cabs, we would find the others, once we were downtown. Five of us loaded into one cab, and our spanish speaking driver in broken english said. "Where to men?" Someone said, "Anywhere that we can get our pants pressed, man." The cabby nodded, with a smile on his face, as if he understood, and said, "Si, Senores." So, off we went, with great expectations. About ten or fifteen minutes later he pulled up to the curb, a few blocks from downtown, in what appeared to be part of a residential area. We noticed that we were in front of a large two story frame house, where a party must have been in process inside. Several Sailors and Marines, with their girlfriends, were having a good time on the large porch, and music coming from inside the old house was so loud that the shingles, on the roof, were vibrating. Our driver turned and was asking for his fare, when, "My God," Cobb said, "this is a dam whore-house." After further explanation, we convinced our driver to take us to a "One Hour Valet-Pressing and Cleaning Shop." A short time later we were five of the sharpest looking Marines that ever walked the streets of this historical city. We could have passed for veterans, had it not been for our "Boot Camp" hair-cut.

We learned that a member of our platoon was also in town, but for a different reason than ours. Allen Jones, from Kansas City, Missouri was trying to find a means to return home, as he had received word that his mother was dying. He had obtained Marine Corps leave papers, but needed money to buy transportation home. Two of us went with him to the Red Cross office, where we were informed that they would loan him money, if the Marine Corps Paymaster would withhold monies from his future pay until the loan had been satisfied. Because time was a major factor, we decided to visit the Salvation Army to request help. They, after confirming the emergency, bought Allen a round trip bus ticket, and gave him some extra cash for his meals. Their only request was that if he could repay later, it would be appreciated. They offered prayers for all of us, then we proceeded to the Bus Station with Jones, and stayed with him until his bus headed East. Although I was never to see Allen Jones again, this experience had a lasting impression on me, to always try to help a buddy, in need.

With nothing planned, we walked around what we thought was the center of the city, passing cafes, tattoo parlors, pawn shops, a city park and a specialty shop where you could buy a variety of gifts and or items to mail home. Radtke spent some of his money on a newspaper front page headline, that linked his name with Tyrone Power, and I bought a couple of silk sofa pillow covers, with the Marine Corps emblem to send Marie. If one had been looking through a pigeons eye, from several stories high, they would have seen what would have appeared to have been a swarm of giant army ants, as the many different military types of uniforms were going in all directions, on the sidewalks below.

Live band music could be heard, coming from the second or third floor of some of the downtown buildings, so if you desired, you could climb a few flight of stairs, pay fifty cents and listen to popular dance music, or watch young couples move their feet and bodies, in unison across the dimly lit dance floor. If you were lucky, you might find a young lady without a partner to twirl around the floor with you. Many young ladies were also affected by the war, as many young men of their age had been absorbed by the military. And they too sought companionship with those who made them feel at ease and treated them with respect.

At this time in history, San Diego was a military supported town, with their docks filled with naval and merchant marine ships, Army, Marine and Coast Guard bases, and the thousands of workers employed by these bases and defense plants brought many dollars into the city coffers. We were well received and treated by the merchants and civilians, probably because the men in uniform helped furnish a large part of their income.

The mode of transportation was private automobiles, taxi's, city and military buses, and electric operated street cars (sometimes called trolleys or trams) which was an enclosed coach that ran on rails, generally in the middle of the main street to the outlying edges of town. For ten cents you could ride to the end of the line and return for another silver dime. We noticed that headlights on vehicles were partially blacked-out as a precaution of being seen at night, should there have been an enemy invasion, or air attack at night along the coast of California.

Like kids turned loose in a candy store, it didn't take us but a few hours of freedom to "do our thing", then we were ready to return to our quarters, and "hit the sack". We knew that liberty would become more frequently available to us, on future non-duty weekends. Near midnight, we re-united with our original lost five and the ten of us boarded and returned to base barracks on a Marine Corps bus. Some had drank too much and others were so tired and sleepy, that had the bus driver been in an enemy uniform, these Marines would not have cared or noticed.

The day following liberty, a few of our platoon members were informed that they were being assigned to special schooling and or other duties. A few of our members were native American Indians, from the Navaho Tribe and because of their special skill in speaking the Apache language, which can be spoken in five different "tongues" (languages) they were very valuable for our communications network. The Japanese would not be able to interpret field communications, when they sent messages to one another. Later, during the war these men would play a very important, but un-recognizable role.

The rest of our group, with gear, loaded on the back of canvas covered trucks that transported us to nearby Camp Elliott, which was the training base for the Second Marine Division.

Additional training at this base would prepare us, to later join the Second Marine Division, in the field. For the reader to understand what had taken place, prior to this date and after the Japanese had declared war upon the United States, it is important to first have some background explained.

The Second Marine Division was formally activated on February 11, 1941. Prior to that date, Marine Regiments had been formed into Brigades. Their first mission, after the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii, was to defend the coastline of the United States, from Oceanside, California, south to the border of Mexico. It was suspected that an invasion attempt might be made.

Later, the Second Marine Brigade was re-established and sailed from San Diego on January 6, 1942, on three Cruise Ships, owned by the MATSON LINES. During peacetime, these ships had cruised Hawaii and the "South Seas", loaded with vacationing passengers that could afford the fare. The Brigade arrived in Pago Pago, American Samoa, January 19. Three days before their arrival, a Japanese submarine had approached their shore and had fired five inch shells at the radio tower, without causing any serious damage. There were no more submarine shelling and the Brigade worked to maintain a base, and train native Marine volunteers to form the Samoan Reserve Battalion. The Eighth Regiment remained on the island for a defensive garrison assignment and the rest of the Brigade left near the end of July, joining with other segments of the Second Marine Division and made history on August 7, by being the first American troops to land on enemy soil, during World War II. Then on October 25th, the Eighth Regiment sailed and on November 3rd., joined the Marines already on Guadalcanal.

Thus, began the battle to retake the Solomon Islands. A legend was created on the humid night of January 12, 1943, when the Japanese had created a situation whereas they caught many Marines in a "cross-fire". The Japs were well entrenched, and with their machine guns and rifles killed and wounded many Marines, and others became momentarily disorganized, taking cover in a ditch. A burly, red bearded Marine Captain, named Henry Pierson "Jim" Crowe, had also just came through the "fire" and said, "Goddam it, you'll never get the Purple Heart hiding in a foxhole," then rising to lead them, he said, "FOLLOW ME!" These words became immortal in the Marine Corps., and Captain Crowe became a Legend.

Respectful of this type of leadership, the Marines followed Captain Crowe in a rifle grenade attack on the enemies "L" shaped emplacement, and completely wiped it out.

Gualalcanal was declared, by our forces, as being Secure on February 9th. The word "Secure", means that the island is now under the control of our military forces, it does not mean that the enemy has given up or has stopped fighting. The Second Battalion of the Eighth Marine Regiment, on this same night, boarded transport ships and headed for a well deserved rest and recuperation in New Zealand.

During our first week at Camp Elliott, we had a chance to discuss our experience background, noted on the "Survey Forms", previously submitted during basic training. At my interview, I was told that most likely I would be selected for Officers Candidate School (OCS). We were soon to learn that the system worked against the betterment of the Corps, rather than for it. Men experienced in flying and aircraft, most likely would be placed in a machine gun or mortar squad. Truck drivers and heavy equipment operators were to push wheel-barrows or assigned some other demeaning task. Finally, when the selection was made to fill vacancies within the Motor Pool, Air Wing and other needed areas, the most qualified, most often, were placed in areas completely different from their experience background.

Officers did not appear to be involved, or even care, as they left most of the selection assignments to the Drill Instructors, Corporals and Sergeants and the general clerical staff for making these decisions, as to where a Marine would be placed.

It also became apparent that when a certain group was needed, then regardless of experience background, they would start with the first name on the alphabetical roster and continue until they met their quota. Then start again where they had previously stopped in the roster, and continue in the alphabet to fulfill the next quota. Many of these mistakes would be corrected accidentally, when the replacements were sent overseas to replace troops that had been killed or wounded in battle. The officers in charge, then reviewed experience backgrounds to find their needed engineers, drivers, clerks, cooks and any other skilled person that they needed in a particular field of endeavor. It appeared to me that the Stateside screening had been a farce.

We spent about ten weeks of additional training at Camp Elliott, doing such things as, overnight bivouac, rifle range, Judo and bayonet practice, live grenade throwing, crawling on our bellies at night through barricaded areas of barbed-wire, while a machine gun was firing live rounds, just a foot or so above our heads, and some overnight hikes or forced marches in the "Boon Docks". We did a multitude of various things to toughen our bodies, including techniques to defend against the enemy.

Almost all of our original members of our basic training "cadence platoon" ended up within a rifle, machine gun or mortar squad, then trained for that purpose. Again, because of the alphabetical roster, Radtke and Riggs were placed within a 81mm(millimeter)mortar squad.

When a group, like ours, are never given any direct answers to questions, then we begin to speculate and this in turn creates a "rumor-mill". "I wonder how long it will be before we ship-out?" Was the question that most of us had on our mind. We had a gut-feeling that our time was nearing as we had been told that vaccines, shots and a trip to the dental office was being scheduled. We were now in the middle of March, 1943, with three and a-half months of training behind us. Our bodies had gone through a process of strengthening our muscles as well as our mind, and being young we were anxious to move on.

While going through the line for our shots and vaccine, I kept my eyes straight forward to avoid the sight of the medics sticking other Marines with those un-sightly long needles. I did not feel that my nerves or stomach would survive the ordeal. I was real happy and almost out the door, after my last injection, when a Navy Corpsman (a medic) shouted, "Hey-Mac!" I turned, in surprise, and said, "Who -- Me?" He replied, "Yes-you, come back here." I returned with shattered nerves, expecting another shot. "All that I wanted," he said, "is my needle back." I got the courage to look down and see a hypodermic needle dangling from my arm. I almost passed out, but was glad it was all over.

A few days later Ronald Patterson, from Springfield, Missouri returned to the barracks from a dental check-up, "OK Perry, they want you next." He said. Then he started raving about the dental office pulling a tooth and working on others. "Those bastards are maniacs." He continued, still throwing verbal stones. After Radtke had his turn, my name was next. Once seated in their military dental chair, I was at their mercy, and they had none. They proceeded to remove filling's that my Doctor Crocker had giving me about four months prior, and repacked with their special brand. I could see no reason for me having to undergo this torture, as these were not like the gentle professionals that we were used to in civilian life. I learned later that many of these maniacs were in training to become dental technicians. I felt that animals at an experimental laboratory would have been treated more respectful. Once finished, I asked to see the person in charge, and asked for an explanation. The reply that I was given, "They needed the practice." I received no apology, but was allowed to sign a waiver, stating that the Corps could no longer work on my teeth, without my approval.

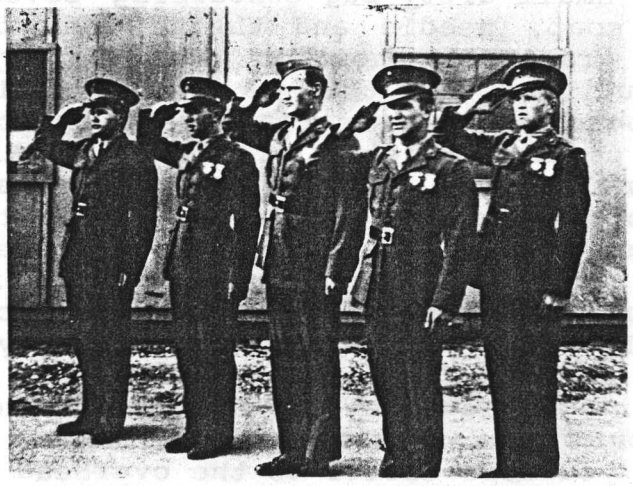
I had previously written to my wife, letting her be aware that my remaining time in the States was limited. She, in turn, had notified my parents. On Saturday, March 27, 1943, our mortar squad had just returned to the base barracks from a week of field training, when I was notified that I had visitors waiting for me. I was shocked and surprised as I could think of no nearby relatives. I showered, shaved, put on clean clothes, made myself presentable and headed for the Visitors Center, where I was to find Marie, my parents and my two teen-age sisters. I could hardly believe it, because during this period, tires and gasoline was very scarce for civilian use, and was rationed. My father, through cooperative friends had acquired enough ration gasoline stamps to make the long 1600 mile trip and return home.

The family had made the long trip from Webb City, Missouri, traveling across plains, deserts and mountains in a brown 1938 model four door DeSoto automobile, equipped with an overdrive transmission. Auto air conditioners were as yet unknown, motels were small and scarce, and roads were in bad shape, but the desire to see a loved one made the trip bearable. As for me, I was stunned, yet delighted. The few days that we enjoyed together was wonderful, words cannot describe the feeling. I had been separated from the world that I had known for several months, and their visit, in addition to boosting my morale, also brought pleasure and sunshine back into my life.

Our few days together ended, and after our regretted goodbye, the family returned home following the well known, and one of the few cross country highways in the United States that was in existence in 1943, the famous Route 66. Their timing could not have coincided with my departure any better than it did, because a few weeks later we were given orders to board ship.

We were treated to a "Camp Elliott Variety Show", on Friday, April 2nd. , with Tyrone Power serving as Master of Ceremonies. Tyrone had enlisted in August of the previous year, however because of the many appearance demands placed upon him, his scheduled training took a longer period of time to complete than did ours. After his initial training, he was selected to go to OCS. After receiving his commission he was trained as a pilot and went on to serve the Corps, very well in the Marine Transport Command.

Before we boarded ship, each of us, took as much liberty as we could afford. When not on "Guard Duty" or some other detail, we spent our time at the Recreation Hall, Post Exchange or the Camp Theatre. Many letters were written and most of us attended a place of worship on Sunday morning. Cameras and film were not easy to obtain, however someone would always be available to loan you theirs or take a picture for you. Pictures below, captures former members of the "Cadence Platoon", at Camp Elliott in April, 1943



Before daybreak, on April 18, after an early breakfast, we returned to our barracks and loaded onto our backs and shoulders all of the field gear issued to us. This was equipment, clothing and personal items that was needed on a daily basis. Over our back packs was an inverted "U" shaped blanket roll, covered by a camouflaged poncho (raingear). Gear and clothing for later use were placed in our "Sea-Bags", and was transported separately, They would not be available again until we reached our final destination. Then loading onto the rear bed of canvas covered trucks with our field packs, we headed through a foggy mist, to the damp wooden decks of the San Diego pier. After arrival and assembling in formation, we were given instructions for boarding the huge vessel, facing us.

The first thing we noticed was that the ship had a long slender, but graceful lines, and was of a lighter shade grey in color than the normal Navy or Military Transports. As soon as the name "LURLINE" was read on the bow, it was recognized as being one of the former "Luxury Liners" that had traveled Hawaii and the South Seas, in peacetime, and had transported the Second Marine Brigade to Samoa, a year earlier.

Again, we were told that the alphabetical roster would be used for the boarding sequence. When I heard the name "RIGGS", I said, "Here Sir." "Your serial number, Riggs." I replied, "494453, Sir." Then after my rifle was checked against the roster for the correct issued serial number, I followed Radtke up the steep gangplank, feeling like a gold miners jackass, carrying a ton of ore.

We were carrying the best and latest combat rifle that was available. We had been issued and trained to use the newest model of the "M-1 Garand Rifle". The M-1 could fire single rounds or fire automatic. It had a cartridge clip that when inserted would reload and eject empty cartridges by a gas pressure build-up from the first cartridge fired. Marines, who had left for war a year earlier had gone into battle with the old 30 caliber bolt action Springfield rifle, a weapon that had been used during World War I, twenty six years before.

Once on deck, we had to squeeze ourselves sideways to enter the first bulkhead door, just inside was a Red Cross representative to pass out a small ditty bag containing several items, as toothpaste, razor, face soap, needle and thread, and finally a pack of cigarettes. We were grateful, however we already had these items with us. Instructions were that we were to follow the man in front of us, until we found a bunk to claim. I followed Radtke through several doors, down several flights of stairs taking us several decks below our original entry. At last we found ourself in one large compartment that had been a storage hold and converted to provide bedding for the troops. Bunks were placed in a series whereas about five canvas bunks hung above the lower one. They were in rows, filling the large compartment, with only about a two foot aisle to maneuver in.

The bunks had been made by tightly stretching canvas sheets, having brass eyelets, with rope drawn and secured to ridged metal vertical posts. The advantage to acquiring the lower bunk, was that once you got out, your feet were on the deck. The disadvantage was that those above you were closer to the overhead light for writing or reading, and your lower bunk was always used as a stepping stone to get to one above.

Once settled in, we went to explore parts of the ship, that was not off-limits to us. I had never been on a ship before, and I was fascinated. I discovered that because of the urgency to move troops, very little had changed as to being readied for troop movement, except where we had been quartered, in a former storage hold. The staterooms had been reserved for the commissioned officers.

The large dining hall, while stripped of its elegant chandeliers and finery, still had elegance and charm. The outer decks on the starboard (right-side) and port (left-side) sides, as well as the fantail (rear-lower outside deck), was available for us to move about, as we pleased. The bow (forward deck) and areas where the ships crew were quartered and or worked was off-limits to the troops, unless we were stationed there on guard duty.

The crew were civilian merchant seamen under contract to the owner, The Matson Lines. They were provided with excellent food and quarters, maintaining the ship twenty four hours a day, with three different crews working an eight hour shift.

Within a few hours after boarding, we became aware that the crew were preparing to get the ship underway. The large heavy ropes that held us to the pier was pulled in and neatly coiled, and we could sense the large propellers were turning and churning water. Many of us scrambled from our bunks, going topside on an outer deck to watch this graceful vessel slowly began to distant itself from the San Diego pier. As we headed westerly the Port of San Diego became smaller until it was finally lost in the horizon. It left us with a sort of lonely feeling, as there were no other ships around, and we were alone on this vast Pacific Ocean. We had not yet been told of our intended destination and we had no way of knowing how long it might be before we would be able to see the California shoreline again, and for some it would be never. Several days later we learned that we, the Sixteenth Replacement Battalion, were enroute to join the Second Marine Division, stationed in New Zealand.

We had been fortunate to have had this ship tranport us, rather than a navy transport, because of several factors; First, the civilian crew showed us respect and went out of their way to help us, secondly, we were provided meals within the large dining area, which gave us a feeling as though we were being served in a fine restaurant, the final reason being that the food was better than the navy would have provided. Meals were served at regular dining tables and to separate groups at different time intervals. We were pleasantly surprised to have milk, butter, cream and on some occasions baked potatoes. Our food was generally good, and eating was something we were always looking forward to.

Since we were going to be on this ship for several weeks, various assignments were given to prevent boredom. I was lucky to be assign guard duty on two occasions, others were a given chores to help in the mess hall, or to clean compartments and heads. The first days at sea, many of us "landlubbers" would experience our first sea sickness, spending much time topside near the rail. Others would spend time playing card games, sacking out or writing letters. Staying below in our bunks was too confining, so we spent many hours on the open decks for fresh air, and sometimes sunshine, staring at the vast amount of water surrounding us, which extended to the horizon in all directions.

Conversation was also a part of our day, almost every subject was thought of or discussed. Most discussions evolved around questions as to why we were, as young men, enroute to a war zone. "How did we get in this mess?" One Marine asked. "We were asleep when the Japanese came to visit us in Pearl Harbor." Came a reply. "I had never heard of Pearl Harbor," I said, "until the Japanese dropped those bombs there." Scott Ross spoke-up with, "Who's to blame?" "Every one of our top civilian and military leaders are to blame," Charley Moon replied, "plus we had no intelligence system of any value." Ross, then asked, "Doesn't it scare the hell out of you, to be placing our lives in the hands of leaders like this?" "Yes," responded Moon, "but

at this point in time, what can we do about it?" They were bringing out some of the many things that all of us had thought of. Then I ended the conversation by saying. "At this point we will have to put our faith and trust in others hands, and I hope that we have said the right prayers, and have a guardian angel that likes us."

As we continued in a southwesterly direction the weather began getting warmer, especially as we neared and crossed the equator. The heat forced many to remain on deck as long as possible, in an effort to breathe fresh air. The heat also created a condition whereas nerves became taut and bitching and complaining became a pastime for many.

After leaving San Diego without escort, and to prevent an enemy submarine to know the true course we were taking, the Lurline traveled in a "zig-zag" fashion, and we sailed at night without any lights being visible from the outside. We were trying to conceal our direction and position, yet several times each day we watched as the crew dumped waste and garbage from the fantail, leaving a trail for sharks and other scavengers to follow.

After seeing nothing but water for many days we began to wish that the scenery would change whereas we might be able to see a distant shoreline. Then around three oclock (3:am) one morning an excited voice shouted that land had been sighted. This encouraged several of us to leave our comfortable bunks and hurry on deck to get a glimpse of this change of scenery. Yes, land was barely visible in the morning darkness, and as I felt my heart pound a little faster, I also felt a sense of relief, knowing that there was something else on the horizon than water. It seemed that it took forever as we slowly approached, then gradually we rounded the tip end of one high land mass, and entered a beautiful body of water. We were surrounded on both sides with dark green foliage of a tropical forest that extended high into the mountain ridges. Our passage way was narrow, but wide enough for large ships to maneuver or pass one another. We were entering the harbor of Pago Pago, on the island of American Samoa. The sun was about to rise and we could see thatched huts, some with a small glimmer of smoke curling slowly skyword mixing with the early morning mist. The shoreline appeared to have no sandy beach area until we approached the pier.

Just a short time before docking, I was summoned again for guard duty near the crews mess hall and storage food locker. My duty commenced at six oclock (am). Soon after docking the side loading hatches were opened, with a ramp leading to the dock, without warning, and to my surprise and amazement, three strange, bronze skinned and barefoot natives appeared wearing flower-figured wrap around skirts, or "lava lavas". I was almost in shock as I saw them approach my inside duty station, and I was ready to challenge them with my rifle, when a Marine Lieutenant approached from the rear and explained that the natives were there to help load and unload supplies for the ships crew.

After my duty shift, I went topside and let my eyes absorb the site that was foreign to me. To my left, facing the pier, I watched as some Polynesian women with small children, carried baskets of clothing to be washed in the clear water of a small cove. The children, some were naked, played in the water, staying out of the womens way. Some of the women were bare breasted and before washing clothes, bath themselves. We looked because of curiosity and amazement, however the natives were very natural in their behavior and probably were thinking that we were the strange ones.

Action had started now around the edges of the pier. Young native boys appearing to range in ages between eight and twelve, started

gathering and shouting strange words to the Marines on ship. The Marines thinking that they wanted treats such as candy bars, started tossing, but they seemed disappointed with us. One of the ships crew members told us that the boys wanted to dive for coins, as this had been the custom whenever the pleasure ship had been in dock during peacetime. Then when we started tossing what we could afford which was nickels, dimes and quarters, the boys would dive and retrieve the coins, and when they came up for air and a fresh start they shouted, "Ei Kie Malingy", "Ei Kie Malingy", repeating these words over and over again.

One Marine turned to me and asked, "What are they saying?" "I don't know," I replied, "but it sounds like they are saying some sort of a Samoan greeting." Another Marine said, "I believe they are trying to tell us; "Hi-MARINES, You're The Greatest." We liked the little Samoan phrase, and this interpretation of its meaning. The phrase must have burned a little spot in the memory section of our brain, because later when passing a buddy in a hallway, you might say, "Ei Kie Malingy," and he would reply by repeating the phrase. Boy, we thought this was great, we were learning a new language. We would not learn the real meaning of this phrase, until we reached New Zealand.

This was a typical tropical island, as the weather was unpredictable. For example, the sun could be shining brightly upon the palm leaves, while rain would start falling in a heavy downpour, then stop as quickly as it started. We left this lovely island the day following our arrival. It was in this group of islands that inspired Robert Lewis Stevenson to write his famous novels "Treasure Island" and "Kidnapped". We gathered on the outer decks to watch this beautiful island slowly fade from view, then our thoughts turned to when and where our next stop would be.

A few days later we were able to see part of the Fiji Islands as we passed between them and the Tonga Island group. There was nothing exciting happening to keep us entertained, but at night we liked to spend hours topside trying to locate or identify various constellations, in the sky. The Southern Cross was one that could easily be identified while we were in the South Pacific Ocean. Its four brightest stars appeared to be like the tips of a cross.

I was walking in an inner hallway one day, heading for noon chow, when I heard my name, "Bernard!" Until now, I had always been addressed as Riggs or Mac. I turned, trying to identify a face with the voice, and I immediately recognized Howard Caldwell, a home town high school chum. We found plenty to talk about and the monotony of the long humid voyage was broken, for a time.

One morning we awoke to a pleasant surprise, the ships propellers were not turning and we found that during the early morning hours of darkness, the Lurline had entered the French Port of Noumea, New Caledonia and we had anchored in the harbor, several hundred yards from the warehouse piers and main dock. We were too far away to see the beauty of the land area, and ships at the piers appeared to be unloading constantly. While at Samoa we had seen some light cruisers, here we were to see heavy cruisers and submarines for the first time, during our journey.

This had been the South Pacific Headquarters for the Navy, during the Guadalcanal campaign. The famous Marine Colonel Merritt "Red Mike" Edson had his "Edsons Raider Battalion" quartered here, however after Colonel Edson had earned the Medal Of Honor, for his action at "Bloody Ridge" (at Guadalcanal) he had been sent to Wellington, New Zealand and was appointed Chief of Staff of the Second Marine Division. I make mention of this famous battalion because one their members would later

become a very important part of our Combat Intelligence Section. Roland D. Wilsey from Saint Paul, Minnesota was a members of this battalion and would earn the "Navy Cross" before being assigned to the Second Marine Division Intelligence (D2), then to our Combat Intelligence Section of 2-8-2 (Second Battalion, Eighth Regiment, of the Second Marine Division).

At mid-morning a naval craft pulled alongside and eight women in Red Cross and Navy Nurse uniforms were brought aboard, under guard and placed in private staterooms, with Marines guards stationed at their doors. We would later drop them off at Melbourne, Australia, where they would be returned to the United States.

We were informed that the women had been sending too much money in U.S. Postal Money Orders back to the States, which was a large amount over and above their regular pay. It was rumored that they had been suspected of prostitution, however we never heard any other explanation.

Later in the afternoon, on the day of arrival, we hoisted anchor and departed from this French Port. As we were leaving the protected harbor we encountered a U.S. Submarine returning from patrol. As we passed the crew waved, with enthusiasm, knowing that they had earned some well deserved shore leave.

U.S. Submarines at the beginning of the war were plagued with many problems. The U.S. had deployed submarines during World War I, but they saw little action. Then the years that followed brought limited interest and budgets. Because of the limited interest in Congress the U.S. Submarine development became a low priority item, and also help to create low morale among the crew. The Japanese, on the other hand had been constantly at war since the 1930's, therefore their Subs had been updated and the crews had experience.

By 1943, we were beginning to reverse this disadvantage. Early in the war, U.S. torpedoes were plagued with faulty firing pins, they were steam driven and ran too deep. Around September, 1943, new electric driven torpedoes became available with an improved firing pin. New and better type submarines were being built and put into action. This, plus the boost in morale, would shift the balance of submarine power to the United States. Submarines played an important part in the war against Japan.

After several weeks, we had passed several different time zones, the Equator, The International Date Line, The Tropic Of Capricorn and had reached the area known as, "Down Under", where the water drains from a sink in a counter-clock-wise manner, or just the opposite from the way it drains north of the Equator. We also had several Sunday worship services in the dining area for different denominations of religious beliefs. Religion was never argued or compared in any form, as it was a personal and private thing to each of us. If the subject was brought-up as a matter of argument, it was quickly suppressed and a different topic was suggested.

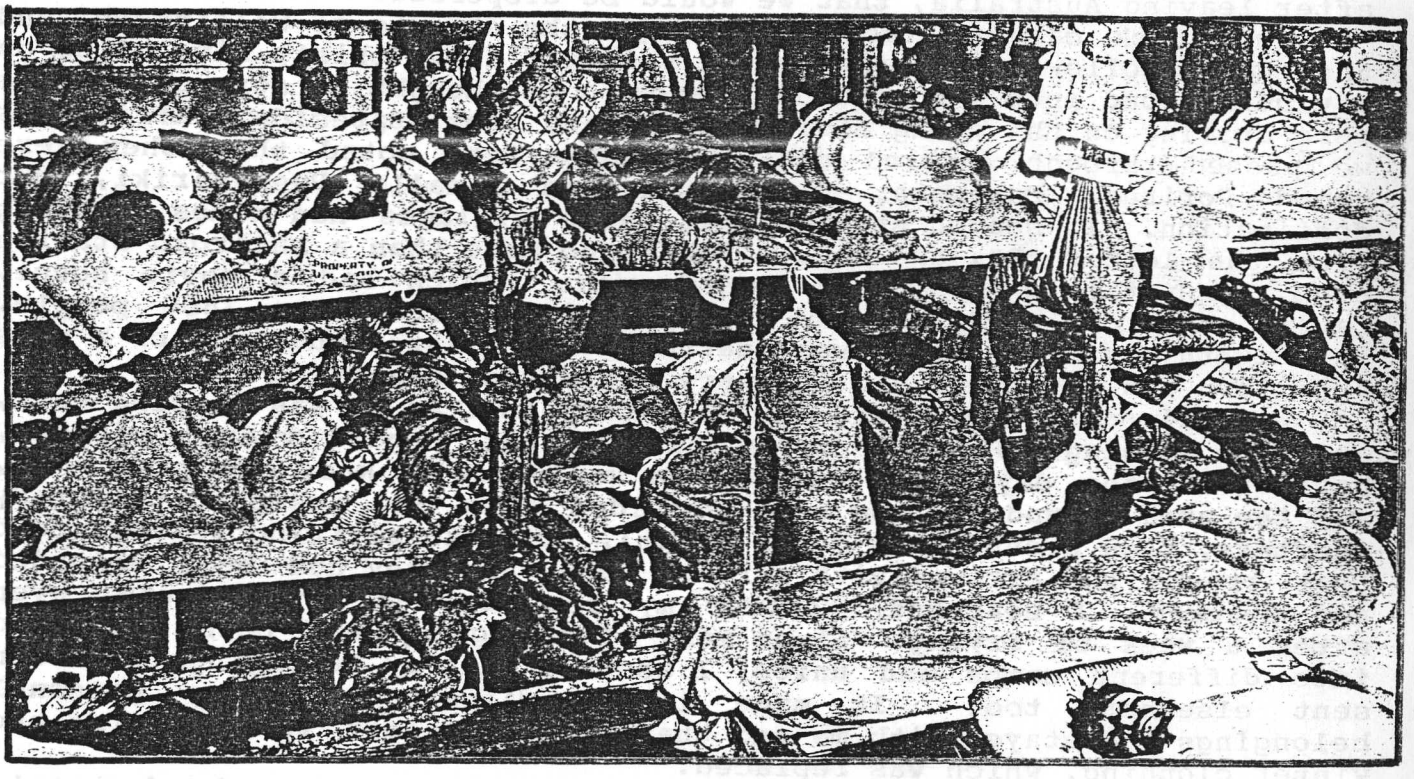
Leaving the South Pacific Ocean, we entered the Tasman Sea with the Flinders Island on our port side we followed the Bass Strait into the harbor at Melbourne, Australia. Melbourne lies on the southeastern part of Australia near the 38 degree south latitude. We did not get to see much while docked, however we did watch as the Marine Guards took the women ashore, those that were brought on board in Noumea. Many of us sneaked down the gangplank, in order that we might brag later that we had been ashore in Australia.

We left within twenty four hours for the last leg of our journey and while we had enjoyed the comforts we were tired of our "sea-legs" and had a strong desire to plant our feet on some solid ground again.

The morning after leaving Melbourne, we were instructed to prepare to leave ship the following day. This meant that all personal gear and belongings be gathered and prepared in the same manner as when we boarded. We were also informed that our Sixteenth Replacement Battalion would be dispersed through-out the Second Marine Division, now Headquartered in Wellington, New Zealand.

Passing through the Cooke Strait, our peacetime pleasure ship arrived and entered the Wellington Harbor early in the afternoon. It seemed as though we would never leave this ship as several hours went by before we were given orders to do so. The "LURLINE" had been my home for over three weeks, and I felt both a relief and sadness leaving her, as this had been my first ship.

Missing at the dock was the Marine Band. They were not here to greet us, as they had greeted the returning heroes of Guadalcanal just a few months earlier, with their "esprit de corp" music. We were not the glory boys, but the Sixteenth Replacement Battalion that had been assembled, trained and sent to this "down-under" port to fill the void caused by the decimated number, of those lost to serious wounds or death, during the battle for the Solomon Islands. We knew that we were "Green" like un-ripened bananas and untested, but we also knew that within a few short hours, we would join, blend, become a part of, and rub shoulders with veterans, who we had already considered to be legends.



TYPICAL QUARTERS ON A
TROOP TRANSPORT (APA)

New Zealand lies almost due east from the lower part of Australia and consists of two large islands and a small island at the most southern end. The islands stretch about 1000 miles from south to north, with a combined land mass about equal to that of the State of Colorado in square miles. Wellington, with a population of about 125,000, is at the southern tip of the northern island and has a natural and easy accessible large harbor. Those who might be familiar with San Francisco would identify with a resemblance in appearance.

Upon debarking from the Lurline, docked in the Lambton Harbor, we were to find that the seasonal weather "down-under" was just the opposite from that which we had left "up-above" in the States. Here it was in the month of May, and we were going through another winter. We never dreamed of or expected this, but felt that this might be better than suffering from the humid heat of the tropics, and the malaria carrying mosquitoes.

The Marine Corps had a high regard for their "Alphabetical Roster" and while in formation, names were called with destinations and truck loading assignments according to where your name was on that list. As an example, Berry and Cobb would go to Camp Russell, near McKay's Crossing and join the Second Regiment, Meadows, and Montgomery were loaded on trucks that would take them to the Sixth Regiments Camp McKay at McKay's Crossing, while Radtke, Riggs and Sheppard would be transported to the Eighth Regiment Camp, just a few kilometers (U.S. Miles) away. At the time of names being called and trucks assigned, we had no knowledge as to our destination, however we had been forewarned, after leaving Australia, that we would be dispersed.

Our truck caravan took us through the streets of Wellington, and then north following a narrow gauge railroad about thirty five miles on a winding road into a mountainous area. We thought it strange that we were driving on the wrong side of the road, from Stateside traffic. As we passed through several small villages were noted that they were named Porirua, Paremata, Plimmerton and finally Paekakariki, our destination. It seemed strange that these villages had names starting with the letter "P", and were slightly no more than a railroad station stop, with the exception of Paekakariki, which had a movie house, tavern, cafe, a milk bar and a population of less than 1800 people. The Eighth Marine Regiment was quartered about three-quarters of a mile from town and the other two infantry regiments, nearby.

We arrived at our assigned 2-8-2 Camp just as it was getting dark, and the evening colder. It was hard to get a good visual picture, however in the days that followed we would get to know every part of, and the area around it. We were provided chow and assigned temporary quarters, then around 2100 hours (9:pm), prior to retiring we were told that trucks had arrived with our sea bags, and they had been unloaded and stacked. I searched, however my sea bag was never found, even after a week of trying. Since many of our group had been scattered into different camps and units, I assumed that my belongings had been sent elsewhere too. It made little difference as my personal belongings had stayed with me and that which was lost was uniforms and winter clothing, which was replaced.

The truck drivers who had brought the sea bags from the dock told us an interesting story of an event, which they had witnessed. As they watched the unloading of the ship, one crate was handled a little roughly and bottles of scotch whiskey, that were inside, were broken and the contents emptied on the deck of the dock. It was discovered that a high ranking officer had shipped several crates of scotch whiskey as part of his personal gear. He was placed under guard and sent to the Division Headquarters in Wellington, for discipline.

During our first week in this land of the "Kiwi" (wingless bird) we were selected for different squads, platoons and any other group needing replacements in order to build their numbers back to full strength. We had freedom to come and go, with recreation and post exchange privileges, and our food was good and plentiful.

Our quarters were approximately twelve foot square, raised wood floor platforms (deck) with each side having a four foot high wood frame mounted vertically from the deck. From each of the four raised corners, wood rafters would extend upward at an angle, meeting in the center to support the pyramidal shaped canvas that covered the wooden frame. The front center entry was nothing more than a wooden frame with a canvas flap that could be tied to help keep the cold and wind out. In the center was an oil burning heating stove, venting through the top, used to keep the chilled air from being too uncomfortable.

From the beginning of basic training, and now in New Zealand we were to learn that a breakfast meal was going to include SOS (S--t On a Shingle), which was ground beef cooked and mixed in a white gravy to be placed on "Texas Style" toast. I heard many joke about SOS, but many of us liked and enjoyed it occasionally. We also enjoyed fresh eggs and plenty of milk and coffee. Noon meals might consist of sandwiches, fruit, vegetables, mutton in some form and rabbit. Evening meals might include beef, sometimes steaks, or pork-chops. Milk and coffee was available at all three meals. For noon and evening meals, mutton and rabbit was always on the menu as well as a New Zealand product which was their version of "Ice Cream". It was always available and stacked in the mess hall, with no limitations. It was made of a starchy foam mixture of a milk product that once frozen, it would never melt, drip or run from the "cracker-jack" type box it was placed in. It could stay in the container for hours and be nothing more than unfrozen-froth. We could not complain about our food, as the ice cream was tasty and good, when in the frozen state. Everything was plentiful and no one was ever hungry. Being from the States, we did miss our good old fashion hamburgers.

A few days had passed since our arrival, and while some of the replacements had been assigned new duties, Dutch Radtke and I were beginning to think that we had been forgotten or that our names had been accidentally been removed from the famous Marine Corps Roster. Then one afternoon, soon after lunch, Dutch and I were starting to take an afternoon siesta, when the canvas flap opening of our tent swung open and a voice asked. "I'm looking for Radtke and Riggs, are they in here?" "We're here!" We both replied, in unison. "You two guys come with me," Said the clerk from Headquarters Company. "you both are being assigned to the Company E (Easy) light machine-gun squad." "Our training has been in the 81 millimeter mortars!" I told him. "I'm sorry fellows," Was his reply. "the machine gun squads were pretty well wiped out on Guadalcanal, so you've been chosen." Dutch and I looked at one another with blank looks on our faces, trying to determine what we had done wrong to receive this type of punishment. We had volunteered for the Corps, but we knew we hadn't volunteered for this.

For the next few weeks we learned everything there was to know about the air-cooled, gas operated, tri-pod mounted light machine guns. We would memorize the name of each part and then blindfolded we were taught how to disassemble and put the weapon back together in operating condition. We also spent many hours at the firing range to test our fortitude and skills. We were afforded few breaks during the day, and when we could we took advantage of them. Many times the NCO squad leader would ask. "Riggs- where is your buddy, Radtke?" "I don't know

where he might be." Was my general reply. "Well, go find that rosy cheek, long legged PFC and tell him to get his tail over here for some training, with the rest of the squad." I would always respond with a loud, "Yes-Sir." then take-off looking for Dutch, and to kill a little time, myself. I always knew where to find Radtke, but I would take my time getting there, as neither of us wanted the title of a Machine Gunner to ever appear within our military resume.

After our second full week had ended, we were given twelve hour liberty passes. Not knowing where to go, or what to do, I decided that I would follow the veterans and learn from them. This was going to be my first freedom outside of camp, since my arrival. I was ready and "Gung Ho", but with apprehension. Radtke and Sheppard had left on an earlier train so I would travel alone, expecting to join them once I was in town. Being in a foreign land, I did not know how the natives might react to us or how we might react to them, but I was ready to explore and find out. I purchased a special "U.S. Armed Forces In Uniform" second class round trip ticket to Wellington for 2s 6d (two shillings and sixpence), which was slightly less than fifty cents (50¢) in our money. Then boarding the train at the Paekakariki Station after 4:pm, I was ready to "spread my wings and fly".

During the thirty plus mile ride, I would enjoy the mountain scenery with the small villages and the dark mountain tunnels and be surprised by some happenings along the way. The conductor came through the various cars punching a hole through the Wellington printed end of our two inch cardboard ticket, and advised that we keep this small ticket in a safe place as this would be our return pass to Paekakariki. Walking through some cars, trying to find a seat I scanned faces to see if I could identify someone that I knew, I was surprised to see, "Cobb - Berry, hey you guys - is it really you?" The two were also surprised to see me and shouted, "Riggs, you ole son of a gun, we thought that you and Radtke may have stayed on the ship!" "No," I replied. "they sent Radtke, Sheppard and me to 2-8-2, what happened to you two?" Cobb answered. "Well, as you know they separated all of us with that dam alphabetical roster. Berry and I went to the Second Regiment at Camp Russell and we think that Meadows and Montgomery were sent to Camp McKay with the Sixth Regiment." "Gosh-it's great to see you fellows, keep in touch," I said. "as we are close by on another." I then found an empty seat and was resting with my eyes closed, when I overheard two Marines in conversation. "Al, have you got a date with Amy tonight?" One asked. "No, not tonight, Chuck." Al replied. "I called her on the tele (telephone) and asked her to go to the flicks (movies), but she said that she couldn't because she was knocked-up." Oh-MY GOD Al, what are you going to do?" Chuck asked, excitedly. "I won't do nothing," Said Al. "because here in New Zealand, knocked-up means "too tired". Boy - my ears were really tuned to this conversation, but at least I was getting to know a little about these people and their strange language.

The train arrived at the Wellington depot around 5:pm and was on time. The conductor made us aware that the last train out tonight was the 12:01pm Paekakariki Midnight Special, and if we missed it, we would have a long hike home. The building housing the depot was large and expansive, and the exterior was a work of art, with eight large Greek columns decorating the front, with a large clock centered near the top.

I was alone, with a lonely feeling but I was absorbing every thing in sight. Then my loneliness disappeared when I heard someone shout, "EI KIE MALINGY - EI KIE MALINGY". Several others responded by repeating the phrase, and I knew that many of my Lurline shipmates were getting their first liberty, also.

Directly in front of the rail station was an electric trolley (tram) line waiting for Marines to board. While many walked, I decided that I would first ride and see the town, saving my legs for a lot of walking, later. As I started to step on the tram, I heard Cobbs' voice. "Riggs, if you are alone, why don't you stick with us, because we might be safer in numbers?" I replied that I would like to. Now, we had to decide on how the evening was going to be spent. We voted to ride the tram to the end of the line, this would give us a chance to see the center of town and some of the residential area. We were thrilled with what we saw, and once reaching the end of the line we were on a beautiful hillside in a residential area that surrounded and overlooked Oriental Bay. The scenery was breathtaking, and words can not adequately describe its beauty, as it has to be seen through ones own eyes to appreciate and enjoy, as we did.

The tram operator left the car and rearranged his electric spring operated overhead connector to swing to the rear of the car. Coming back on board and walking through the length of the tram, he stopped to say hello, and then we engaged him in a conversation, asking many questions. Once he became aware that we had recently arrived and did not know our way around, he proceeded to give us a little tour talk, then offered some advice and suggestions. "My name is Thomas Hawke," He said. "I've lived here all of my fifty seven years and have been operating this tram for the past five years. We're real happy to have you bloody yanks down here, but you've got to be real careful, because our returning servicemen are very jealous, when they see you yanks with our young women." He continued. "Stay in a group, never alone as sometimes at an alleyway they might befriend you and offer you a drink, then if you stepped in the alley with them, they might be joined by others to beat you up." We were grateful for the advice and asked him about things we might do in town. He explained that there were many Milk Bars (ice cream parlors) and several good eateries (restaurants) and most had a specialty of "Steak and Eggs". The locals drank their beer warm, and if we wanted cold beer, most of the Hotels cooled it for the Yanks. Mr. Hawke gave us good advice and a personal tour on the way back. He let us off downtown at the Bank of New Zealand corner. This was where the tram lines crossed and from here we could go in any direction.

We were hungry, so we weren't long in finding a place to eat. And yes, we did try the steak and eggs which was to our liking, both in taste and cost. As we left our cafe, we took a look in both directions, just a few steps away to our left our eyes became fixed on the elegant Roman Catholic Cathedral of Wellington. To our right we noticed that we were adjacent to the St. George Hotel and a fair sized neon sign was hanging above advertising New Zealands famous "Waitemata Beer". Berry said. "Let's go in to the bar and see if they've cooled any for us Yanks." We had plenty of time so we went in, found the bar and ordered three cold beers. One was all that we wanted after having our big meal, it tasted good, but we were not in town to drink, so we discussed our options, then decided that we would first go to the flicks, if we could find the Majestic Circle Theatre, then later go to the Cecil Hotel, where the Red Cross was sponsoring a dance.

We found the theatre and soon realized that the New Zealanders enjoyed a different type of humor than us American boys, as they would laugh at times when we didn't, and we laughed when they were not amused. It became a little embarrassing, yet we enjoyed the evening. We asked for directions to the Cecil Hotel and were told to take a tram and ride until we passed Courtenay Place, the hotel was nearby. A tram ride cost only 2d (two-penny) to go in any direction.

It was close to 9:30pm when we found the hotel, it was bustling with activity, with many different types of uniforms. The Americans were not the only ones in uniform as the New Zealand Sailors and Army personnel were on the dance floor dancing with their dates or one of the local young ladies. The music was coming from one side of the room and the small band was playing popular American songs of the day.

I was aware that a high school chum of mine had joined the Marine Corps several months before I joined. J.W. Meyer had been an excellent trumpet player, while in high school, receiving many local and State Honors, but I was unaware of his present whereabouts. As we moved around watching the dancing and enjoying the music, Cobb and Berry had spotted two young ladies without partners and headed in their direction to converse and perhaps dance with, once they had broken the ice (become acquainted). My eyes had been scanning the Band members and when the trumpeter stood to play, I was dumbfounded to recognize J.W. Meyer. I was thinking that here we were, thousands of miles from home, and I would find an old friend. As soon as the Band took their evening break, I approached the platform and before I could say a word, Meyers' eyes met with mine and I am sure that he was as glad to see me as I was to see him. We gave each other a warm brotherly hug and exchanged whatever news each had. I told him that I had met Howard Caldwell, another schoolmate while on the Lurline, and he informed that several from our home town was in nearby camps. Meyer had joined the Marines just to continue his trumpet playing in the Marine Band, and his desire was fulfilled when he was assigned to the Second Marine Division Band. When I ask what his duties might be during any battle engagement, he informed that the Band members would serve as stretcher carriers for the Medical Units.

After a short break the Band started playing again and it seemed to me that the hands on the old wall clock was moving with the fast music, because it was getting close to going home time. Meyer and I would see one another a few more times during the war. I gathered my two buddies and we left the Cecil Hotel in the direction of the rail station. Cobb said that he an Berry had made dates with their dance partners for the next week-end. No sooner than we reached the first street crossing, Berry turned completely around and said. "I can't believe what I'm seeing, look back of us at the Marine Lieutenant with the gal on his arm, the one that went by us!" "Why, what's wrong?" Cobb asked. "Is he in our outfit?" "Not that I know of," Answered Berry. "but he was a Private First Class (PFC) a few weeks back, when we were on the Lurline." "Well," I said. "if he ever gets caught wearing an officers uniform, his tail will get scorched."

A block before reaching the rail station, we saw a gathering of uniforms, including some Marine MPs'(Military Police) who were separating two uniformed service men, both were scuffed-up and had bloody faces. "What happened?" I asked. "The New Zealand Sailor called the Marine a Bloody Yank," Came an answer from the crowd. "and when the Marine called the New Zealander a Bloody Sailor, the Sailor started swinging." "What" I asked. "does the word Bloody mean?" The MP overheard our conversation and said. "Mac, it means that they can get by with it, saying it to you, but they will fight like a bulldog if you ever use the word in describing one of them." He continued with. "And that's all you need to know."

Well, if that's all that I needed to know, then I planned to file that message away in my memory bank and never make the mistake of using it in their presence. On later trips we noticed that the word "Bloody" was a part of their vocabulary, the meaning was never explained to us, but we knew that it was a bad word.

The 12:01 Midnight Special was at the station, waiting for our arrival. We boarded about twenty minutes early in order that we might have a choice of seats, however we noticed that there were fewer returning to Camp than had left, because some of the older Marine veterans had extended leave. We were returning excited about our first adventure to Wellington. We had a chance to compare their english language to ours, their warm beer to our cold and their sense of humor. Even though they drove on the wrong side of the road, they were likeable people and went out of their way to make us comfortable. The young ladies were up to date with the latest popular songs and movies coming from the States and seemed to me to be very much like any stateside young women. Their young men had also been taken from them for military duty in Africa and other areas wherever the British Government might send them. They had been at war for a longer period than we had, and many of these families had suffered the loss of many of their loved ones.

Most of us newer members found that one evening of liberty was plenty, and all that we could afford. Sunday, the day following liberty, we were informed that mail from the States had arrived by ship. This was the first mail to reach those of us who had arrived on the Lurline. I received several letters from Marie and other family members, so I was in another world for a time, then after reading them for the second time, I knew that I must write replies to those who cared, and were writing me. That afternoon, I heard a voice outside my tent say. "If you're looking for Riggs, he's in there." I sat upright on my bunk, and watched as a short stocky built Marine opened the door flap and entered. The face was strangely familiar and I uttered. "Orville - Orville Sayer?" "Hi - Riggs, here's a couple more letters from Marie." Of course, his face was familiar, Orville and I had played High School football together, however he graduated ahead of me. Sayer said. "Riggs, I run the Regimental Post Office and when I saw Maries name and that Webb City, Missouri return, I just had to come and hand deliver this."

We reminisced and promised to visit again, when time permitted. Sayer had first been with the Eighth Regiment at Pago Pago, American Samoa, then had landed with them at Guadalcanal. He was also one of the unfortunate Marines to suffer from malaria. I would watch many of these veterans "chill and sweat" from this terrible fever.

Monday morning, while getting some more machine gun training, a clerk from Headquarters Company appeared and asked for Riggs. My God - was my first reaction, what have I done wrong now? The clerk said. "Riggs, they want you at the Sergeant Majors office. Will you come with me?" Anything, I thought, to get me away from that machine gun training, was OK with me, so I obeyed. "Sergeant Major, I've brought Riggs from Easy Company, didn't you want to see him." The clerk asked. "Yes, thanks Cagle." Then he looked at me and said. "Riggs, Gunnery Sergeant John Day would like to talk to you." "Cagle, would you or Williamson walk him over?" The Sgt. Major asked. "I'll take him." Cagle replied, then said. "OK Riggs, follow me." My curiosity was getting me nervous, so I asked. "Who's Gunner John Day?" Cagle replied. "Gunner Day heads up our Combat Intelligence Section, Riggs - you'll like Gunner Day, he's one of the best you'll ever find in the Corps." We soon arrived at a wood framed building, and the room which we entered was about ten foot square. Gunner Day was sitting at a small homemade desk, and once Cagle had introduced me, he left.

"Riggs, I've got to re-build and put a Battalion Intelligence Section together, and I need some good qualified men to help me succeed. I've reviewed your educational and experience background and I see that you have had some good engineering as well as mapping experience, you can also do artwork and sketch as well. Right now I have a spot in mind for you, with us." Gunner Day paused at this point, expecting me to make a response. "Yes, I've had that type experience," I said. "but, how would you use me, what type of duties would be expected of me?" "I am looking to use you as our Battalion Draftsman, that would mean that you would be responsible to maintain and keep our maps up to date." Gunner said. "The way we operate is like this, before we ever go into action, maps will be sent to us from Division Intelligence (D2) showing the enemies location, and any other data they might have as to enemy strength, gun emplacements, etc. as well as our designated landing areas marked, and the area that each Marine unit will be responsible for securing. You will be responsible to see that Major Crowe and his staff, including his Executive Officer Major Chamberlin, and all Company Officers under their command has up to date maps before landing. Once we do make an assault, our Combat Intelligence Scouts that are assigned to the various companies, working with the Company Commanders will, through scouting parties, spot enemy locations, strength and targets and forward this information back to you in the Command Post (CP) with coordinates. You will keep an overlay over your master map, transpose this data to your map or overlay and a runner will carry this information to a higher echelon. Your data gathered will allow Major Crowe to know where his and other troops are at all times, and he in turn can keep his Company Commanders informed. So your job will be an important one. Division (D2) will have our data, plus data from all other units, thus giving them an overall picture. They in turn will be able to provide all Battalion Commanders any necessary or needed information. Any questions?" I said. "No, Gunner," I replied. "you've given me a pretty complete picture." "Riggs, I would like to have you join our small group, I'm planning to have about fifteen, but I want to advise that by being our draftsman you will carry an EP (Engineering Personnel) classification and in the Battalion you could never advance to any more than a Corporals rating, unless you were transferred to a higher echelon." Gunner continued with. "Do you understand how rough and unfair this might seem to you later?" "Yes, I understand, but I believe that I would like to join your group, Gunner." Gunner stood, shook my hand and said. "We'll move you in tomorrow and we're glad to have you."

My feet took me from Gunner Days office, but my head was in the clouds. After all that mortar and machine gun training, I felt that I had unknowingly been dealt a straight flush poker hand. John Day had removed the "hangmans" rope from around my neck, and I was grateful, as I knew that he had saved my life.

Radtkes first words were. "Riggs, when I see that silly grin then I know that something is going on, what happened? I know that you were called to Headquarters Company?" I tried to explain to him what had happened on this wonderful Monday morning, and there was a feeling also of sadness when I told him that I would be leaving him the next day.

Tuesday morning I was moved into my new quarters, where I would bunk with veterans of Guadalcanal. There was Ray Simon, Kenneth Clark, Quinton Adams and a Texan, Ed Grant. Now I felt like I was flying with the eagles. Later, I was introduced to the other members of the revered Intelligence Section, Ole C. Wibholm, Jr., Arden Ostrowski, Staff Sergeant N.O. Fort and Richard Hutchenson. Gunner Day showed me more of the office and the equipment and drawing materials. There were rolls of linen drawing cloth, paper velum, pens, various colored inks and everything that I would need to function as a draftsman for the Battalion.

One of my first duties was to help Gunner Day transform some written instructions into a drawing. The drawing was the new insignia that was to appear on all U.S. Aircraft, for identification. It made me wonder why our higher Intelligence had not sent us a drawing instead of giving instructions as to its design! It could not have been to prevent the Japanese from knowing of the insignia design, as they can read and interpret instructions also.

After the second week with my new group, Gunner Day asked if I knew of any good reliable men that might fit in and be a credit to the Intelligence Section. "I think that I could recommend two, Gunner." I said. "One, Harlan Radtke is good at writing and art and would be helpful in sketching. Then, Marvin Sheppard would be and excellent choice as well." I proceeded to tell him what I knew of the two men and of our being placed together, since joining the Marines. Whether my recommendation had any bearing, I'll never know, but both Radtke and Sheppard were interviewed and became a very valuable part of our group.

For a period of time, I thought that my God had forsaken me, however now that the three of us had been reunited, it was like the sun was starting to shine again. One day, while going through unit locker boxes that had been crated, since leaving Guadalcanal, we found a "Thompson Submachine Gun". "Where did this come from?" I asked. Gunner spoke-up. "Kenneth Clark packed this away some months ago." We were told that shot guns had been a choice of weapons for some officers, Major Crowe being one. We took the submachine gun to the firing range a few times, and was amazed that this 45 caliber weapon made you feel like you were trying to shoot at a target while mounted on a bucking bronco.

The Combat Intelligence Section was considered to be a part of Headquarters Company, yet we operated as a separate entity. Our scouts were assigned to the various Company Commanders, and would often go into the valley and nearby mountain areas for long daylight or midnight to dawn hikes. Often, the rest of our section would take these hikes with them during night activity. The long night walks took us through ice cold mountain streams, over or under barbed wire fences, and through herds of sheep on grazing land. The nights were often without moonlight and with early morning fog that was so thick you held on to the man in front of you, or get lost. The New Zealand ranchers were well compensated by the U.S. Government, for our trespassing.

It was now June of 1943 and Roland D. Wilsey and John Bergdoll were added to our team. We were now fourteen in number and had been told that our group size would probably be no larger than fifteen, when complete. We entertained ourselves by going to the outdoor movies, as soon as it was dark enough to show on the screen, or go to the flicks or tavern in Paekakariki. Then there was our base PX (Post Exchange) and recreational building. There were occasions when a couple of us might sneak over to the food storage area, while the cooks were at the outdoor movie and confiscate a few steaks and eggs to cook on the flat top of our oil heaters, using our mess gear as a skillet. Others might furnish the coffee, bread and other items to provide our cozy tent with a late night snack, which always tasted good during these winter nights of June.

One day I entered our tent in a happy carefree mood, and upon seeing Marvin Sheppard, I burst out with "EI KIE MALINGY", Sheppard replied with. "EI KIE MALINGY". A startled look appeared on Quinton Adams face and he look at both of us and inquired. "Do you guys know what you just said?" "Sure," I replied. "in the Samoan language it's like a greeting or something to that effect." Adams grinned, then asked. "Where did you first hear it?" We proceeded to tell him about our encounter with the young boys diving for coins in Pago Pago Harbor. "Listen," He said. "I was stationed on Samoa for several months, and what those boys were trying to tell you Marines wasn't what you thought it was. You fellows were tossing them nickels, dimes and quarters and they expected more. During peacetime the cruise ships used to dock at Pago Pago, and the wealthy passengers aboard would toss the Polynesian boys fifty cent pieces and silver dollars. What they were saying to you was "EAT S--T, YOU CHEAP MARINES", so your interpretation was wrong." Quinton had just let the air out of our balloon, then after a second or two, all three of us laughed until our sides hurt. I would never forget, how we had been fooled by the Samoan phrase that we thought had a wonderful and special meaning.

If Radtke couldn't be found around sleeping quarters, then there was a good chance of finding him sketching at the PX or recreation hall, with a Camel cigarette in his hand to be lit or thrown away. Many times I would criticize Dutch for just lighting up, taking no more than two puffs and then tossing an almost un-smoked cigarette. Camels, Lucky Strikes and Chesterfields were the most popular brands. Raleighs was a brand you might smoke if nothing else was available, and we tried to save these to give to the enemy.

Dutch was also fond of candy, and one day while he sank his teeth into a Snicker Bar the heavy caramel removed his prominent front tooth. He looked a little different now when we tried to get him to grin, but he didn't see anything funny about it. Dutch scraped together some money and had a Wellington dentist refasten one in for him, at a cost of less that ninety-five American dollars. He must have went to an excellent dentist as I never heard of him having any further problems.

Near the first part of July, an enterprising "Gyrine" joined a partnership with some local citizen and established an "American Styled" hamburger stand outside our camp gates. The first week it was new and business was good, the second week the Marines didn't like the taste of mutton mixed with the beef and their business declined sharply. After the second week, they started serving real beef and the business flourished.

Major Crowe, around the first part of August had a brilliant idea that he discussed with his new Executive Officer, Major William C. Chamberlin. His plan was to take his Battalion into the mountain region around Foxton, for a week or so of bivouac and training.

We were transported to the Foxton area, where we bivouacked under two men "pup" tents. The tents were constructed by each marine furnishing his half of camouflaged, waterproof canvas to snap or lace together to complete one tent. At night you might use a candle for light, unless you were lucky enough to have acquired a flashlight with batteries. A campfire was generally left in the middle of the grounds, to provide light and warmth to those who wanted to huddle near by.

The Company Commanders would take their troops on hikes and general training in the nearby area. Our Intelligence Section scouted the area, establishing make-believe OPs' (Observation Posts), taking notes, making sketches and making conversation with any strangers. We encountered a rancher at his home and had a very friendly talk with him. He told us of having lost a son during the war in North Africa, and that he would pray for our safe keeping. We talked about many things and we enjoyed his company as much as he enjoyed ours. He showed us how to make a lamp from an ordinary bottle, and we watched in delight, as it pleased him to show a small group of Marines something that he had learned, from his grandfather.

One evening, after we had been in the Foxton area for many days, and about three hours before darkness, we were told that early the next morning, before daybreak we would pack all our gear on our backs and begin a forced march back to the Paekakariki Camp. While in the field we had been on field rations, and were anxious for some good hot food, but we never realized how much pain and suffering we would endure before we reached the gates.

Trucks unloaded new shoes and socks for anyone wanting same. I needed new shoes, and without thinking I picked up a pair of my size with three new pair of socks. Later, I was to find that breaking-in a new pair of shoes on a long march was probably not very smart, but I had already made my choice.

Major Crowe and some of his staff had made a trip into the nearby village and had purchased some kegs of beer and a few bottles of stronger liquids which was brought to our bivouac about two hours before darkness. The announcement was made that the Major was pleased with our field training and this treat was the staffs way to show their appreciation. The beer kegs were iced and we could drink to our hearts content and enjoy the merriment of the evening, but we would still be expected to break camp and be ready to march before daybreak. A few canteen cups of good cold beer was enough to relax me, whereas I slept like a baby, that night. When reveille sounded it wasn't easy struggling in the darkness to separate our canvas tents, put on new shoes and socks, eat a can of rations, then fall into formation. Our group fell in behind Major Chamberlin and Gunner Day and headed for the major road. The coolness of the mountain morning air was enough to keep me awake and moving in an effort to keep warm. Different people have estimated the mileage between the bivouac area and camp as being between forty to sixty miles. My guess would be that it was nearer the lesser amount, however it would take us around twenty hours, a few changes of bloody socks, and the last few miles by sheer guts and "esprit de corps" pride that we all had within us.

At different intervals along our winding route, meals would be waiting for us, from the back of trucks, sometimes with hot coffee, sometimes with only sandwiches, but they were always there. We walked for an hour and then was allowed a five minute break, then we would start out again. During meal breaks we were allowed only about fifteen minutes. Sometimes we sang, marched to a cadence tune or just let our feet take one step at a time and carry our almost unconscious body, mile after mile. No one asked about the time and no one cared.

While this forced march was the brainchild of Major Crowe, it would prove and strengthen the respect and bond between the Officers and men. Major Chamberlin was the real hero on this long march, as he and the Officers under his command let it be known that they would walk the full distance. Chamberlin made the statement that he would not ask of his men what he would not do himself. With a leader like that you would follow him to hell, which we later did when we waded ashore at Tarawa.

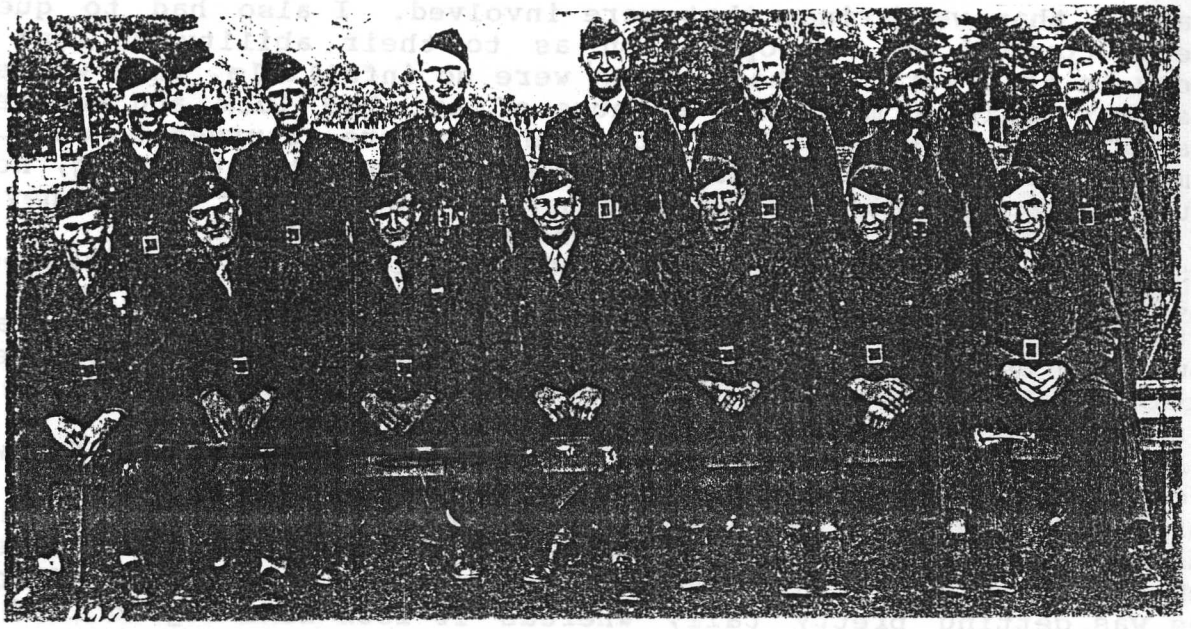
Contrary to stories that Major Crowe walked with us and had bloody feet upon returning to camp is not true. While we marched, stumbled and in some cases crawled into camp with bloody feet, we would often cuss as we watched our Battalion Commander ride in his chauffeured jeep. Once we reached the gates and found our way to our tents, dawn was starting to break, then word was passed that anyone completing the long forced march was due liberty, if they desired. Believe it or not, but some Marines did prepare themselves and caught the train to Wellington. Most of us sacked-out and felt like sleeping for 100 years.

The forced march also proved that the Navy Corpsmen (Medics) assigned to our Battalion were a very valuable part of our team. Many Marines, because of various reasons fell by the roadside and were unable to complete the full march. Major Crowe was adamant that nobody was to ride except himself, however the Corpsmen attending to those who could no longer walk were very insistent that these men be taken back to camp by truck, jeep or ambulance, and they got their way and earned the respect from all Marines in the Battalion.

Just before we made our trip into the Foxton area, group pictures had been taken and medals and decorations were awarded those who had earned same during the Guadalcanal engagement. Quinton Adams received his "Purple Heart" and Kenneth Clark was presented with a "Silver Star". Soon after the awards ceremony and group pictures, Major Chamberlin had arrived to become Crowes Executive Officer, and we were to receive the last man to fill our ranks. This young handsome individual had been enrolled at Colgate University when he also became caught-up in the war. John Kohnle joined us as we were about ready to leave on the bivouac training and although he had not had the tough conditioning that most of us had been through, he walked the full distance of the long march with us, without complaint.

Ships were arriving more frequently with mail, liberty and recreation activities were becoming much more available. We needed diversion from the routine of training in any form. The New Zealanders were avid "Rugby" fans and our Second Division had put together a good football team, that had played some exhibition games around Christchurch (on the southern island) and in Wellington. Our football team was challenged to play a game of Rugby, at the University field in Wellington, under Rugby Rules. Any Marine wanting to go was provided transportation, so many of us took the day off and went. It was a sight to see, as our team played as fine a game that could be played, yet the New Zealand team won by only one point difference. Events like this provided good public relations for the Marines, plus helping to boost our morale with this different type of entertainment.

In early September, several changes were being implemented which placed the 18,000 members of the Second Marine Division under the direct command of Vice Admiral Raymond Spruance of the Navys Fifth Fleet. Rear Admiral Richmond Turner would command the Fifth Amphibious Force, reporting to Spruance and Marine Major General Holland ("Howlin' Mad") Smith would command the Fifth Amphibious Corps, reporting to Admiral Turner.



COMBAT INTELLIGENCE SECTION
PAEKAKARIKI, NEW ZEALAND 2-8-2 , 1943
From left to right front row;
Raymond H. Simon, Kenneth W. Clark, Quinton R. Adams, John R. Day
N. O. Fort, Ed Grant, Bernard L. Riggs.
From left to right back row:
Marvin H. Sheppard, Arden O. Ostrowski, Richard W. Hutchenson,
Ole C. Wibholm Jr., Harlan C. Radtke, John R. Bergdoll,
Roland D. Wilsey.

While changes in the higher and lower echelon of command was taking place, we joined with other Regiments for some amphibious maneuvers at Hawke Bay. We boarded APAs' (Troop Transports) in Wellington and headed up the eastern coast of the larger island of New Zealand, approximately 200 miles north of Wellington. Naval Intelligence had selected this area, because they had determined that once hitting the first sandbar a Navy landing craft could lower their front ramp and men, tanks and trucks could proceed to the shore without any difficulty. Our Intelligence and planning of this training operation was so fouled-up that it is shameful to even mention that it ever occurred, however every aspect must fit chronologically into my story, or it would not be worth telling. Here is what happened.

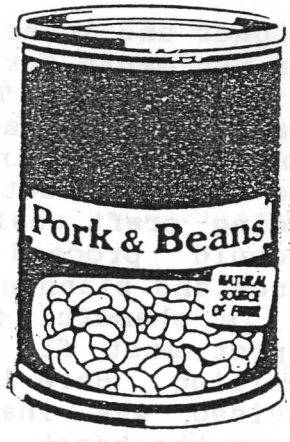
The Intelligence provided was inaccurate as there were many unexpected sandbars out from the beach. When the naval crafts hit the first sandbars, they followed instructions and lowered the front ramp, to unload men, trucks, Jeeps and tanks. The water was so deep in some of these areas that the men and equipment went completely under water. In addition, the weather on this day wasn't in our favor, as the ocean waves were choppy and heavy swells were forming. Marines descending on rope ladders from the side of the ship onto the landing crafts were caught in ocean swells causing some Marines to be crushed when getting caught between the two vessels. On this unfortunate amphibious maneuvers we lost some good men and equipment. Later we were able to recover some of this equipment, however the tide took some tanks out to where they might stay forever. That same evening we listened to the "Tokyo Rose" broadcast from Japan and she told the story of our fiasco and named the number of Marines that we had lost, this day.

Now it made me wonder how "Tokyo Rose" knew more about this operation than we Marines that were involved. I also had to question those in command of our operation as to their ability to lead us to victory in this war, if their plans were so infallible, then why such a disastrous training mission? Because of our bad luck and weather the ships brought us back to Wellington and we were returned to camp. We had many unanswered questions concerning our aborted training, however because Officers would stick together, we the "peons" would never be told the full story, or who, if anyone was to be blamed.

Some of the equipment salvaged and lost was reconditioned and replaced. We were aware that our remaining days here were being shortened as much activity was taking place in preparation of leaving. We surveyed our needs for summer clothing and equipment and were told to pack winter clothing in our private "sea bag" and make ready for departure on short notice.

As packing was taking place I noticed that while a lot of unwanted articles were being tossed, a favorite snack was being trashed. One favorite item of food was Campbells' Pork an Beans. We purchased the beans at the PX and kept in our tents with soda crackers to have as a snack any time other food wasn't available. The pile of discarded beans was getting pretty tall, whereas it look like a good load for a heavy truck.

I could not see all this food going to waste, suppose at our next location we had no PX and we had hunger pains! With this thought in my mind I scrounged around and found a second "sea bag" and loaded it until it became heavy. After sealing and putting my identification on it, I was now ready to journey anywhere that the Red Cross or Navy had plans to send me. I did not have a long wait, because during the last week in October, 1943 we were given orders to break camp, as our ship was in the harbor.



The Second Marine Division, with attachments, started loading ships in the Wellington Harbor on the 28th of October, 1943. The former members of the 16th Replacement Battalion, who had been my shipmates on the Lurline were now scattered throughout the Division. They were getting ready to take a voyage that their mothers would have forbidden, had she known of the miles to be covered, number of sons to be lost and the hardship and suffering that these sons would endure before the wars end. These men as well as replacements that joined the division later were now placing their lives in the hands of their "GOD-Almighty", and the best known trained military leaders that the United States had to offer. Hereafter, life or death decisions would be theirs to call, and it would be those under their command to carry out, whether it be right or wrong.

By late night, October 31st, all ships had been loaded and near dawn, November 1, the propellers of our APA-6 (Troop Transport) the "Heywood" started turning and easing us out of the harbor. The Eighth Marine Regiment reinforced including Navy corpsmen, was sailing with Major Henry Pierson "Jim" Crowe in command. We learned that the Heywood had transported Marines to France, during the first World War, in 1917. This was nothing like the luxury cruise ship that had brought us to New Zealand, but by now we had learned to adapt to our surroundings and environment, If we didn't then our chance for survival was diminished. There were eleven other fully loaded APAs' in our "flotilla", they were the Zeilin, Middleton, Biddle (with Regimental Command), Lee, Monrovia, Sheridan, LaSalle, Doyen, Harris, Bell and Ormsby. Tanks were loaded onto AKAs' (modified ships to carry amphibious vehicles and heavy equipment), the Thurba, Virgo and Bellatrix. All ships had screws (propellers) turning and were following one another, like ducklings following their mother.

Many of us crowded the rails to get a final glimpse of Wellington and to say our silent goodbye. We overheard Quinton Adams say, "TOFA" as he stood nearby, having the same thoughts as the rest of us. Then he glanced in our direction and explained. "That in Samoan language means goodbye." We thought that "TOFA" was a proper salute, so we accepted that.

Leaving New Zealand by going through the Cook Strait, we headed north into the Tasman Sea. We still had no knowledge as to any destination, but we knew that we were enroute to engage the enemy in combat on some island, and for many of us it would be our first encounter. Rumors became a sort of pastime game of guessing and Wake Island was the name heard most, or referred to. We felt crowded on this ship and as the weather began to warm, tempers had a short fuse, and the veterans of Guadalcanal with malaria were again being plagued with the symptoms of chills and fever. The Navy Corpsmen provided them with medication, comfort and attended to their needs.

We were not accustomed to salt water showers, however we would learn that it was either this or do without. Washing my hair with regular bath soap and trying to make suds with sea salt water was an impossible task. Fresh water had to be conserved for drinking purposes only, because of the large number of men on board.

This voyage to meet and engage the enemy in combat would be the first encounter for many of us and in order for us to keep our minds from thinking to much about what would was ahead, NCOs' had orders to keep us as busy with chores, as much as possible. We cleaned weapons, had rifle inspections, and went topside for calisthenics. In our free time we wrote letters, played cards, read, tell tall stories and watch day by day as new vessels joined in our convoy making it grow in size quite a bit larger than that which left New Zealand.

On November 2nd, Dutch Radtke started sketching while we both were sitting upright on our tightly stretched canvas bunks. Looking at me Dutch said. "Sit still Riggs, just be patient and keep looking in the direction that you are now." It wasn't till then that I realized that he was trying to capture my youthful and handsome face on paper. Well, I had nothing else to do, so to pacify my brother Marine I followed his instructions. After a lengthy period of time my neck was getting stiff and I was also curious as to know if he was drawing a cartoon or a likeness that I might recognize. Finally he said that I could move and relax, as he was finished. He then handed me a pencil sketched likeness and said, "Here is something you might want to send to Marie." He did a splendid job and I was proud of his artistic talent.

We had to wash our clothes at various intervals and we found that by tieing a long rope to some "fatigues" and stuffing the legs and body with dirty clothes, we would tie off the legs and lower the stuffed "fatigues" over the side with a long rope until it was in the water, dragging and splashing against the hull of the ship. This method washed as well as bleached our clothes, however if we were not careful or left them dangling overnight, then it was most likely that there would be nothing left at the end of the rope. If the sea or sharks hadn't taken them, perhaps another Marine did.

Due to the extreme heat as we again neared the Equator, we spent as much time on the open deck as possible. After leaving the Tasman Sea we were now in the southwest of the Pacific Ocean, and our convoy was averaging about 14 nautical knots per hour or converted to about 16 miles per hour. This does not seem to be any faster than what a good bicycle could have carried us, but at a steady pace we were clipping 386 miles every 24 hours. On the night of November 6, we were nearing the Efate Island, which is a part of, but near the southern end of the New Hebrides chain of islands. Then on November 7, we were there and our ship dropped anchor in Mele Bay.

Unknown to us at the time was the background of planning that had previously taken place by the Navy and Marine Corp Command, which dictated that we be at this island at this precise time. This was part of a plan called "OPERATION GALVANIC", a code name for an idea conceived by Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander-in Chief Pacific. His plan was to use the Central Pacific islands as stepping stones to the mainland of Japan, but first he wanted U.S. Marines to be involved in an initial limited "trial run" landing operation before pursuing the more distant, and what he thought would be the more difficult islands. His JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff) concurred with this idea and gave the plan the code name.

The planning for this "test run" was conducted by the Navys' Fifth Fleet, the Fifth Amphibious Force and the Marines Fifth Amphibious Corps, with Vice Admiral Raymond Spruance in command. So, while the Marines were going to be asked to attempt an amphibious assault on some island, it was going to be under the direction and command of the Navy "Brass".

There were many disagreements between the Marine and Navy "Brass", with the plan of "OPERATION GALVANIC". The Marine Commanders wanted to save Marine lives, and the Navy was more concerned about trying to save face from their historical and never to be forgotten miscalculated blunder of being caught off-guard at Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941. Marine Major General Holland M. ("Howlin' Mad") Smith, Commander of the Fifth Amphibious Corps was dead set against the choice of the island, selected by the Navy to be taken. Colonel Merritt Edson, Chief of Staff to Major General Julian C. Smith (CG,2d MarDiv.) and other Marine Commanders agreed.

When the Marine planners argued their case and lost to the higher authority of the Navy, they were dissatisfied but agreed to comply with the wishes of Vice Admiral Raymond A. Spruance. They put their efforts toward making the best plans for getting their committed Marines ashore as safely as they could.

For the proposed amphibious assault the Division had only 75 LVT-1s (tracked landing vehicles) which some had been used as support vehicles on Guadalcanal. Many of the Marine planners knew that more existing vehicles had to be equipped with heavier plated armor if the assault had any chance to be successful. The Marine Generals knew that 100 newer model LVT-2, equipped with heavy armor and better fire power, were presently available in San Diego, awaiting shipment. Lt. Col. David M. Shoup suggested that the older units be modified with better weapons and heavier armor for protection to the troop compartment. His suggestion was approved and the modification carried out.

Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner took the position that the present 75 LVT-1 vehicles were sufficient, but Col. Edson, Lt. Col. Shoup and Maj. Gen. Holland Smith took another position and insisted that unless the 100 newer LVT-2 vehicles were made available for this upcoming operation, then they would not commit their Marines. Admiral Turner did an about face and gave permission for the newer units to be shipped from San Diego. There was one major problem, as this meant that they would have to be shipped on slow moving LSTs (tank landing ships) which could only average about 8 nautical knots per hour, and cover about 228 miles per day. In addition they would require a separate convoy and the time factor for their arrival would mean that they would have to be loaded and taken directly to the assault area for our interception and use at that time. Amphibious training in the Hebrides would have to be with the modified LVT-1 and the newer models enroute from the States could not be used until the day of the assault.

Major General Julian Smith, Commander of the Second Marine Division, was very much opposed to the Navy plans, and after his initial plan was rejected by the Navy, plus having been told that his Second Division Marines would be the full source of the assault with the Sixth Marine Regiment being kept in reserve, he felt that the Navy was ordering his troops into a situation, whereas he had no control. He also knew that the survival chances for his men was small, if the Navy plans were implemented. Considering his options, which were "nil", he asked Maj. Gen. Holland Smith to absolve him of any responsibility for this landing plan. General Smith granted his request.

The aforementioned was some of the planning background that had taken place and was responsible for our being in this part of New Hebrides and now anchored in Mele Bay at this particular time in history. We were here to partake in our last amphibious training before actually going into battle. We still had not been informed as to our final destination.

From now until November 11, Combat Team 2, comprising the Second Battalion, Second Regiment (2-2); Third Battalion, Second Regiment (3-2); and the Second Battalion, Eighth Regiment (2-8 with Major H.P. Crowe commanding) would climb down the rope ladders fastened to the side of the ships onto "Higgins" boats or "Amtracs" (LVT-1s modified) for practice landings on some of the islands deserted hot sandy beaches. Sometimes the Marines or a native would climb trees to dislodge some coconuts, from which we would drink the cool milk, inside. We knew that the islands also produced sugar cane, bananas and other crops, the coconuts were all that we ever came in contact with. We enjoyed being off ship during the hot humid days where we could take shelter under palm trees or swim in the clear water to keep cool.

Aboard ship it was hot, crowded and uncomfortable. To stay below deck we sweltered, so most Marines stayed topside for any breeze that might blow their way, but this caused an overcrowding and Marine Guards had orders to patrol the decks and always make sure that there was a passage way open for the ships crew. All that we heard one afternoon was. "Move on Mac, you can't stand here." or "Mac, you've got to move as you can't sit there." After shifting from spot to spot one Marine couldn't take the hassling anymore and shouted, "TO HELL WITH IT", and then he jumped overboard. Several others started cheering and followed him in the water below. Several Officers were aware of our situation and joined in the cheering. We were anchored not to far from the sandy shoreline and the Marines were left free to swim and release the tension from their system. For those of us that stayed on the ship the episode provided a little laughter and broke the monotony of the day.

We would spend almost a week around Mele Bay, and while there a typhoon hit the islands, however we rode out the storm. Then one day we were informed that we were leaving around dawn, the next morning. Around 0600 military time on November 13, 1943 the old APA-6 (Heywood) hoisted anchor, with the 8th and 18th Regiments aboard and headed north once out of the bay, we headed north while still in the South Pacific. We were not alone as the other ships in our convoy was scattered, in front, behind or on our port and starboard side.

By midmorning we observed an armada of heavy vessels leaving Havannah Harbor, in the Hebrides, to join with our northern bound convoy. We became excited and our eyes became focused on the old battleship "Maryland" as it passed by, it was being followed by two other battleships, the Colorado and the Tennessee; the heavy cruiser, the Portland; three light cruisers, the Mobile, Birmingham and Santa Fe; in addition there were nine destroyers, and two mine sweepers, the Pursuit and Requisite. The "Ashland", an LSD (Landing Ship Dock) had also arrived from Noumea, New Caledonia with fourteen General Sherman Tanks in its hold, and "C" (Charley) Company Marines of the Fifth Amphibious Corps.

For those of us who had never been in action before, we were overwhelmed with the awesome site of the armada surrounding us. For the veterans, it was the largest gathering of naval vessels that they had ever witnessed. Major Crowe had called all of his Company Commanders together soon after we had pulled anchor this morning and entertained them with a large map and a lecture as to the island that the Navy had selected for us to assault. He gave instructions as to who would be involved and details of what he knew about the defense of the island including all intelligence that was known. The code name was "Helen".

During the day we watched as we neared a large uninhabited island mass , in the Hebrides, that had a large and high natural limestone structure. We learned that it was called "Monument Rock" and as the Battleships passed by, they fired practice salvos at the exposed cliffs. I can not verify as to any damage they may have caused or whether they hit their intended target, as my eyes were fixed on the black powder smoke coming from the big guns, and my ears picked up the sound of the tremendous explosive charges as they were fired. For twenty minutes or more it sounded as though God was sending thunder charges out of the sky.

After Gunner Day had been fully briefed, he called our Intelligence Section into his small office stateroom, and with the map on the wall, he provided us with all of the intelligence that had been provided him. Before leaving New Zealand Gunner Day had all of the maps and military information brought to his quarters and locked up under Marine Guard.

A historic event was taking shape, as this would be the first time that an amphibious force of this kind and size ever assembled for the purpose of making a direct assault on an enemy held island. While TARAWA is an Atoll with a series of small islands, it is considered to be a part of the Gilbert Island Group and was under British control before the Japanese invaded and claimed it. The small island that was soon to become a temporary morgue for the many Marines that would lose their lives there, had the name of Betio (Bititu). Since "D" Day (day of assault) had been established for early morning November 20, 1943, we counted today as being "D" minus 6.

Gunner Day went over all of the data with each one of his group, explaining our individual and committed responsibilities. Radtke, Kohnle, Clark, Wibholm, Hutchenson, Ostrowski and a few others would be assigned and go ashore with various Company Commanders to serve as scouts or Battalion Intelligence liaison.

My assignment for the next few days was to watch over the maps and make sure that all battalion Officers and responsible NCOs were provided with a reduced 11½ by 19 inch size copy of a "Landing Information Sheet" with a sketch map of "Helen" shown on the reverse.

LANDING INFORMATION SHEET

Instructions:

a. This sheet will be filled out prior to D-day by each NCO or enlisted man in charge of a detail of men. Each officer is responsible for issuing, and supervising its preparation for all their subordinate leaders.

b. Use the sketch map on the back for pertinent locations.

1. My detail's debarkation station and time to be there?

2. My assigned boat number?

3. What equipment does my detail take ashore besides individual equipment?

4. Direction (azimuth) of movement to beach:

5. Point my detail should land on beach (mark on sketch)?

6. Initial objective, zone of action, assembly area, or destination for my unit ashore (mark on sketch)?

7. Names of officer(s) or NCO(s) under whom my detail will operate?

8. Where and when am I to report to them?

9. What unit is to be on my right?

10. What unit is to be on my left?

11. What reports do I have to make, and to whom?

12. Other remarks pertinent to my detail?

For this operation, Rear Admiral Richard Turner placed his deputy, Rear Admiral Harry Hill in command of the Fifth Amphibious Force, then before leaving the Hebrides, Admiral Hill moved his flag and staff aboard the Battleship Maryland

Soon after leaving the Hebrides, our ship (Heywood) lost its steering and or rudder control, which allowed us to go nowhere, except in a large circle. Normally while in a convoy the others would proceed and we would face the Pacific as a "sitting duck" for an enemy submarine, however a destroyer dropped from the convoy to assist us until the old APA-6 had corrected the problem. Escorted by the destroyer we headed for the convoy under "full steam" and found a space to settle in, which placed us with only two ships following behind on both the port and starboard sides.

We were still in a hot humid zone and many Marines were taking advantage of sleeping on the open decks at night, as it was a little cooler. Every time that we were on a ship we had to contend with "General Quarter" drills that could come unexpected at anytime day or night. These drills consisted of the Navy crew going to their assigned gun positions and the Marines being transported were to put on life jackets, and stand by in selected groups at assigned locations, for the purpose of being ready to abandon ship in case it became necessary from any enemy submarine actions. One morning at daybreak words coming from the PA (public address) system blasted loudly. "ABANDON SHIP--Abandon Ship, Now Hear This ABANDON SHIP", then there was a short pause, then the words. "This is a Drill". For those of us who were sleeping soundly in our bunks below and be awakened to the words, "ABANDON SHIP", was real scary. Still being half asleep we didn't have time to clear our heads, we just scrambled into some clothes, grabbed our life jackets and headed for our preassigned station. Reaching topside near the fantail there was much excitement and commotion when we arrived. "What's going on?" I was asking anyone. "Two Gyenes (Marines) were sleeping out here on deck and when the PA system woke them with, "ABANDON SHIP--Abandon Ship", one jumped overboard, then his buddy followed!" Was a reply that came from an NCO, nearby. This day luck was in the favor of the two Marines, as the two APAs to our rear were notified and they swerved to rescue them from a near disaster. While in convoy, no ship would have been allowed to reverse course for any rescue.

During this period in history, radios, transmitters and public address systems operated with what was known as "vacuum tubes". This was an electron tube that had all of the air removed, and could be used as a amplifier or a rectifier. Once a system was turned on no sound would transmit until the vacuum tubes had warmed-up and this took several seconds. I came to the conclusion that the PA operator had started talking as soon as he had turned the system on and then we only heard the later part of his announcement.

As D-day was approaching, the majority of us were attending group meetings with chaplains of our chosen denomination, or busy writing and thinking of our loved ones at home. One Marine was overheard saying. "I wonder why we never see Chaplains ever sitting with the enlisted men or eating chow with us?" Another Marine replied. "Listen, these guys will preach to you that all men are created equal, but they have all accepted Commissions, and they might hold your hand while you cry after reading "Dear John letters", however they are going to eat and sleep where its most comfortable." "Couldn't they just enlist as a common enlisted man," Someone asked. "and still serve as a Chaplain?" There was silence, no one answered. These were the kind of thoughts and conversations that were taking place, as we neared D-day.

My thoughts turned to my family and my religious up-bringing. I had always felt that a persons choice of religious beliefs were a very personal thing, and one should never be critical, but respectful of others who believed differently. Marie and I attended and were married in the Methodist Church, because we started there in our youth and as the years went by, we felt comfortable with this choice and never had any reason to question any other. I had the conviction that my God was always with me and that I could always communicate my thoughts anytime that I felt the need. I will admit that by the wars end, I started believing that perhaps there could be one or more "Guardian Angels" watching over each of us while we are on this earth.

Since D-day was nearing, I'm sure that I was not alone in having these thoughts or reaching out to my God, and at the same time, search my soul and wonder how many of us would have to walk through HELL before we went to HEAVEN.

As the convoy sliced its way through the bluish green water, we had been accompanied by whales and porpoises since leaving New Zealand and as we watched them play alongside our ship, we were also entertained by "flying fish" that would rise several feet out of the water to sail or fly for a distance of twenty to thirty yards before disappearing. Then at night we could look over the railings and watch the waves bounce against the ships hull, giving off a spectacular phosphorescent glow. These things helped to distract our minds from what the future had in store for us.

We now had arrived at "D minus 2", and we were edgy and nervous, as we wondered about what we might encounter. Fifty five percent of us had never been in battle and therefore could not comprehend the horror of death or the slaughtering of men. The veterans suggested that we waterproof any valuables, photos, watches, cigarettes and any other items that we wanted to protect and only carry ashore the bare necessities. This would include toilet tissue, water, rations, extra underwear, socks and poncho. Other items would be left on ship for our return, or it would catch up with us later. Condoms were obtained from the PX , Medical Center or from a Navy Corpsman to cover watches, matches, cigarettes, billfolds and other small items. In addition to my regular backpack (haversack), which was full I had to fasten my map pack to the backpack. The map pack contained extra small maps, a drawing board with overlays, colored pencils, tape and message books. I would also have my M-1 Garand rifle over my shoulder and a cartridge belt around my middle with packs of cartridge clips. I was afraid that once all of this gear was placed on my shoulders and back I might tumble backwards, and never be able stand erect again without assistance.

Vice Admiral Raymond A. Spruance arrived on the cruiser Indianapolis to join our convoy, then later we were in sight of the U.S. Army task force that was headed for the Makin Islands. The two tasks forces made it appear that every ship in the world had gathered in this part of the Pacific Ocean.

Within a few hours our convoy turned to head west in the direction of the Gilbert Islands and the Army task force was lost from sight as they continued north. At "D-day minus 1" we sailed just north but parallel to the Equator where it was hot and humid. Now, in this climate we received one of the biggest "Snow Jobs" in military history. The Intelligence given to us by well meaning superiors was that with all of the previous strikes on this small island by Army Bombers, Naval Aircraft, Cruisers and Battleships during the past few weeks, any live Japanese remaining would be so dazed by the shelling, that we the "shoe leather" for the Navy could go ashore an expect little resistance.

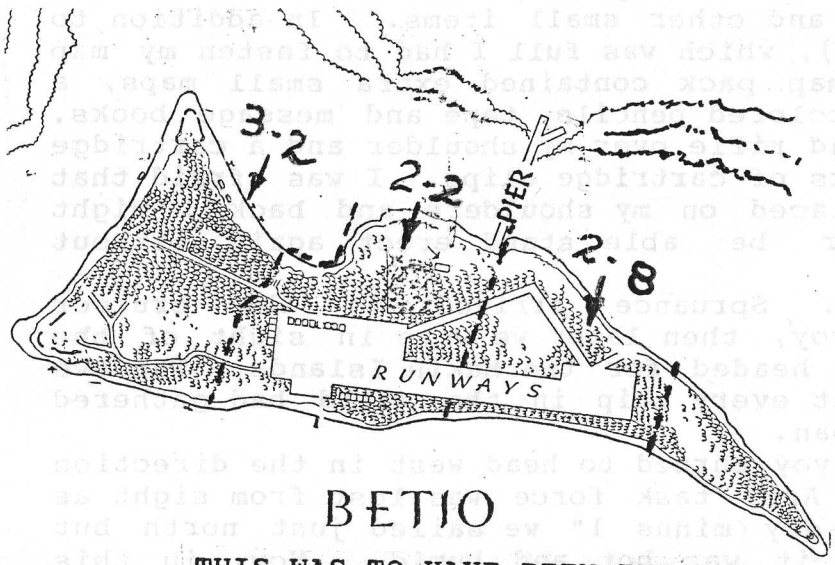
If the Officers wanted to believe this "cock and bull" story that Navy Intelligence was feeding all of us, let them, but for the rest of us enlisted personnel that were going to do their bidding, we were young but not dumb.

The Navy was kind enough to treat us to a pre-Thanksgiving dinner which was as good as could be expected aboard ship. This was to be like the "Last Supper" for about a fifth of our group. It was a good meal and we did appreciate it. However, the next morning (D-day) before leaving the ship, the Officers were served their standard "steak and eggs" while we "grunts" had our usual beans and ketchup.

Still at "D-day minus one" every small detail had to be double checked to make certain everyone was ready and knew exactly what their assignment was to be the following day. Maps had been given to all persons required to have them. Their landing beaches had been defined and noted on the map as well as all known enemy bunkers, storehouses and the islands reinforced Command Post.

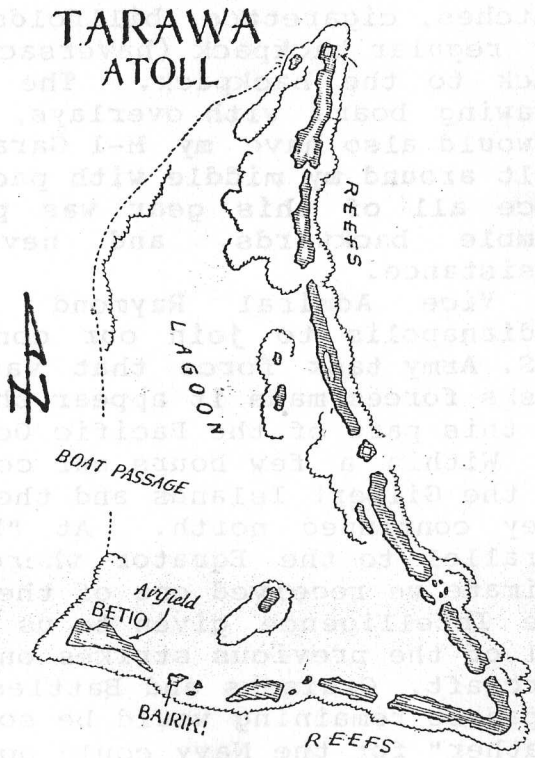
The TARAWA ATOLL is made up of a series of small islands protected by an outer reef and a forty two mile long lagoon that is sixteen miles wide at its most southern end. The atoll is shaped like a reversed "L" with Betio ("Helen") on the southwestern tip of the tail. At the extreme northern tip was a leper colony (asylum) that had been maintained by the British, before the Japanese invasion. The only opening for small craft and ships was through one passageway into the lagoon that was located about four miles directly north of Betio.

The three major initial assault areas selected were on the northern side of the island identified as "Red Beach 1, 2, and 3." The Japanese had mined the southern beaches as they did not expect that we would be so foolish as to make our assault from the lagoon side which had a reef that extended 500 yards (about a third of a mile) from shore. The initial plan was for each landing team to land and fight their way directly across the island, reaching and securing all area in between the northern and southern side.



BETIO

THIS WAS TO HAVE BEEN THE ORIGINAL PLAN



Combat Team 2 had been selected to make the initial assault on the "Red Beaches", with their three Battalions (reinforced). The Third Battalion (3/2) Commanded by Major John Schoetell would be responsible for Red Beach 1, which would extend from the northwestern tip of the island to about 600 feet past the western end of the airfield.

The Second Battalion (2/2) Commanded by Lt. Col. Herbert K. Amey was assigned to secure Red Beach 2, which would extend from the eastern end of Red Beach 1 to the main pier. The pier, starting about midway of the airfield extended north from the shore approximately 500 yards (about a third of a mile) into the lagoon where the protective reef ended and deeper water began.

Our Second Battalion of the Eighth Marine Regiment (2/8) under Major Henry Pierson "Jim" Crowes Command would assault Red Beach 3, which extended from the main pier east to the end of the airfield, where the Japanese Headquarters was located within a heavy fortified reinforced concrete and coconut log bunker. The initial assault on the island was going to be made by Marines loading into the modified LVT-1s and the newer LVT-2s, because they were amphibious tractors that would not be stopped if the tide in the inner reef was low. Their "tank type" traction would let them proceed in water, track in coral and sand, and allow those fortunate ones to reach the shore.

There was a Special Landing Team aboard the APA-3 (Zeilin) that would be the first group to go ashore. Their assignment was to precede the other landing crafts to the end of the main pier and clear this and the surrounding approach area of as many Japs and weapons as they possibly could, before the three main beacheads were assaulted. This team was a hand picked Scout-Sniper Platoon which was under the joint command of First Lt. William D. Hawkins and Lt. Alan Leslie who would be in charge of the accompanying engineers with their explosive charges and flame throwers.

Also on the Zeilin was Robert Sherrod, an internationally known and respected correspondent, with Time Incorporated. Mr. Sherrod would land and supply the world, in his words, a first hand account of what was happening; "Not only what happened on Tarawa, but also what men felt under the stress of the most violent battle that Americans have known." "These things have to be felt to be fully realized. And certainly, no one who has not been there can imagine the overwhelming, inhuman smell of five thousand dead who are piled and scattered in an area of less than one square mile." Mr. Sherrod would spend his first day ashore in our Second Battalion Headquarters, with Major Crowe and our Intelligence Section. After the battle and his return to the States, he would write his first book, "TARAWA - the story of a battle", which would immortalize every person who landed or died there. In his book he used the code name "Blue Fox" to identify the transport Zeilin and "Base X" to identify the Hebrides. Code names were used when he wrote his book due to the fact that we were still at war.

If anyone had known what the next four days had in store for us, I'm sure that we would have embraced one another, and written some long last letters home with signatures of "goodbye" and each would have made peace with his maker. Radtke, Simon, Clark, Kohnle, Grant, Wilsey, Adams, Ostrowski, Bergdoll, Fort, Hutchenson, Wibholm, Day, Sheppard and myself had all been assigned our respective groups to go ashore with. Radtke, Clark, Kohnle, Wibholm, Ostrowski and a few others were to ride in with some of the Company Commanders, Day would stay with Major Crowe, and Sheppard and I were scheduled to follow the LVTs in "Higgin" boats piloted by navy coxswains.

Very few Marines will admit to sleeping, but very little on this night before "D" day and even then our day started on APA-6 (Heywood)

at around 0130 hour (military time) on D-day morning, November 20, 1943. The invasion assault would be a joint effort of "NAVAL TASK FORCE 53", using the Second Marine Division including attached Navy Corpsmen to land and face the heavily fortified Japanese stronghold, with the Navy and Coast Guard for support.

We had been told that the island had previously been bombed for many weeks prior to our landing, and that the tide would be high enough for even the small draft "Higgin" boats to be driven over the 500 yard extended reef to unload troops near the beach. One of the last Intelligence reports was that the island had been fortified with Japanese Landing Force Troops and Korean laborers, their troops were a counterpart to the U.S. Marines. The report also stated that the Japs now anticipated our landing on the lagoon side and had built a barricade of coral boulders across the reef, linked by steel cables.

With all of the Navy Armada several miles off-shore the Japs fired the first shot by sending a red star cluster in our direction at 0441 hour and before 0510 hour they started firing their big eight inch guns, which they had captured from the British at Singapore. Our transports (APAs) started unloading Marine assault teams into "Higgin" boats at 0300 hour and as soon as the troops were in the smaller wave bouncing crafts, the transports headed north to escape enemy fire. Some in Higgin boats would transfer later to the new LVTs-2.

Remembering the Naval Intelligence at Hawke Bay and the snafu landing losses we suffered, I did not have any faith in the Intelligence given us before we were dropped in these small assault crafts. First, Navy experts (Officers-as the Navy does not acknowledge any of less rank to have brains) promised at least five feet of water at the end of the main pier and reefs edge, which would, if true, allow Higgin boats to go over the reef and land troops close to shore.

A New Zealand Reserve Officer who had been on these islands before the Japs invaded, warned that there would be less than four feet of water over the edge of the reef and with a sudden shift of the tide it could be even less on this day. It was acknowledged that this low (neap) tide would be over by November 22 and the water level would rise, however Admiral Turner made the decision to go ahead with the operation on this date as scheduled as his Intelligence had informed him that for each day the assault was delayed, there was a danger of a west wind driving the waves, making it too high for a landing and would prevent the heavy equipment from reaching the shore at the needed time. He was to be proved wrong.

The first Amtracs (LVTs) carrying assault troops had been scheduled to land at 0830 hour, but do to the heavy Jap guns pounding shells at our troops and ships as much as five and one half miles from their position, our Command kept our units circling for a later "H" hour(landing time).

Navy planes were supposed to drop 1500 tons of bombs commencing at 0542 hour, but due to another "Navy Snafu" and botched communications the carrier based planes arrived at 0620 hour, with their Hellcats, Dauntless and Avengers making their runs they dropped only 500 tons. This was only a third of what Col. Shoup had been promised. It was an unforgettable air-show, while they were overhead. Our Navy started firing long range shells around 0622 hour, sending 3000 tons of screaming metal at every part of the island and ceased firing after ninety minutes. While the naval guns were deadly, many passed over this flat island, where shattered palm trees were the highest item above the crab infested sand. It took a lot of shelling before the Battleships silenced the large eight inch Singapore gun, that up to now had given our Navy so much trouble.

The Battleships Colorado and Maryland, having silenced the big eight inch guns on shore, allowed other ships to move in closer to fire onto the island. It also allowed the minesweepers Requisite and Pursuit to enter the lagoon channel and clear away any mines that had been planted, they had made their way in at 0700 hour. The Japs, using whatever heavy guns they had left, opened fire on the two minesweepers. As soon as this happened the destroyers Dashiell and Ringgold entered the lagoon to support and protect the minesweepers. The Ringgold took three hits, but remained fighting.

The minesweepers radioed reports of no mines being encountered, however do to the unavoidable delay General Julian Smith re-scheduled "H"-hour for 0900. Marines had been riding in Amtracs and Higgin boats since 0300 hour (3:am) staying together by circling in holding patterns. Now that the time for the first assault wave had been set, the Amtracs, each carrying 24 to 26 Marines proceeded to the line of departure, which was about three and one half miles out with the rest of us in Higgin (Higgin is the name of a boat builder) boats following directly behind.

The Second Regiment Scout and Sniper Platoon Specialists lead the assault and reached their objective at 0855 hour, but not without difficulty because the Japs were firing every type of weapon that they had available. As soon as the pier was reached they became aware that the tide was out and the reef was not covered with enough water to allow the Higgin boats to go any farther than the edge of the reef which began at the end of the pier. This would only allow the Amtracs a chance to crawl over the reef and attempt to reach the shore, however it meant that the supporting Marines and equipment following in the Higgin boats would be forced to depart from the front unloading ramps and walk and carry their equipment a third of a mile in waist high water toward the enemy, while being shot at. Word was received that Navy Intelligence was wrong again, when the first group of LVTs were less than two miles from the island.

Several snafus' took place on this hellish Saturday morning. The final strafing run by carrier aircraft was 45 minutes late. Col. Shoup had requested and was promised tons of "Daisey Cutter" bombs to be dropped just minutes before any troops reached shore, AND THE NAVY DID NOT DELIVER. Then Admiral Hill ordered his ships to cease fire when the first assault waves of Amtracs were still twenty minutes from the beach. This gave the Japs plenty of time to regroup and man their heavy machine guns and direct their anti-aircraft guns in a horizontal plane to destroy our incoming LVTs and Higgin boats, and provide the Japs with the largest "Shooting Gallery" that the U.S. Navy could provide. This left every Marine exposed as "wingless ducks" might be in a pond or small lake, drifting toward the shore.

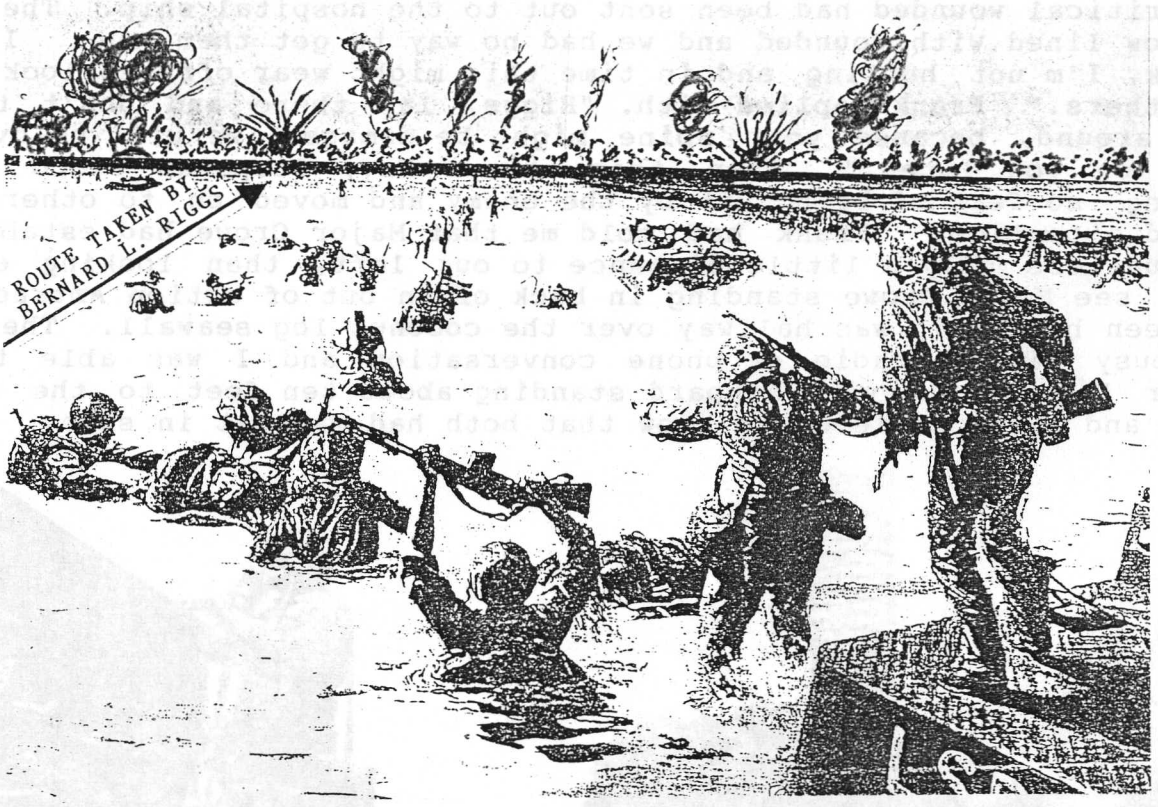
It is hard to point blame at a critical time, like this, nor should it be forgotten. Most often errors, bad judgment and Intelligence are not discovered or immediately known until the battle is over and analyzed. As in this battle many of these errors would not come to be known until Biographies of Admirals, Generals and those of lesser rank are written, as late as fifty plus years later. These were very bad mistakes that cost the lives of many American men unnecessarily. These men were friends, brothers, husbands and GOOD MARINES, who could have been here today, writing this story instead of me.

As the Amtracs made their way to the beach many were completely blown to pieces, with their men, those who did survive jumped out and if they had not yet reached the reef, they would drown in the deep water with their heavy gear taking them under, of course those that had reached the reef had a chance of survival being in waist high water.

John Kohnles LVT made it to the beach, but as he climbed out he stood facing a Jap that had a saber in hand ready to strike at him. John was caught off-guard and did not have time to protect himself, however another buddy Marine was ready and shot the Jap, saving John. There were 125 Amtracs (LVTs) used in the first assault waves this Saturday morning and those that did make it in, unloaded and went back to bring more troops and supplies ashore. Corporal Kenneth Clark had made it in with his Company Commander, but was soon hit in the shoulder which almost severed his arm. In the next three days, 90 of the 125 LVTs would be completely destroyed or put out of action.

At 0920 the Higgin boat that I was in reached the reef and the coxswain lowered the front ramp, we at first thought he was "chicken" or afraid to take us closer in, but we soon realized that his boat would not make it over the reef. Marvin Sheppard and I, John R. Cox, a Navy Pharmacist Mate 3rd Class, and a couple of Correspondents, one of which was Richard W. Johnson with United Press and Frank Filan a Photographer with Associated Press, were very much stunned, surprised and shocked as we stepped off the ramp into the waist high water and saw the island at a great distance from us and the great span of water that separated us from shore. That was the first thing that caught our attention, however we were no more than in the water until our eyes witnessed horror that one can not imagine could be real. Dead and parts of bodies were floating in the water, Amtracs and Higgin boats that had taken direct hits, whistling anti-aircraft shells flying just above our heads or exploding all around and above, and with hundreds of men wading in front or surrounding us, that was enough to scare the hell out even out of the "Devil". Heavy machine gun fire was coming from the shore and was blanketing the water like heavy raindrops and men all around were dropping faster than my eyes could move from one to another. Marvin Sheppard was by my side and yelled that he was going to make faster time and head in a certain direction, so at that moment we parted company. For every step that I took I had to push away a dead or part of a body and I was so frighten and scared that if I did not distract my eyes from witnessing this horror, I knew that I would not make it. I decided to affix my eyes on a Navy Corpsman that was directly in front of me at arms length. This helped only for a few seconds, then a loud "BOOM" rang in my ears from a millimeter shell that had hit the Corpsman direct, exploding in his body which completely disappeared. His body must also have absorbed the fragments, but the concussion threw me back several feet out of the water causing me to land on my backside under four feet of water, yet I was still holding on to my M1-Garand Rifle. I attempted to use my legs to lift my head above water, but my legs would not function and I had no feeling from my waist down. I used the rifle as a crutch to push upward allowing me to raise my head above water. Then the realization occurred to me that perhaps I had no lower body. At this point fear and being scared was replaced with an intense desire to get what was left of me to shore and find my Headquarters Company, Gunner Day and Major Crowe as I was the Battalion draftsman and I was needed, then I became a "Robot".

I held the rifle butt on the bottom of the reef and forced it to move my body forward. As the water became more shallow and I was now able to propel myself by extending my arms on the bottom "walking on my hands" while still holding on to the Government Issued (GI) rifle. In the shallow water I could see that my lower body was intact, I was in no pain and I noticed no blood, but I was concerned that my lower body would not function. Then for some unknown reason I raised my rifle to drain the barrel, then placed it back in the water!!



At this point I was able to drag my body with my hands and arms reaching the sandy coral bottom. We were assaulting Red Beach 3 that extended left of the main pier and my direction had brought me about a hundred feet or so left of the pier when I finally reached the shore. Shelling and enemy gunfire had not subsided, and as I looked around for the first time toward the reef, I witnessed a large number of Higgin boats still unloading Marines and Corpsmen from 600 to 700 yards out, and erect bodies being hit and falling silently in the water. I heard no screaming for help or from pain, yet I wanted to scream to release the frustration and mental anguish that surrounded me.

Since I had made it ashore without being hit I could not imagine how I survived not being killed or wounded as I had been one of the defenseless targets that had been openly exposed to enemy fire this morning. Then I realized that since I was only able to keep my head above water, perhaps I became less of a target than many others.

I dragged myself up until I was shielded by a seawall of coconut logs, then for some reason my hands started digging a sizeable hole (foxhole) in the sand and I rolled my body in. I soon found that I was within thirty five feet from Major Crowe and Gunner Day. I was completely defenseless at this moment as I was lying face up with all of my back pack gear still under me. I had a good grip on my rifle to defend myself if we were rushed by the enemy, but my bayonet was fastened to the back pack and would have been useless. The first member of our Intelligence Section to pass by was Raymond Simon, from Syracuse, New York. I shouted, "Ray", and he turned and saw me. "Riggs, are you OK?" Ray asked. Then I told him of the explosion and that my legs and lower body had no feeling. "Stay put," Ray said. "and I'll send Frank Campbell over just as soon as I see him again." Frank was a Navy Corpsman assigned to our Headquarters Company. He was from the San Francisco area and his background was in music, he loved music so much that he always claimed that music was his religion.

Frank did show up later and wanted me to be evacuated as soon as the critical wounded had been sent out to the hospital ship. The beach was now lined with wounded and we had no way to get them out. I said. "Frank, I'm not hurting and in time this might wear off, so look after the others." Frank replied with. "Riggs, lay there and don't try to move around, because your spine might be damaged, we will be over to check on you later." Then this brave Navy Corpsman stood erect, showing no fear of being hit by the enemy and moved on to others that needed attention. Frank had told me that Major Crowe had established headquarters only a little distance to our left, then looking east I could see Major Crowe standing in back of an out of action Amtrac that had been hit as it was halfway over the coconut log seawall. The Major was busy with a radio or phone conversation and I was able to see Gunner Day and Marvin Sheppard standing about ten feet to the Majors rear, and I was relieved to know that both had made it in safe.

I learned from some of those around me that Major Crowes Eighth Marines was the only landing team that had any radio communication, and that phone wire had been strung to the various Companies, however the Companies were moving so often that Roland Wilsey, Sheppard, Radtke, Kohnle and others of our Intelligence Section, serving as "runners" were providing the most reliable data to Crowe and his staff. I learned also that a large number of Easy Company Officers had been killed or wounded before making it to shore and that many NCOs and Squad Leaders were doing an excellent job of leading the men under them.

There was high praise for the advanced assault team of Scout-Sniper and Engineers, lead by Lts. Hawkins and Leslie, now we learned that they had headed straight inland, and were continuing to destroy more Jap machine gun and other weapon emplacements.

I had no sense of time as my watch did not survive its waterproof condom. I assumed that it was around 1020 hour. It was getting hot as the sun seemed to be directly overhead. I was still covered with sand and wet clothing that made me feel as though I was getting an unwanted steam bath. My helmet provided my only shade.

Major Crowe, with his shotgun and his long red waxed mustache, became the first Battalion Commander to land with his troops, but he lost a Company of Officers during and soon after landing. Easy ("E") Company had been hit hard, but with this loss he still maintained tight control. Major Crowe with his Executive Officer Major Chamberlin would prove themselves to be "one hell of a team", they worked well together, even though they were opposites in a lot of ways, they respected one another. Several Photographers and Correspondents began to gather around Crowes Command Post (CP) as this was the only CP that was getting good "feedback" as to what the front troops were seeing and encountering. One Correspondent was identified as Robert Sherrod, with Time Incorporated, and two Marine Movie Photographers, William "Bill" Kelliher and Norman Hatch, others I could not identify, however I became concerned that I did not see Frank Filan or Richard W. Johnson at Crowes CP and wondered if they ever made it in. I also wondered about John R. Cox, the Navy Corpsman that had ridden in with us. Frank Campbell told me later in the day that John Cox had been killed.

At this early hour we only had a foothold, but our Company Commanders had positioned their men whereas "F" (Fox) Company was to our extreme left flank, along the beach with some squads several yards over the seawall, inland. They were the closest to the smaller Burns-Philp Pier and the Islands Major Japanese Headquarters and Command Post reinforced concrete bunker. What was left of "E" (Easy) Company was to their right flank (or west side), then "G" (George) Company joined with "E" Company and their troops would extend to the far right and main pier. Crowe had positioned his staff near the eastern edge of "G" Company, and during the day would give his staff some anxious moments by his fearless disregard of the enemies ability to do him harm

During the day, on the west side of the main pier, men were still slowly fighting their way to shore and taking heavy losses for every inch taken. Red Beach 2 would suffer the heaviest losses of the landing beaches during this assault, and later we would know the reason for the heavy losses in this area.

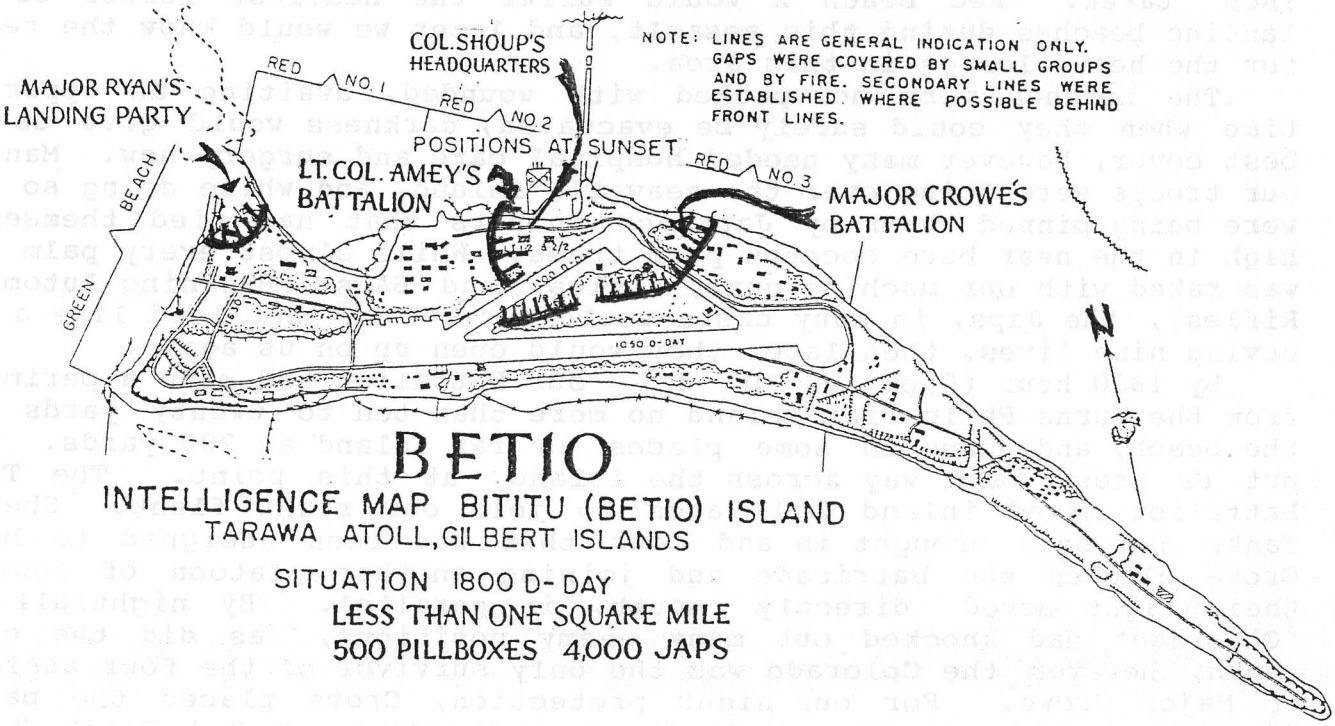
The beaches were now packed with wounded, awaiting an opportune time when they could safely be evacuated, darkness would give us the best cover, however many needed hospital care and surgery now. Many of our troops were going over the seawall, inland, and while doing so they were being pinned down by Japanese snipers that had tied themselves high in the near bare coconut palm trees. While almost every palm tree was raked with our machine guns, rifles, and BARs' (Browning Automatic Rifles), the Japs, in many cases would survive the hot lead like a cat having nine lives, then later they would open up on us again.

By 1800 hour (6;pm) on "D" day, our Battalion had made a perimeter from the Burns-Philp Pier inland no more than ten to twenty yards from the beach, and then in some places as far inland as 200 yards. This put us about half way across the island, at this point. The Third Battalion moved inland 200 yards to join our right flank. Sherman Tanks had been brought in and four that had been assigned to Major Crowe climbed the barricade and joining another platoon of four to their right moved directly south, in parallel. By nightfall the "Colorado" had knocked out many enemy positions, as did the other tanks, however the Colorado was the only survivor of the four assigned to Major Crowe. For our night protection, Crowe placed the battle scarred Colorado on the sandy beach left flank of Red Beach 3 for protection as he expected the Japs to re-assemble after darkness and attempt an assault on our minor foothold, driving us back into the lagoon.

Around dusk, Gunner Day stopped by to check on me and advised that I stay put, as our map board and overlays would be of little value in this type of a situation. He told me that Corporal Clark had been wounded pretty bad, and Arden Ostrowski had been hit, but he didn't know how serious. He advised all of those around me that as soon as it became dark, no one was to move around and to hold our fire, don't be nervous and shoot at shadows as it might be a Marine buddy. Movement along the beach and on the pier started removing the wounded to the end of the pier. Supplies were being brought to the end of the pier and those carrying wounded out were bringing medical and other supplies to the beach. It was difficult as enemy snipers were still active and was making it difficult. Gunner Day told us that a counter assault was to be expected during the night and that we should be ready and prepared for almost anything.

I had removed my back pack early in the day, but I was so tired of being in just one position that I made every attempt to right myself and force myself to stand. I still had no feeling in my lower body and I felt helpless and had no choice except to stay put. Reflecting on the events of the day, I had seen Jap snipers wound and kill Marines in foxholes next to me or as some walked by and were shot, falling at my feet. Some were shot as soon as they stood up from their protected hole in the sand. Dead bodies and parts of bodies floated in the water, just a few feet away, and the heat of the day was helpful in spreading the smell of decaying flesh to the point that it was almost unbearable, but there was no way that we could avoid its presence.

I silently talked to my maker, with more questions than I ever expected answers to. "If my GOD was a merciful one, then why were we here with all of this death surrounding us?" And. "Why was I untouched, when so many others had been killed or wounded?" Still, I thought, this battle has just started and my odds of not making it did not seem to be in my favor, if compared to the casualties thus far, after only ten hours of battle.



I knew that if I survived this battle, I would be mentally scarred for life. I prayed that my life be spared, or that death be instantly, if that was to be. I had a lot of time this day to make peace and a covenant with my maker, and once made, I felt a "peace of mind" that stayed with me long after we left this island.

To discourage any Japanese assembly from forming at the east end of the island, and on Major Crowes left flank, Navy Observers were on shore to request air and naval gun fire support, if needed. Marine Observers were also available to direct artillery. As darkness came we learned that of all the Marines that had landed today, one third would be listed as casualties. Our map showing where the Battalions had placed their men for the night was not very encouraging as it indicated that we, after losing about 1500 men, were only holding onto about one-tenth of a square mile of coconut trees and sand. We had been charged with holding on to this real estate because our lives was dependent on this.

Several Korean laborers and one Japanese prisoner had been captured today, and for some unknown reason, as soon as darkness settled over the island, the Jap was allowed freedom of movement, and crawled around with a knife and stabbed several of our wounded Marines before he was killed. The only light was from fires caused from "Flame-Throwers" on gasoline and ammunition dumps supported by a dim moon.

Many of the Marines on the beach and inland were crowded into one or two man foxholes or a ready made shell crater. No one would sleep unless a buddy next to him remained awake and on watch. Those of us lying on the beach would be just as cautious. We watched as troops kept trying to come ashore and the wounded were being carried, on stretchers to the end of the pier or placed in rubber boats and taken into deeper water where the Higgin boats could then transport them to a transport ship that had been partially converted to take care of the wounded.

Marines risked their lives to carry wounded to the end of the 500 yard long pier, then return carrying in badly needed items such as water, ammunition, food rations and medical supplies that had been unloaded there because of the deeper water. On the way out and on their return they had to dodge enemy machine gun fire, mortar shells and sniper bullets. Sometimes the enemy shells came so close that the sniper and machine gun bullets were splintering the wood on the pier planks, causing Marines to dive into the water to escape being hit.

After a lengthy time, someone figured out where some of the snipers were firing from, other than the coconut palms. At frequent intervals surrounding the beaches, the Japanese had built toilets on stilts, extending out over the water with a walkway ramp to the shore. After we finally determined that the Jap snipers had been using these enclosures to shoot at our Marines, then special teams went after them with demolition and flame throwers. This stopped one source of our problem, but only a small part.

We had been told to be quite and not make any sounds this night, however when you are about to close your eyes from the lack of much needed sleep, and you hear a crawling sound, then sand falling into your foxhole you are quickly wide awake and ready to bayonet your first Jap. But, it wasn't a Jap, this small island had more sand crabs than the State of California had in oranges and illegal aliens combined. These little devils liked to party at night and were crawling everywhere, scarring the hell out of us. We cussed and then would toss the little devils and he would probably land in another foxhole, then that Marine would cuss and toss. This would continue all night and a single crab might be handled by a hundred different Marines.

We heard the sound of a slow moving Japanese seaplane overhead about two hours before dawn. It could not have been cruising over 80 to 100 miles per hour, as the motor was turning just enough to keep the machine in the air. The veterans of Guadalcanal called him "Old Washing Machine Charlie". The old boy did drop two bombs, one fell in our area and the other on the Japanese side, then after a few minutes he made his last pass and dropped the rest of his load into the water on the other side of the island. Soon after he had made his first drop, the Japs took advantage by opening up on our lines with machine gun and rifle fire. Earlier in the night our ships had been approached by enemy planes, but the ships with their heavy firepower discouraged their attack. At various times during the night we had noticed parachute flares above the island, but we did not know if they were ours or theirs.

We had some large gaps in our lines, and had the Japs been aware of this we could have suffered some severe losses or perhaps been overran. We learned later that the heavy shelling preceding our landing had severely damaged their communication lines, isolating the enemy troops from their command center. This fact alone may have saved us on our first night ashore. Earlier, when we had dug our first foxholes in the sand we had not given consideration of the tide rising to fill these holes with water, therefore we heard a lot of "grumbling", and watched as everyone, including me, crowd in close to others on the higher ground.

We survived and during the first night we had been re-supplied with much needed items. As dawn broke on "D"-day Plus One, we were better able to see what we had not suspected yesterday. We found that we were confronted with unexpected strong fortifications, that were still manned by (maybe groggy-but) live Japanese who had survived by burrowing underground during the heavy bombardment and shelling. The coconut logs that helped protect their concrete bunkers and pillboxes indicated that of all the pre-shelling that had taken place, little damage had been done. Later, we did learn that hundreds of Japs had committed suicide during the bombing of our planes and the heavy shelling from the Battleships, however there still remained a few thousand live Japs that were perhaps not anxious, but willing to fight to keep this "Little Part Of Hell".

The Jap snipers that had been killed in the palm trees overnight had been replaced during the darkness with others, who were going to make our lives miserable until we sent them to join their "dis-honorable ancestors". We also discovered that under the cover of darkness, many of these little yellow weasels, removed their clothes and had swam out to many of our damaged and abandonded off-shore tanks, boats and LVTs, and taking sniper positions where they were now in back of us. They gave us and the troops coming in a lot of miserable moments, until they were discovered.

A band of snipers with machine guns was also discovered about the same time, by accident, firing from a partially sunk, burned out, rusty small (what we thought was abandoned) metal ship hull that was located about 150 yards west of the the main pier. NOW, we realized that this was the answer for why we had suffered so many losses on "D"-day, overnight and earlier this morning. "WHY, Oh-Why," We wondered. "did we not discover these snipers sooner?

Once we were aware of Japs on this old partially sunken freighter, Naval Observers requested carrier based fighters to strafe and bomb the rusty old hulk. Four "Hellcats" arrived after 0730 hour (7:30am), each following the other making individual strafing runs with their fifty caliber guns blazing, intermixed with bright glowing tracer bullets.

Then three more planes made individual strafing runs and unleashed bombs attached to their bellies. The first two planes missed their bomb target, but the third plane made a direct hit, sending flame high into the air with debris falling everywhere nearby. This apparently was not enough as the flame soon died out. Within a few minutes twelve more fighter-bombers would appear, make their runs low to the water and drop their bombs, then return to their carrier. It was a good little target for the Navy Pilots to practice their bombing mission on, however only one bomb from the twelve dropped hit the old ship and the others missed their mark by as much as two hundred feet beyond the hull.

For those of us watching, these Navy Hellcat Pilots put on one hell of a spectacular strafing and bombing air show, but it still did not accomplish the task expected. Engineers with demolition and the support of riflemen finally approached the freighter and destroyed the remaining live Japs, then they proceeded to the other scattered damaged off-shore abandoned equipment to rid them of any remaining Japanese snipers.

While this was going on, the Marines on shore were going through the slow process of reworking the coconut trees with hot lead. It was now 8:30am of the second day and we had learned that before the old ship had been demolished that the Japs on it had caused two hundred casualties to an incoming team of Engineers causing badly needed Marines and their flame throwers to be lost in the water. It would take an additional four more hours for the Engineering group to re-organize and get all their equipment on shore.

It was still early morning and we had been on the island almost twenty-four hours. We did not get the big counter assault that we had expected. Colonel Shoups Regimental Headquarters had given orders for all Commanders to start a head-on attack over the sea wall and with the others already inland to move forward. A lot of activity was taking place in Major Crowes area, as I noticed that he was in conference with his Company Officers, Gunner Day and Staff. He gave orders to Major Chamberlin to take charge of "Fox" and "Easy" Companies and with the assistance of "George" Company, advance and destroy as many enemy emplacements, with whatever means necessary and available. The major objective being the Japanese Command Post. The enemy CP was less than a hundred feet from our present front line perimeter next to the east end of the airfield runway, and near the end of Red Beach 3. I watched as Major Chamberlin left with several men, including William "Bill" Kelliher and Norman Hatch (Marine Photographers). They both had been issued .45 caliber pistols due to the movie cameras and equipment that they had to carry. Captain Barrett, Commander of "Fox" Company and Lt. Robert H. Rogers, Commander of "Easy" Company with his very capable weapons platoon leader, Lt. Thomas P. Perkins was making ready to follow any orders from Major Chamberlin. Harlan Radtke had been assigned to be the Headquarters Intelligence liaison and scout for "Fox" Company and stayed close to the Captain.

Once Major Chamberlin gave the signal to move, all troops began to advance, but were caught within a murderous enemy crossfire and advancement was minimal. We learned quickly that the CP had been surrounded by emplacements and bunkers specifically for the purpose of defending it. Major Crowe then directed Lt. Louis Largey, the tank Commander of the "Colorado" to direct firepower to the east of "Fox" Companies left flank, directly on the enemy gun emplacements. While Chamberlin was charged with taking control of the area to our left, Major Crowe would remain behind with "George" Company and oversee that advancement was made to the front and inland.

Major Chamberlins Officers and men, with the assistance of the Navy Observers bringing shells from far away ships, the Engineers, under Lt. Alexander Bonnyman, with their demolition and bulky flame throwers, plus the tank "Colorado" and with sheer guts and everyone working together as one team, they were able to destroy many of the machine gun emplacements and reinforced bunkers that had previously had them pinned down in by enemy crossfire. This allowed our troops to command control of the enemy CP, but only on two sides. The Japs on the other two sides were putting up a strong resistance by rushing and throwing grenades and small mortar shells over the above ground CP at our positions on the other two sides, so our position was very difficult to maintain and hold.

During Day-Two, I observed many of our Intelligence group coming into Headquarters to report and discuss matters with Gunner Day. I wanted to be with them, be a part, move and do something useful, however, now after over twenty-eight hours I could not function and had no lower feeling. Then around 5pm (1700 hour) Marvin Sheppard stopped to visit and bring me up-to-date. We discussed how scarry it had been when we first unloaded and walked ashore and then he told me that he had spent most of yesterday not far from Major Chamberlin in a foxhole, as they had caught a lot of enemy fire, including grenades and mortars.

After picking up some supplies, Marvin left saying. "I'll see you later Riggs." And headed back to his group. Shortly afterward Corporal Abe Gordon, from Headquarters Company stopped by and sat for a while. He told me that he had heard of Ken Clarks bad experience and that he had been evacuated. Corpsman Stanley Bowen stopped by with some wounded and I recognized one as Stanli Soltys, a good looking young man from Amsterdam, New York. Stanli had been in my machine gun squad in New Zealand and we became close friends. "Stan," I asked. "what in the devil happened to you?" His reply was. "We had set our machine guns on "Easy" Companies left flank, when we got shelled by some Jap mortar rounds, and I got a handful of shrapnel. Stanley Bowen had bandaged Stanlis' right hand pretty well, now he would wait to be evacuated. Stanlis' sister Sadie and my wife had exchanged letters in the past several months and I learned they had a brother John that was in the Army and in New Guinea.

I asked if anyone had seen or heard from Radtke, as I was worried that I had not seen him around. Stanli told me that he thought that Stanley Bowen had looked at a small wound that Radtke had received to his behind. Abe Gordons ears perked up and he asked. "What happened to Dutch Radtke?" Then one of the men responded. "As far as I know, Dutch and Captain Barrett both dove for the same one man foxhole after some Jap had tossed them a grenade and the Captain got in first with Dutch exposed on top of Barrett, and a small piece of shrapnel grazed Radtkes bottom, not that it will put him out of action, but he will get a Purple Heart Medal." Then Abe started laughing, and I thought he would never stop, then I remembered that Abe and Radtke had "kidded" one another, prior to landing, about who would get shot in the behind first. Abe headed for the pier and Bowen picked up some medical supplies and then headed back along the beach in the direction of "Fox" Company. Stanli stayed with the other wounded that would be evacuated after dark to a hospital ship. Once he left the island, I would not see him again until we were about ready to leave Hawaii.

Around 6:pm (1800 hour), just before dark we heard a lot of cheering and our attention was directed to the main pier. We could see Jeeps pulling 37mm and 75mm (millimeter) self-propelled guns. They too, were being shot at but most were getting in to shore. We were one group of happy Marines as this was a great morale booster.

I had remembered seeing Lieutenants Aubrey Edmonds and William D. Hawkins in Major Crowes area yesterday, but I had not seen them today. Word had been passed that Lt. Hawkins and his team had been doing a tremendous, but dangerous job of wiping out several machine gun emplacements. He had been hit by a enemy mortar shell fragment yesterday and then today he had lead his men inland and after tossing some grenades he received a bad chest wound from the Japs, but continued to fight until he had silenced three more machine gun nests before being killed. Since he had been the first to lead his men in and assault this island, his deeds on D-day became legendary. Today, after learning that he had died from his wounds, I don't believe that we were shocked, but saddened by the news. We knew of him only through listening to those who were close to him tell about his bravery and deeds. He would be awarded a "Medal Of Honor" posthumously.

When I had asked Gunner Day about Lieutenant Edmonds, he told me that he had been seriously wounded in the back today and had been evacuated to one of the hospital ships as he needed immediate medical attention.

Stanli, wasn't that seriously wounded and was awaiting darkness before he and hundreds of others could be evacuated, so he stopped by several times to chat and check on me. I was getting pretty tired lying in one position and I asked him to assist me to my feet, and I was surprised that I could actually stand with supported help, although I felt a numbness for the first time and a small tingle as one might feel when a foot or a leg is "asleep".

It began to get dark, and we learned that General Julian Smith, knowing that Col. Shoup had been wounded on D-day morning, sent Col. "Red Mike" Merritt Edson ashore around 8:pm to take Command of the Regiment and all action on shore. Word was passed very quickly of the Command change and while everyone was worn-out, dirty, exhausted, thirsty and ready to sleep for a year, the news was welcome. Col. Edson was respected and he in return respected those under his Command. Many times he would sit in the middle of a group of enlisted personnel and "jaw bone" and talk about any subject we might want to discuss. You can't help but love a man like that.

On this second night we had eight Infantry Battalions and two Artillery Battalions ashore. One of the Artillery Battalions had been sent ashore on the adjacent island of Bairiki. Their 105mm Howitzers was aligned to send firepower to our eastern end of Betio, whenever we needed it. Many of the wounded were being helped to the end of the main pier, supplies were building-up on the pier and men were needed to carry them in.

I was determined that if there was numbness in my lower body then if I could stand I might be able to move. Stanli had helped me once, now when some Corpsmen needed another man on one end of a stretcher, I volunteered if they could help me stand, and once I had a hold on to the lighter end of the stretcher I was hanging on to something and the momentum of the others forcing us in a direction, my legs began to move in an involuntary but automatic fashion. We left our wounded on the stretcher at the piers end with other medics, then after a short breather we picked up supplies that we could carry and headed back to the beach. I carried some of the lighter items and left the heavy ammunition and other things for others. This was about the best therapy that I could get, but by now my legs were almost dead weight and was dragging. I saw Abe Gordon coming toward me as I neared the shore, and we all were trying to dodge the sniper bullets, however it appeared that one Jap sniper was determined to single Abe as his individual target, so Abe started going a little faster when bullets

were splintering the wooden planks at his feet, this was too close for Abe, so he dove into the water. Because of his speed and diving performance Abe could have been an "Olympic" contender, but as his rear end went over the pier, a bullet nicked him on one of his "fanny cheeks", not serious, but enough for a "Purple Heart".

Our drinking water was being brought in five gallon metal cans that had once been used to carry gasoline or diesel fuel. The cans, I'm sure had been rinsed before they were filled with drinking water. I filled my canteen from one of these cans and then swallowed a few gulps of this petro flavored liquid before I realized that if I had placed a lighted match near my mouth I could have spit flame like a tiny dragon. We drank it because we had no other choice, but if the Navy had filled these cans with some of their Rum and Scotch Whiskey, we would have secured this island on the first day.

One of the Artillery Battalions had aquired from a bar in New Zealand "Siwash", a beer drinking duck and they brought their mascot ashore with them. Well, as the story was told, it seems as though "Siwash" had got into a fight with a red Japanese rooster and came away a little bloody, after making the rooster "turn tail". Now the Battalion was recommending their duck for a "Purple Heart".

Going into our second night wasn't something to look forward to as we expected a repeat performance of the first night. Our Marines had burrowed into the sand and were holding dearly to what ground we had taken today, and with the help of others I made a few more trips to the end of the pier for supplies. The Japanese that remained on the island had been forced back toward the eastern end of the island and not being unified by any leadership they were forming small attack groups or fighting as individuals, and they were determined that we were going to pay a big price before letting us have this one square mile of real estate. They continued through the night with every type of weapon they had left. Almost all of their heavier weapons had been captured or destroyed. Our firepower in the means of Howitzers, Battleships, Destroyers and even Carrier planes that strafed and bombed selected targets made good hits on enemy fuel and ammo dumps that shook the island like an eight point "Richter Scale" earthquake and the fires turned the darkness into a brightly lit island for a period of time. After midnight the Japs banded together and made several "Banzi" charges, breaking through in some areas causing many losses to troops on Crowes right flank, but our troops never gave back any ground taken.

A few hours before daylight "Old Washing Machine Charley" had not forgotten us, and again he seemed to be in no hurry to leave as he kept circling above us with his load of bombs, before releasing them in an area that caused no harm. Then the sound of his slow turning engine faded completely. Fighting land crabs and Japs and the harassment from "Charley" didn't allow for much rest or sleep.

Approaching daylight on Day Three, and as 5:30am we had been here for 44 hours which included two sleepless nights. "Oh my God-," I thought. "why couldn't I be somewhere else! And why did they give this island the code name of "Helen" when a more appropriate name would have been "Purgatory"?"

Col. Edson was confident now that we could take this island and instructed all Battalion Commanders to move the troops forward, secure all assigned objectives and eliminate all further enemy resistance. He was so confident of his Commanders that he gave permission to the "Navy Seabees" (a Navy Construction Battalion) to start landing with their equipment to rework and rebuild the existing airfield runways, whereas our fighter planes could start landing to refuel and strike at the enemy on other islands. That was the main reason for our being here.

Major Crowe had been assigned Red Beach 3, which included three critical Japanese strongholds that had to be destroyed. They were to the east of Major Chamberlins offensive positions, and included a steel reinforced pillbox near the Burn-Philp Pier, then a coconut log protected machine gun emplacement. These emplacements were so arranged that they provided an excellent cross-firing position for the protection of the Japanese Headquarters and Command Post, which was slightly forward of the two active emplacements. Yesterday, Major Chamberlin had secured two sides of the Jap CP, now he had to find a way of securing the Japanese CP as well as the two emplacements that was protecting it. The Japanese Headquarters was an extremely large bombproof shelter, with five foot thick reinforced concrete walls, with coconut logs protecting the outside, then sand packed hard on all sides and top. The shelter extended above ground perhaps as high as twenty to thirty five feet.

Major Crowe had learned how to make the best use of all of his support groups, such as tanks, infantry, engineers (with their demolition and flame throwers), naval gunfire and artillery, coordinating them to his advantage. Chamberlin was instructed to initiate his assault on the three major obstacles at 0930 hour (9:30am), just 48 hours after our initial assault. Major Crowe with his long red waxed mustache stood erect with his trusty shotgun nearby, and there was no doubt about who was in Command of this Battalion.

Marine Uses Shotgun on Tarawa Japs, and How

Washington, Dec. 18.—You might have thought that Maj. Henry Pearson (Jim) Crowe was going after ducks when he stormed ashore on Tarawa in the Gilbert islands with U. S. marines, carrying as his chief weapon an ordinary double-barreled shotgun.

But the major knew what he was doing. He was toting what might be called the marines' new "secret weapon," it was disclosed here. He was strictly after Japs.

Dispatches from Tarawa told of the red-haired, barrel-chested Crowe standing at his improvised command post and blazing away at the Japs. It was a sight to see, a correspondent reported.

A spokesman for the marines disclosed that shotguns have been part of the leathernecks' equipment ever since Guadalcanal, where they were first used to good effect.

It was pointed out that sometimes you can hear a sniper and know about where he is, but you can't see him.

That's where those shotguns come in handy, especially in jungle fighting. It's something like hunting birds. Sometimes you've got to "flush them out," the marine spokesman said.

So it went on Guadalcanal. Japs hiding in the bushes could not be seen, but oftentimes they could be heard. A volley of shotgun slugs either killed them, or at least flushed them out.

Then other marines equipped with their regular rifles would pick them off.

And again it was sometimes like shooting birds; one shot might bring down two Japs.

Major Chamberlin directed action against the gun emplacement and the pillbox (an enclosed gun emplacement), these two had given us so much trouble that they had to be silenced first, before the enemy CP could be assaulted. After some heavy fighting "Fox" and "Easy" Companies had taken control by silencing the two. Three sides were under our domination, and the next object would be to destroy and seal all openings to the large bombproof CP shelter, that housed the Japanese Commander and his staff.

After the troops had taken a brief rest, Major Chamberlin stood up and shouted to his Officers and men. "To HELL with it, FOLLOW ME." Then making a mad dash to the top of the enemies sand covered fortification, he found to his great surprise and dismay that SSgt. Norman Hatch, with his movie camera operating, was the only person to climb to the top with him! As the two looked down the other side they saw a very surprised squad of Japanese Imperials (similar, as compared to U.S. Marines) staring up at them. Realizing that they were standing on top of the enemies CP alone, Hatch said. "Major, I think we had better get the Hell out of here." Turning to run down, Chamberlin answered. "I'm with you." And both raced back to the foxholes they had just left. SSgt. Hatch during his climb up, looking down below on the enemy with his camera taking film footage, would be rewarded later by receiving an Academy Award Oscar for the best film documentary of 1944.

Recovering from shock and after he recovered his breath, Major Chamberlin called his Officers and NCOs' together, then for twenty minutes he gave them a "dressing-down" that they would never forget. This was out of character for the Major, but he was their highly respected leader and they knew that he would never ask them to do anything that he would not do himself. He had proved this during the long forced march in New Zealand.

Then for the next hour, with Chamberlin leading, they had some of the heaviest resistance thus far encountered, but they made progress. Demolition and flame throwing Engineers, under the Command of Lt. Alexander Bonnyman had the responsibility for sealing openings in this compound, wherever found. In doing so, the Engineers had made their way to the top, like Chamberlin had found himself earlier, when they were rushed by a suicidal group of Japanese Imperials in a counterattack movement. As the Japs charged up the incline, Lt. Bonnyman stood and fired into their midst, then not waiting for them to come to him, he charged down the slope with his men following. They killed most of the attackers, but in doing so the Lieutenant sacrificed his life. A question might be asked. "Was he scared?" No, I do not believe that he was. It is my belief that a Marine in the heat of battle, may be caught off-guard, automatically reacts to a situation as he has been taught and conditioned. His brave and devoted action earned him the Medal Of Honor, the third to be earned posthumous during this battle.

Lt. Bonnymans men continued to place their demolition charges in vents and other openings, causing the hysterical Japs inside to attempt escaping from the main east and south exits where Chamberlins Marines and Bonnymans Engineers were waiting with flame throwers, rifles, BARs' (Browning Automatic Rifles), grenades and even 37mm canister fire. The Japanese Commander Admiral Shibasaki, with many of his staff died this day within their well fortified Command Post, thus losing the chance of ever meeting his American counterpart.

The sealing of this enemy compound also sealed the fate of the remaining Japs and now the team of Crowe and Chamberlin, with their support groups, could pat themselves on the back for a job WELL DONE.

Now, we looked at the lagoon and watched as replacement troops were making their way toward the beach to provide support. They were standing upright without being fired upon and we commented on the contrast from what it was a few days before

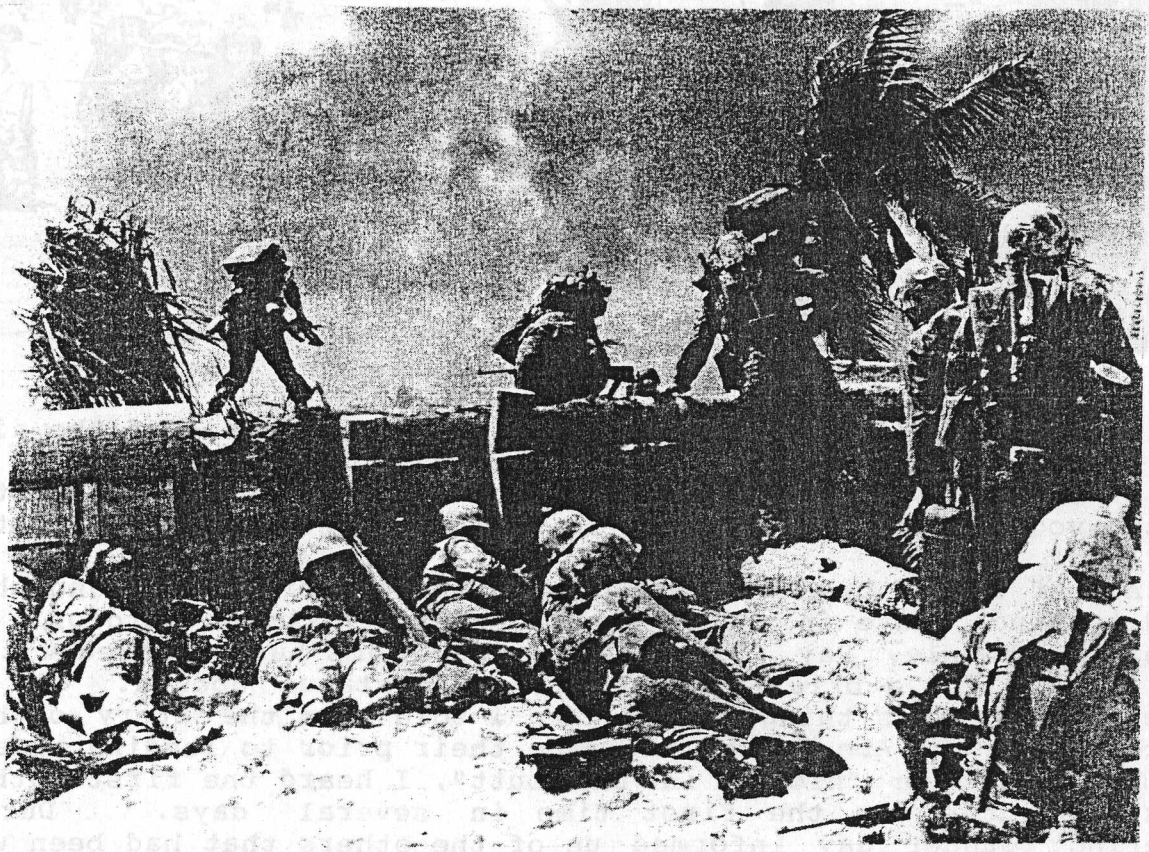
Crowes Battalion had control of the eastern end of the airfield, and the Japs were being compressed into small pockets and the eastern end of the small island. Evidently the word "surrender" was not a part of the vocabulary or dictionary as they were determined to fight to the very end.

All of us had been suffering from the heat of the day and shade was hard to find. Late in the afternoon Radtke, Wibholm, Bergdoll, Wilsey, Sheppard, Kohnle, Day, Simon, Grant and Adams had gathered with me at the 2-8 CP for a briefing session and a status update. We started discussing various things, then when I told them the story of how both Dutch Radtke and Abe Gordon had made their prior to landing remark, and how both had been "nicked in the butt", I heard the first outburst of group laughter for the first time in several days. During our briefing, Gunner day informed us of the others that had been wounded, naming Clark and Ostrowski. Clark had been the most seriously wounded, and while there was an feeling of sadness, we were fortunate that none of our group had lost their life, as yet.

Soon after darkness of Day Three movement was detected behind the Japanese lines. A group of about fifty Japs grouped and made an assault to the right of our Battalion lines, finding their way between "A" and "B" Company lines of the First Battalion of the Sixth Marine Regiment. This "Banzai" attack was costly to the enemy, however they just kept coming and were being killed as fast as they were sighted. They kept attacking in small groups all through the night. We used our machine guns and called for firepower from our artillery and the two ships, U.S.S. Schroeder and U.S.S. Sigsbee that were in the lagoon to direct their shells during the night on the remaining Jap held territory. At early daylight it was determined that the two companies had lost forty men dead and one hundred twenty eight wounded. Three hundred and twenty five of the enemy had sacrificed their lives by making the night assault.

Day Four at 7:am the remaining portion of the island was strafed and bombed by a squadrons of Carrier fighter planes for thirty minutes, then they were blasted for fifteen minutes with 105mm artillery shells and followed at 7:45am by the two ships in the lagoon.

The Engineers with their demolition and flame throwers, supported by two Sherman Tanks (Colorado and China Girl) and seven light tanks started a forward move at 8:am (70½ hours after our landing) heading toward the eastern end. After advancing 150 yards they started getting resistance by the 500 remaining live Japs that were entrenched in pillboxes, deep trenches and dugouts (large foxholes) in the sand. They could have been saved by surrendering, however they chose not to, and as our troops advanced, many would turn their grenades upon themselves and the others were destroyed by our flame throwers, grenades and demolitions.



Many of us still used the log reinforced seawall as a means of protection, as it was still dangerous to expose yourself unless it was absolutely necessary because bypassed snipers were still active.

Navy planes strafed the sand bar between Betio and Bairiki around noon, and "L" Company of the Sixth Marines reached the eastern most tip of Betio around 1:pm. We now had control of the whole island and victory was ours to assume, yet we knew that about 100 or more Japs were still hiding and would have to be found, one by one.

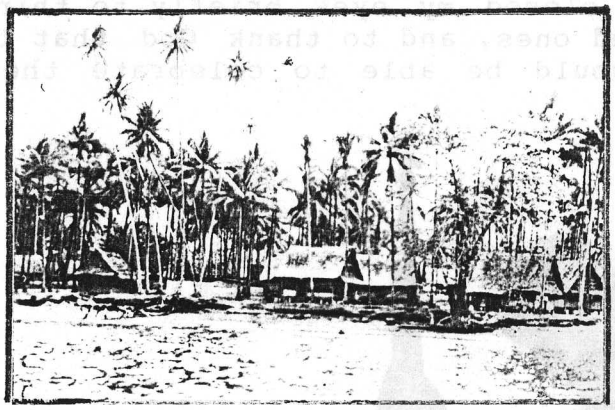
Major General Julian Smith claimed the island (code named "Helen") as being secured at 1330 hour (1:30pm, D-day Plus Three) November 23, 1943. A young Navy Ensign, W.W. Kelly had landed his Carrier based plane on the airstrip one half hour before, and had been greeted by many happy cheering Marines and "Sea-Bees", he placed his feet on the runway then after shaking a few hands, he climbed back in his plane and returned to his carrier.

For those of us who were survivors there was a numbness of the brain. What we had witnessed was unbelievable, this plus the fact that we had not had any sleep for several days and I knew of no one who had the opportunity to have relieved themselves, other than urinating. For the walking survivors there was a sadness and yet a great sense of relief knowing that we had survived the "Fires Of HELL".

Early in the afternoon of the fourth day, Major Crowe gave orders for his Battalion to assemble for departure. Rather than go directly to the ship Heywood, we would be transported to the adjacent island of Bairiki for the night. We had assembled with all of our gear and in our individual groups we were prepared to walk the length of the pier on this Tuesday afternoon, when a trumpet sounded and we turned to watch as "Colors" were being hoisted. What we saw was the American Flag and the "Colors" of the British Government being hoisted atop two separate almost bare coconut palm trees, on this blood soaked sand dune. I had a lump in my throat and a sick stomach as we stood at attention, I was thinking of all the American blood and bodies that would remain here. I was very disappointed to think that we had sacrificed so much, just to return this island back to the British, who cared not for the war being fought in the Pacific.

So I left this island a little bit heartbroken with the feeling that if we had lost all these good American boys, just to give the island back to the British Government, then our country had betrayed us and our families, back home. (SEE FOOTNOTE)

Higgin boats carried us to Bairiki, one of the prettiest tropical islands that I would ever see. Untouched coconut palm trees, a beautiful clean sandy beach with bluish green clear water splashing along the shore.



We found huts and small empty villages that appeared that families just walked away. This would have made a wonderful "Hollywood" movie setting. The contrast of the two islands (Betio and Bairiki) was almost unbelievable. We took advantage of our present situation and bathed and swam until nightfall. Some coconuts were dislodged from some palms and the milk inside was refreshingly cool.

We set up a guarded perimeter and went to sleep early. Elements of the Sixth and Tenth Marines were guarding the end separating the two islands, so sleep came easy and was welcome.

We awoke to a beautiful sunrise and casually ate our canned rations, with some Marines making coffee by using their canteen cups over a small fire. It was the first smell of coffee since early D-day morning. We knew that we would soon leave this little island and so we explored some of the small huts and the village in order to take some pleasant memory with us, to help us forget the bad.

FOOTNOTE: A British Historian, Derrick Wright, North Yorkshire, England, would fifty years after the war, inform the author, that England never concerned itself with the Pacific war, but after the war, asked the United States to pay for damages that the U.S. Forces caused, when retaking their islands!!!!!!!

Between 8:30am and 9:30am Higgin boats began arriving to return us to our mother ship the Heywood, that had been our home since leaving New Zealand. Once aboard we found that much had been converted to a hospital as well as a morgue. Sadness, again surrounded us as we partook in services prior to "burial at sea" for those who did not survive from their wounds. The Navy was so appreciative of having us back on board that they prepared and served another Thanksgiving Dinner.

As we slowly lost sight of the Tarawa Atoll, we also left behind 1026 American bodies to be buried there, and whose individual stories of sacrifice and bravery would never be told, except for the few, who would be singled for medals other than the posthumous "Purple Heart".

During the seventy-five hours and forty-two minutes battle (after the first landing), 4 Medal Of Honors would be awarded, 3 posthumously, 44 Navy Crosses, 223 Silver Stars, 3401 Purple Hearts and the Second Marine Division would be given a Presidential Unit Citation. Colonel David M. Shoup would be the sole survivor to receive the Medal Of Honor and a Purple Heart. In addition, Majors Crowe and Chamberlin would be awarded the "British Distinguished Service Cross" and Colonel Edson would be spot promoted to a Brigadier General.

Our ship was headed for Hawaii where we hoped to rest. Harlan Radtke informed that November 26, was his birthday and Marvin Sheppard said that his birthday would fall on December 7 (Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941). I closed my eyes briefly to think of those not with us and of their loved ones, and to thank God that those of us that were on this ship would be able to celebrate the two birthdays.

We were about 2000 miles from Pearl Harbor and I estimated that it would take us approximately five and a half days, if we averaged our normal 386 miles per day. I have, from memory assumed that we arrived in Pearl Harbor at Honolulu on the 30th of November. Having reached the famous harbor, where the Japanese declared War on the United States, we were to witness much of the destruction that the Japs had caused on this still beautiful island of Oahu. We did not debark, but from the ships railings we observed the transfer of our wounded to Navy Ambulances that would carry them to the nearby Naval Hospitals. We learned that the "Lurline", the luxury liner that had transported the 16th replacement Battalion to New Zealand, had left this harbor for the last time on Friday, December 5th, just two days before war was declared on December 7, 1941.

Right after the surprise Japanese attack on these islands, gas masks had been issued, bars had an early curfew, gasoline was rationed, gas attack alarms were hung every one thousand feet and all paper money was overprinted with "HAWAII" to make it worthless in case of an invasion. Street Car tracks had been pulled and made into tank barricades. Now, that we were taking the war to the Japanese, many of these items of a protective defensive nature were being relaxed.

In this land, the word "Aloha" means both, Hello and Goodbye, so the day after arriving we said "Aloha" and left this historic harbor to head 200 miles southwest and on the eastern side of the large island of Hawaii. Within twenty four hours we arrived at the docks in Hilo and unloaded onto the beds of canvas covered trucks that carried us sixty five miles over a still smoldering volcanic rock road, high into a mountain area. The road was irregular twisting and curving and finally we found ourselves saddled in between two well known and sometimes active volcanoes, the Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa.

As we unloaded at our new campsite, we noticed that it was very cold and snow was observed in some of the nearby mountains. The erection of our campsite had only partially been started. The setting was on some barren cattle rangeland belonging to the Parker Ranch, which was one of the largest cattle ranches in the world. We had no winter clothing or blankets as our "sea-bags" had not yet been unloaded from the ship. Some wooden platforms had been laid out, but there was no canvas covering them. We were located adjacent to a small village named "Kamuela", which was no more than a general store, post office and a few houses. The new Division Camp would be named Camp Tarawa, however the 2nd Battalion of the Eighth Regiment would be known as Camp Crowe.

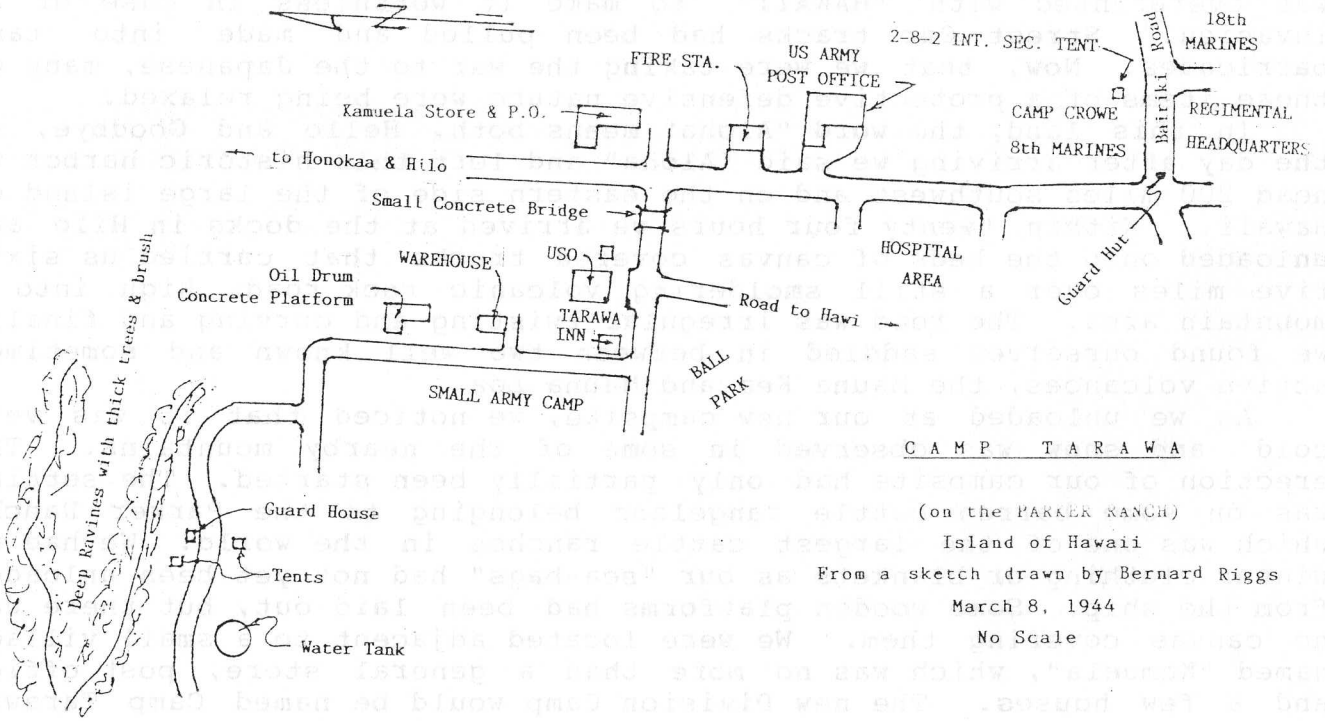
The 8th and the 18th Regiments had both been on the "Heywood" and were the first group of Marines to arrive at this new site, from the "Tarawa Operation". A small Army detachment was here when we arrived and we assumed that they had been sent here to layout and prepare a camp site for our arrival, and for the others that would follow.

Our group made out with what was available to us, sleeping on folded canvas cots the first night and eating field rations. We slept on the elevated wooden tent platforms, covering our bodies with everything we could find, then we used our "ponchos" as the outer cover. The air was cold and when not sleeping I gazed upward at the clear heavenly sky to see both, the North Star and the Southern Cross. When sleep did come, I am sure that most, as I, would dream of home.

My legs were getting back to normal, whereas the numbness feeling had almost completely disappeared. I was determined that I would overcome this problem, but then and to this present day I will always question the cause. Was it from concussion, shock or just being "frighten to death" from what occurred around me??? Only God knows.

The day after our arrival, mess huts were set up, we erected canvas over our wooden platforms, blankets and heavier clothing became available. Our "sea-bags" had been unloaded from the ship. No Post Exchange (PX) had been set up yet, but my extra "sea-bag" with the pork n beans made me a very popular guy, while the supply lasted. Again we started enjoying some hot meals, with plenty of milk, fruit and fresh meat. Yes, breakfast had SOS (stuff on a shingle) for those who were addicted to it.

During the first week of our arrival the mess cooks went all out and prepared, for us, a wonderful meal of turkey and all the trimmings. This was our third "Thanksgiving Meal" this year, and I heard no one complaining. It was deserving, we had earned it and just the fact that we were here to eat and enjoy it, gave us all something to be thankful for. We had our first mail-call during our first week and on December 5th we were treated to our first entertainment.



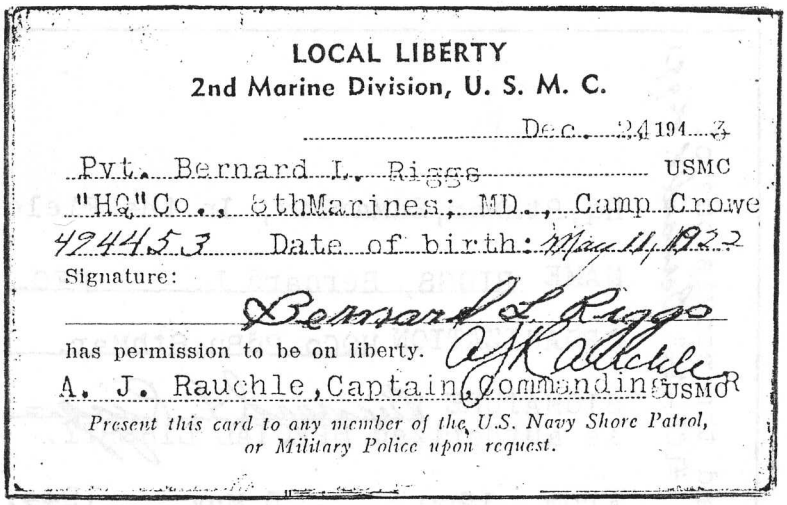
CAMP TARAWA

(on the PARKER RANCH)
Island of Hawaii
From a sketch drawn by Bernard Riggs
March 8, 1944
No Scale

Just west of the Kamuela Store and Post Office, the Army Band and personnel had prepared a welcoming for us Marines. We had been invited to some live entertainment at a Recreational Hut (would be converted to a USO Center later), located about a half a mile from our camp. When word was passed, it didn't take long for the area to be filled with entertainment starved servicemen this evening to enjoy music as well as prepared food and drinks. The Army Band, under the direction of Private Alvin S Carter (formerly with the National Broadcasting Company in Chicago) played popular songs of the day for a continuous period of over five hours, he was assisted by Private Wes Kilfoye (a former Chicago band leader). Marine Private Edward J. Zito sang four numbers, ending with, "When The Lights Go On Again All Over The World", Private William R. Hodgins was the last to perform with two fast "hot" songs, including some of his fancy dance steps for some variation. We enjoyed our evening out and it help to boost our sinking morale.

Also on this particular day of December 5, 1943, we were given the news that the United States Marines had turned control of the British Islands Atoll of Tarawa to the U.S. Navy.

We worked real hard for the next two weeks, making our camp livable. The Navy Construction Battalion assigned to the 18th Marine Regiment graded and laid out some road beds. A Mess Hall and a Post Exchange had been established, now Coca Cola and beer became available, but was rationed where we could only have two of each per day. This was no problem as those that wanted more were able to buy or swap favors from those that didn't want these items. We were beginning to find that we had more free time to do as we wished, so many of us would relax, write letters, play poker or some other group card game and often take short excursions to some close by village. Captain A. J. Rauchle, Commander of our 2-8 Headquarters Company was kind enough, at times. to sign and issue local liberty passes (cards). On Christmas Eve day almost everyone in camp had a signed pass and not many choices of places to go.



LOCAL LIBERTY
2nd Marine Division, U. S. M. C.

Dec. 24 194 3

Pvt. Bernard L. Riggs USMC
"HQ" Co., 6th Marines; MD., Camp Crowe
494453 Date of birth: May 11, 1922
Signature:
Bernard L. Riggs
has permission to be on liberty. A J Rauchle
A. J. Rauchle, Captain, Commanding USMCR

Present this card to any member of the U.S. Navy Shore Patrol, or Military Police upon request.

On Christmas Day, those of us that remained in camp were given another turkey dinner, with trimmings and a small folded 3 by 4 inch light blue card with the Marine Corps Emblem embossed in the center and "Christmas, 1943" printed on the right front lower corner, with a short Marine Prayer Greeting printed inside.

A Second Marine Division newspaper started publication soon after the first of the year under the appropriate name "Tarawa-Boom-De-Ay". Captain Orion Todd, Jr. organized an athletic program and from that he had some baseball games and boxing matches, or we as individuals could check out sporting equipment. Later in April many of our Marine Boxers were matched against other Marine units or Soldiers from the 7th Air Force. Fifteen bouts were scheduled and held on Wednesday, April 26, 1944. The Second Division Band (with my school-mate J.W. Meyer) played music for 1½ hours prior to the bouts that commenced at 1900 hour (7:pm).

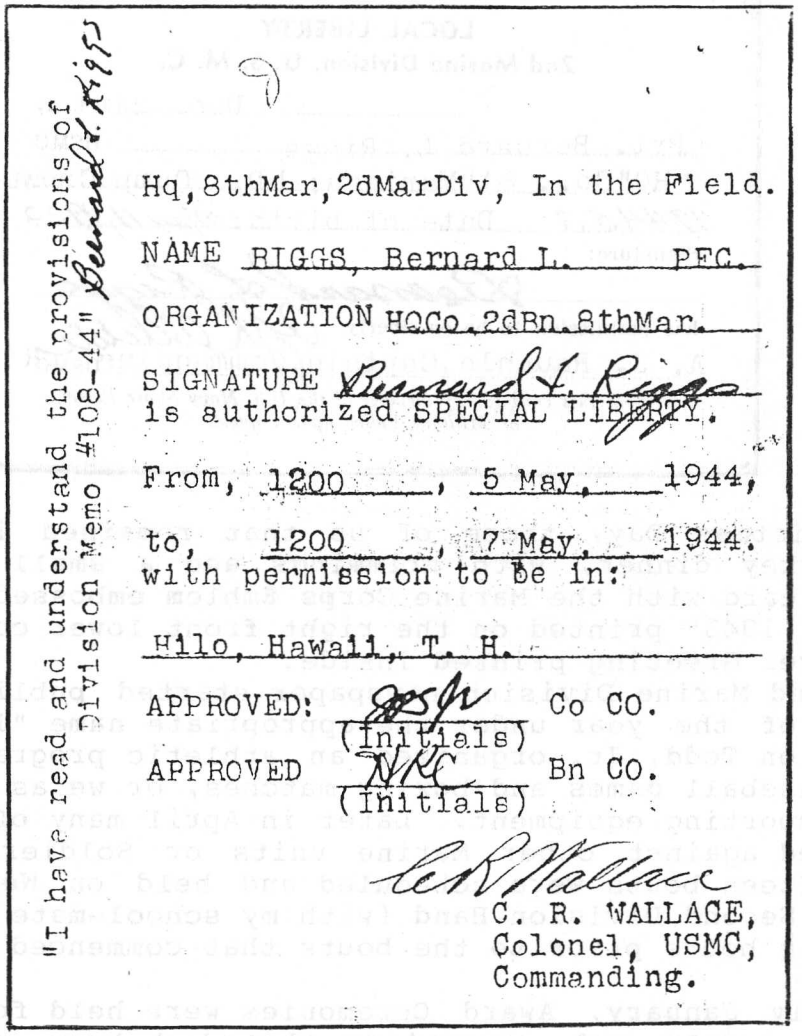
In early January, Award Ceremonies were held for the presentation of awards, medals and promotions that had been earned. Crowe was elevated to a Lieutenant Colonel, and later in April our Eighth Regiment Commander, Colonel Elmer Hall was replaced by Colonel Clarence R. Wallace.

We had arrived in Hawaii the first part of December and while we had enjoyed the holidays and the packages from home the Division Command returned us to earnest training the later part of January, 1944.

The holiday packages from home with candies, cookies, cakes and other items, mostly of an eatable nature were most welcome. Some were

not received until January, which was pleasant because we generally shared our rewards with the others in our tent or group and it allowed us a chance to share something different every week or so. Of all the food packages shared, I was always impressed with the homemade variety of food that Ray Simon received, it was unusually good and different from our norm and he always made sure that we all enjoy it with him.

Some of our boys found that going into a downtown barbershop, while on liberty in Hilo, was a good way to meet or find a pretty "wahine" (woman) as the ladies were now being trained as barbers, while the men had been inducted into the service. Three of our group struck up an acquaintance with three young lady "barbers", who then provided them a means of getting around town, then were kind enough to invite them into their homes for the night. For the rest of us we walked around town exploring and site seeing or would consume time by sitting on a park bench, visit the USO (United Service Organization) and perhaps a couple of taverns.



"I have read and understand the provisions of Division Memo #108-44" Bernard L. Riggs

Hq, 8thMar, 2dMarDiv, In the Field.

NAME RIGGS, Bernard L. PFC.

ORGANIZATION HQCo. 2dBn. 8thMar.

SIGNATURE Bernard L. Riggs

is authorized SPECIAL LIBERTY.

From, 1200, 5 May, 1944,

to, 1200, 7 May, 1944.

with permission to be in:

Hilo, Hawaii, T. H.

APPROVED: (Initials) Co CO.

APPROVED (Initials) Bn CO.

C. R. WALLACE,
Colonel, USMC,
Commanding.

After one day many of us were ready to return to camp and sleep. On the trip back, Quinton Adams kept us awake, talking about the wonderful girl he had met. He was in sort of a "dream state", as he described her. He told us that he had met this pretty young lady at the USO Club. Her name was Harriet Hulihey, from Hilo, Hawaii and as the weeks and months went by he spent as much time in Hilo to be with her as he could. Later, we did have a chance to meet her, and she was as beautiful as he had described. We would, because of her name and being from Hilo, always remember her as being Quintons "4H" girl.

Radtke, Sheppard and I, during one of our liberty outings were fortunate to meet and visit with Dick Meadows and Jim Montgomery, from our old "Cadence Platoon 1234", they were part of the Sixteenth Replacement that went to New Zealand on the Lurline, however they had been separated from us in New Zealand when we were sent to different Marine Units. We learned that Dick Meadows had two brothers that had remained on the island of Betio (code name "Helen") in the Tarawa Atoll the night that we had left the island for Bairiki. During the night a Jap that had stayed well hidden, had silently crawled into Jim Meadows foxhole and seriously wounded him in the throat and hand with a bayonet, before Jim was able to subdue and kill his attacker by engaging in hand to hand combat. Their brother Bill was sent to Camp Tarawa, joining Dick. I believe that the "Boot Camp" training, discipline and the loss of identity that we were to suffer would also bind a group of young men as friends who would not be forgotten even after parting into different units within the Corps. It was good to see Montgomery and Meadows again.

We started rebuilding our unit soon after the first of the year. Some of our men transferred into line companies, where they were offered rank promotions and some transferred to a higher echelon. Some of our replacements came from men that had served in line companies, within our battalion, such as James D. Nix, Warren Jack "Obe" O'Brien and Joseph J. Rutkowski. New replacements arriving from the States included a sixteen year old Charles R. Lindahl (Minneapolis, Minn.), Jack M. Freeman (East Bakersfield, Calif.), Thurman D. Toon (Valporaiso, Ind.), and George Schapendonk (Chicago, Ill.). Of these, Lindahl, Freeman and Rutkowski would be killed in action (KIA) during the battle for Saipan and Tinian.

The new members needed training, so Gunner Day gave orders to Ed Grant and Quinton Adams to take us on reconnaissance hikes into the nearby wilderness side of the surrounding mountains, where we would establish observation posts (OPs), sketch the terrain, practice scouting and indulge in some other field training. While in the past our Intelligence Section had been immune to many work details, these days were coming to an end.

Our group was assigned a work detail to spend a week at the warehouse docks in Hilo. We worked inside, stacking supplies as they were brought from the ships. We enjoyed the diversion, but being young kids we also took advantage of sneaking "goodies" from the many damaged or broken cartons and boxes. When we arrived back in camp, we had privately confiscated enough candy, cigarettes and other items that we could have set up our own Post Exchange.

Another day we were assigned a work detail to unload shells at the ammunition dump. We experienced a shocking trauma that none of us involved will ever forget. Marvin Sheppard and I were handling 81mm shell casings as they were being brought back to the rear of the truck beds, then the two of us would carry the casings to be stacked with others. Roland Wilsey and Harlan Radtke had carried one back for "Shep" and me to carry off, in setting it down it had slipped from their fingers when it was just a few inches from the truck bed and it dropped with a little "thud". It was warm and the wind was calm, but both "Shep" and I saw what we thought was a curl of smoke coming from the inside rim of the container and in unison we shouted, "S M O K E".

I have never seen men disappear as fast as this work detail. Where did they hide? Yes, they concealed themselves behind other stacks of ammunition!!! We waited for a lengthy time and when nothing happened we approached and were relieved to learn that a small portion of dried dirt had dislodged and when broken curled upward like smoke.

When not on work details, our main objective was to better prepare ourselves for future engagements. This meant that we studied Japanese-American dictionaries to learn words and phrases that might help us to communicate. Of course we studied enemy maps, symbols, plane and ship identification and markings and a multitude of other things. James Nix was selected from our section to go to Division Language Schooling and his training became valuable to us sometime later.

We knew that a war was being fought in Africa and Europe as many of us had brothers or a relative and friends fighting there, however our minds were more focused on our own theatre of operation.

During one of our mail calls I received a letter from a close friend with whom I had worked with before entering the Marines. John Henry Tarr brought me up to date, then said in his letter;

> "Bernard, after you left us in Seymour, Indiana, I married Maxine, then I joined the Army Supply Corps, which sent us here to Fort Hood, Texas. Since our group would never see any overseas action, we decided that we would donate our blood to the Red Cross. We continued to give regularly, until one of our enlisted mens wife had a baby, and needed blood. We all had just recently given blood to the Red Cross and they refused our offer of another donation. They ended up selling blood to the wife, and we were informed that the blood would have been free if she had been an officers wife. After that we of the enlisted ranks at this depot were very shocked and disappointed. We have stopped giving of blood, but will support you men fighting by all other means."

Division Intelligence sent me unsolicited supplies quite often, and much that was received, I had little need of. I had no need of the many rolls of starched linen drawing cloth because my drawings and sketches were made on transparent parchment drawing paper. It would have been a waste to discard it, so I began to devise ways in which it might be used. By soaking the starched linen in warm water and then hand washing with soap, I was able to remove the starch, ending up with some very fine linen. The cloth was approximately 36 to 42 inches wide and I could unroll any length that I wanted. I cut lengths and made bed sheets for my canvas bunk. I cut sections and made some real nice handkerchiefs. After a few washings I gave my sheets away to my buddies who appreciated my discards.

I started experimenting with my colored inks, the linen and my newly acquired ability to read, speak and understand some of the Japanese language. With some luck and my art and drafting skill I learned to duplicate some very impressive "authentic looking" Japanese flags. To obtain a battle-worn look I would place them at the entrance to our tent, covered with a little sand and dirt. After we had walked over them many times then I shook off the dirt and sand and I had an item that fooled Division Intelligence. It was an item that had to be cleared by them before anyone could mail home and over a period of time they reviewed, passed and cleared several, that they unknowingly had provided the linen and ink for. These flags would buy or provide us with many things as we bartered with Sailors, Merchant Marines, Air Force and Navy Pilots for money, pistols and or anything that might provide us with a need. There were many interesting stories created from the making, selling and trading of these flags and I'm sure that many are still being displayed, with pride as the real M'coy.

We began to start becoming involved in a stepped-up training program involving field maneuvers and this was enough to tell us that we were preparing to depart soon to do some more exterminating. As Colonel "Jim" Crowes Battalion draftsman, I was often asked to ride with him and or Major Chamberlin when going to various field locations, Regimental and Divisional Headquarters. I was fortunate because through this process I was able to observe and better understand when and why certain orders were passed down and followed. I had a first hand opportunity to make my own judgement of officers of rank, and how they reacted to, or treated those of lesser rank.

Brigadier General Merritt Edson (a Medal of Honor recipient and Assistant Division Chief of Staff) was the most "colorful", in my opinion, of all. He treated officers and the enlisted men with equal respect. It was not below his dignity to sit down among the enlisted and "chew the fat".

Colonel Henry Pierson Crowe, being an officer that had earned his rank by first being an enlisted man, did very little to acknowledge or socialize with the enlisted personnel. He kept himself aloof of the normal troops most of the time. This did not mean that he was disliked, to the contrary, almost everyone respected his leadership and would follow his commands, without question. In combat he always kept a cool head and men respected him for that.

Major William C. Chamberlin (Crowes Executive Officer) was well liked and respected by every man in the Battalion. Not being a Career Marine, but having been an educator that had been caught-up in this war like the rest of us, he was not aloof and would often chat with the troops as an equal. Having made the long forced march with us, while in New Zealand and for his courageous action and leadership at TARAWA, the men knew that he would never ask them to do something that he would not do himself. Major Chamberlin was a well loved and respected leader that would never be given the promotion and recognition that he justly deserved and earned. I have assumed that this was due to the fact that the Marine Corps was going to give credit and promotions, first to their career officers, which I personally thought was wrong.

The Company Commanders and their officers were always closely associated with their men. Having fought side by side, they depended upon and respected one another. The dependence upon each other for survival also established a close bond of trust. Our Intelligence men and or scouts were also closely bonded to the officers as we were their "Intelligence Eyes and Ears", when in battle.

Lessons that had been learned at TARAWA as to landing craft, and amphibious tractors lead to the development of new vehicles. A shallow draft rocket boat had been developed that now could precede other craft with personnel to shore, and bombard the designated landing area before troops landed. It was a great boost to our morale to know of its existence. The new weapon would be known as an LSI(R).

One day we were told to return all sporting and recreation equipment to the Red Cross representative and the Chaplain, whom would have control of it, hereafter. We knew that this was the message we had all dreaded hearing as we were nearing departure.

This was a very sad day to later reflect upon, because once the equipment was packed we were never allowed to ever use it again. During the next twenty months when we were idle or in rest camps, we were always told by the Red Cross representative and Chaplain that they would not unpack these items as we might move out again soon. I thought that we were getting a "dirty deal", however we had no recourse but to accept their denial. There were bicycles, boxing gloves, basketballs and much more being stored and being wasted.

Since early January, Division Headquarters had made a request through Gunner Day that we review our daily logs covering the Battalions battle for TARAWA (Betio Island) and make a detailed day by day accounting for Navy Historians to review. Gunner Day, myself and Roland Wilsey spent many hours preparing a detailed report. The Navy Historians did make their appearance and took notes from our report, ask a few questions then rewrote their version of what happened, and then showed us what they would document as fact. When we questioned their report, we were told in as many words; "IT REALLY IS NONE OF YOUR CONCERN, WHERE YOU DOCUMENTED THAT SOME OF OUR MEN WERE KILLED, ACCIDENTALLY BY OUR OWN RIFLES, SHORT DROPPED BOMBS OR SHELLS FALLING SHORT FROM ARTILLERY AND SHIPS, ANY OF OUR MISTREATMENT OF THE ENEMY OR ANYTHING OF A NATURE THAT MIGHT REFLECT OR SHOW OUR GOVERNMENT OR MILITARY, PUTTING THEM IN A BAD IMAGE WILL NEVER BE WRITTEN IN ANY OFFICIAL HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS. AND THAT IS WHY WE ARE HERE."

After that little bit of conversation, I questioned why should our Combat Intelligence Section, who were with the front line troops, ever want to keep an accurate daily log of actions, if the Navy Historians sitting safely on ship or behind a desk in Washington were going to write their own fictitious version and omit all of the negative things that was witnessed as occurring.

Later I discussed this with Gunner Day and he said that our daily logs were to be kept accurate, always. I reflected on those negative things that do occur in battle and would never be known, except for those who were there and involved. I praise those of the private news media who risked their lives also, they were there, witnessed what did occur and sent their unbelievable-but true stories back to the people at home. These stories they sent home would never have been told had it been left completely to the Military Historians to document.

This little speech given us taught me a very valuable lesson. This meant that my past reading of American and World History was to be questioned as to its accuracy, if it was written to appease those in power at the time.

In addition to our camp newsletter, "Pony Size"(reduced) copies of TIME Magazine were being distributed and we received news broadcasts from those who were lucky enough to have a radio, or over the camp loudspeaker. A new way was developed to get our letters back home a little faster than ships. We could now use what was called a "V-Letter Form", this was a single sheet form whereas we wrote our name and Unit address at the top and in another top section the name and address where it was to be sent, below that was a space for writing a short letter. V-Mail then was censored, then copied on film (35mm or other) and sent to the States by Air, then photo-copied and enlarged when reaching the States and forwarded. This type of mail reached loved ones a lot quicker that being sent on a slow boat.

Late in April, 1944, we started receiving many of the original Battalion men returning to us from the various Hawaiian hospitals, who had received some of the less serious wounds at TARAWA. One was Stanli Soltys, that had received some shrapnel in his hand. During this past week I had been having some bad pain in my lower right side stomach area. It had given me so much trouble that Frank Campbell, our Navy Corpsman said. "Riggs, if this continues I am going to send you to the hospital as it might be your appendix, and we sure couldn't help you much when we are aboard ship." Boy, this had me scared, because if I was left behind I probably would be sent to a new unit, after the operation. Maybe the Lord helped me because my pain disappeared and I knew I would not be left behind. Later I learned that had I stayed behind I probably would have landed on Iwo Jima.

V - M A I L

(VICTORY)

ACTUAL SIZE
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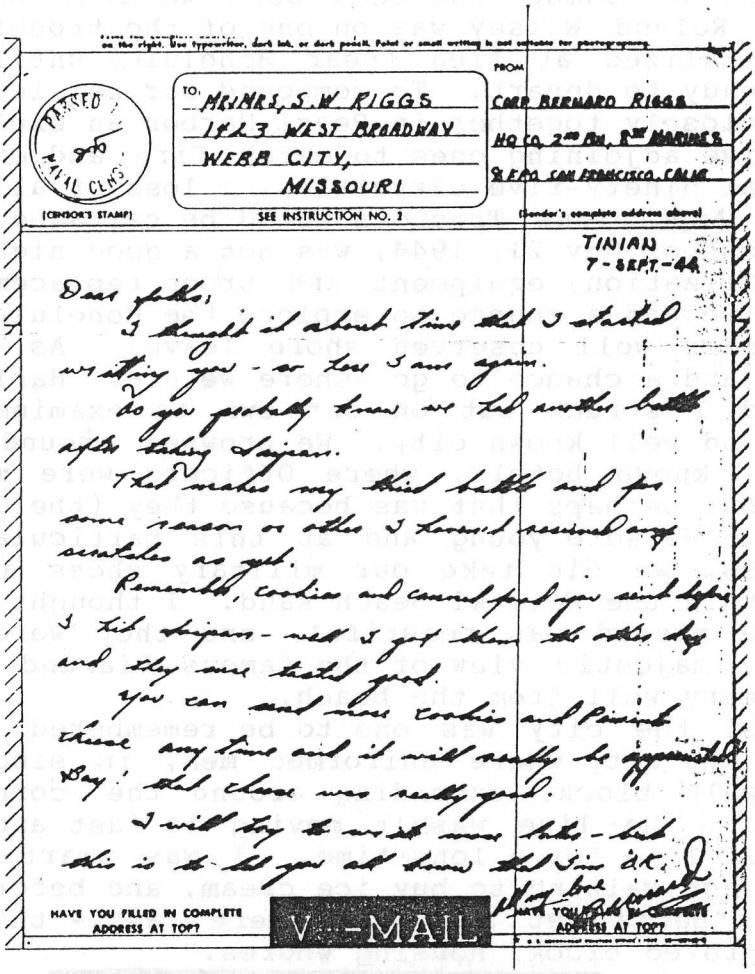


We started loading onto several of the twenty-two LSTs' assigned to the Division, the first week in May, 1944, at the Hilo Harbor. An LST (Launching Ship for amphibian tractors, tanks and troops) can best be described as being an oversized and odd shaped sardine can. It has a frontal carriage that lowers to become a ramp for unloading. It was designed with an underside that was more flat than most vessels of this size. Since it had less draft than a "V" bottomed ship it allowed the LST to get the equipment, supplies and troops closer to the beach. Due to the shape of the underside, heavy wind and a rough sea could toss it around with little effort. Troop quarters were very limited and could not accommodate the troops placed on-board. Many slept topside where vehicles were fasten to the deck, or in the hold (lower cargo area). Drinking water was very scarce and a shower or shave had to be with salty sea water.

LSTs could only maintain an average speed of 8 knots per hour or about 221 ocean miles within a twenty-four hour period, if not hampered by wind or high ocean waves. We had a new amphibious tank (LVT-A) aboard, it was heavily armored and would be tested in combat when we reached our final destination.

Leaving Hilo, our routing would take us to a Hawaiian island shore line, where we would engage in some landing maneuvers, before proceeding to the Pearl and Honolulu Harbors for final staging and outfitting. We had also been promised liberty there, that we were looking forward to. While on maneuvers we encountered an unusual and untimely severe storm that caused LCTs' (Landing Craft Tanks) to break loose and be washed off the LST decks. We would count twenty-nine casualties, as many were sleeping under the Tanks on top deck.

While a lot of damage had been done we lost only three Landing Craft Tanks. Roland Wilsey was on one of the troubled LSTs, causing him to be hospitalized at Aiea (near Honolulu) until our flotilla was refitted and ready to depart. To compound our bad luck, while our LSTs were anchored closely together in Pearl Harbor an explosion occurred on one, causing five adjoining ones to catch fire and explode. This gave us an additional ninety-five casualties, a loss of all supplies aboard, but only five Amphibious Tractors would be salvaged from the six lost LSTs. This night of May 21, 1944, was not a good night for us.

The hospitalization, equipment and troop replacement gave those of us unharmed, time and a chance to explore the Honolulu area, so we took advantage of some well deserved shore leave. As soon as we were allowed passes and a chance to go ashore we did. Harlan Radtke, George Schapendonk and I struck out on our own to examine and explore this famous harbor and well known city. We browsed around and through some of the well known hotels, where Officers were more welcome than enlisted men, but perhaps that was because they (the Officers) had more money to spend. We were young and at this particular time, we could have cared less, we did take our military shoes and socks off and walked barefoot in the Waikiki Beach sand. I thought that every wahine (woman) that we passed was beautiful, and they were. We were quite taken with the majestic view of the famous Diamond Head Crater that could be seen very well from the beach.

Our tour of the city was one to be remembered, as we came across one section of the city where uniformed men, in single file, took up one city sidewalk block, extending around the corner for another one-half block. The line wasn't moving to fast and it appeared that many had been in line for a long time. I was smart enough to realize that they were not waiting to buy ice cream, and before I could say it, Radtke said. "Let's get away from here fast,- this is nothing more than a city approved block, housing whores."

GEORGE SCHAPENDONK **HARLAN C. RADTKE**

BERNARD L. RIGGS

There was no need to question his suggestion so we started "backtracking" as if Marine trained "Doberman Pinscher" dogs were snapping at our heels.

The next day, I was able to make contact and visit my wifes' brother, Herman W. "Burr" Hoerning, with the Army Signal Corps at Honolulu. With my D2 (Intelligence Clearance) I was allowed to see how the Army listened to different broadcasting frequencies (radio) transmissions of the Japanese, then the processing for decoding these messages. I would not see "Burr" again until after the war.

We encountered Jim Montgomery and Dick Meadows on our last day and learned that they had been on one of the LSTs that was lost due to the explosions. WOW-, I was sure a miracle had occurred, for them to be alive and with us, and yes, I do believe in unexplained things happening, that protects us from harm. I do not know if they lost any of their personal items, I knew Jim Montgomery did have a bundle of letters from his girl friend "Kitty", that he had dated through High School, and I'm sure he would have tried save them at all cost.

I talked Dutch Radtke out of some small change and the two of us bought a Number 2 size can of "Del Monte" peaches to have something decent to eat, in addition to rations on future nights ashore. Field rations can get quite tasteless when consumed for a long period.

I was also beginning to feel like an old man, having reached my twenty-second birthday May 11th, when I compared my age to the 16 year old Charles Lindahl that was in our group. This young "kid" spent many patient hours teaching me his game of chess, and I never won.

I began thinking about how much "Kittys" letters meant to Montgomery and I felt a strong urge to write a long assuring letter to Marie. Once we left this harbor it might be a long time before I would have the opportunity to write again. Radtke would most often pen a line or two to Marie at the end of my letter, teasing her by saying that he had lived with me longer than she had. I finished my letter, hoping that she should have it soon.

As soon as the large sun fell into the horizon of the beautiful Pacific, I heard a familiar voice say. "Riggsy, come with me." I turned and saw Gunner John Day and obediently followed him along the outside railing, then down a stairwell along the side of the vessel, where a Navy Coxswain was waiting in a small powered craft. I followed Gunner aboard and a few minutes later, Colonel Crowe and Major Chamberlin were with us. The Coxswain headed through a maze of ships and vessels before pulling alongside a dark grey transport (APA) where we went aboard, Once on board Crowe and Chamberlin were met and escorted to their destination, and I took the direction that Gunner was taking and it lead us to the ships commissary, where he purchased twenty-four cartons of cigarettes and a few other items. NOW - it dawned on me as to why he had said, "Riggsy" he needed a pack-mule to help him carry this load back, which we did after the commissary found us some cloth bags to carry this loot in.

We returned to the small craft and waited while Crowe and Chamberlin, I assumed, were getting a final briefing. In less than an hour they also returned and we headed back toward our LST. The return took us past the remains of the six destroyed LSTs. The area was well lighted and salvage and repair crews were working twenty four hours. The Coast Guard had provided markers for passing vessels to aviod. As we neared our LST, my assumption proved to be correct, as Col. Crowe turned to Gunner and me with a slight smile on his face, said. "Get a good nights rest, we're leaving in the morning."

The sun had disappeared into the ocean last night, and this morning we would witness its re-appearance, rising from the opposite direction. Today was the 25th of May and as the sun started showing the first sign of light, we heard the noise of anchors being hoisted, propellers started turning and our LST fell in line, following others out of the harbor.

I was glad that something different was happening today, but I was not anxious to get to our unknown destination. We had enjoyed some good times during the six-month stay. One that we would not soon forget was the Division Rodeo and Barbecue held during our stay at the Parker Ranch, where many of our Marines rode broncos and steers for our entertainment. This plus the USO shows and the several months allowed for us to rest and heal on United States soil was of great help.

We knew as soon as we had been placed on LSTs that we had been chosen to lead another assault on some beach. Within our flotilla leaving Pearl Harbor was LSDs (loaded with Sherman Tanks), AKAs (with Tanks), LSTs, and an accompaniment of light destroyers for protection. There were also a few APDs, that were converted World War I Destroyers that had some boilers removed, to make room for carrying troops.

The Regimental, Division Command and Reserve Troops did not leave until several days later, They were on the faster APAs (transport ships) and joined with us after we had reached and entered the lagoon at Eniwetok Island (an Atoll). We had now been told of our next island to be assaulted, its strength and all other known intelligence.

The island was to be Saipan, one of the Japanese held islands in the Marianas chain of islands, that included Tinian and Guam. We studied our maps carefully and our landing beach assignments. The assault to be lead by two separate Combat Teams, CT-8 and CT-6 on a four Battalion front. The 1st Battalion of a newly formed 29th Regiment (being carried as reserve troops on the old converted APDs) would follow in behind CT-8 and CT-2 would land behind CT-6.

The code name assigned was "Operation Forager", I have not been able to make any sense of how Admiral Nimitz and Staff chose this name, but I'm sure they could explain, if I ever get a chance to ask.
The full operation was to assault and control Saipan first, then Tinian and Guam. After World War 1 these islands had been given to Japan under a League of Nations mandate, before they had been under Germany control.

Saipan, being about 15 miles long was populated with 30,000 civilians and 25000 Imperial Army and Navy troops. It is about 5000 miles from San Francisco and within 1300 miles from Japan. With its several airfields it would allow us to be within air striking range of Japan proper, using our long range bombers. The highest ground is Mount Tapotchau which rises 1500 feet above sea level.

On June 6th we heard over the ships PA (public address system) that U.S. Troops had crossed the English Channel, landing in France. There was a lot of cheering, however our thoughts were more on our assignment, and France and the War in Europe was far to removed from our thoughts.

We were presently at Eniwetok Atoll, in the Marshall Islands awaiting for various units to gather and assemble. This was considered to be a "Staging Area". When we were ready to leave this Atoll to proceed to our destination, we would be part of the largest convoy ever assembled to date in the Pacific. As we left, we were aware that the Fourth Marine Division and the Twenty-Seventh Army Division was with us. All troop carrying vessels were surrounded and protected by all types of Destroyers, Minesweepers, Light Cruisers and other naval craft. The Battleships, Heavy Cruisers, Destroyers and Carriers were

far on the horizon ahead, prepared to engage the enemy if any might attempt to hamper our movement.

Marines tried to spend as much time as possible above on the open deck to catch any cool breeze that might blow, however the sun reflecting from the metal decks generated a tremendous amount of unwanted heat. I made my trips on the outside mostly after the sun disappeared. I was somewhat more fortunate than some, because I was allowed to stay in a small air conditioned room, provided for Gunner Days storage of maps and our Intelligence Data. The room had been under "lock and key", protected by a Marine Guard until after leaving Hawaii and OPERATION FORAGER was announced to the troops.

Being the Battalions Draftsman, I took advantage of the situation and any other comforts that I could make available to me. Wilsey, Sheppard, Wibholm and several others of our Intelligence Section were aboard other LSTs with the Companies to whom they had been assigned to land with. Only a small number of our group had remained on this vessel which carried the Battalion Command.

I became educated by watching the Navy Stewards provide sweet breads and coffee to the Officers, both night and day, between regular meals. My brain, which hadn't much of an opportunity to work for awhile, started working "overtime" to discover a way to help those of our group on board, a means to obtain some of these "fringe benefits". The "navy boys" had been making inquiries of the Marines on board as to any war trophies and souvenirs that they might sell or part with. Of course, most of the Marines having these items would have mailed them home long ago, except for a few. Some still had a few small items that they did sell to the sailors.

One day while "jawing" with a Steward, he let it be known that there was a limited amount of ice cream being kept for the Officers and crew. My brain went into "first-gear" and I started the process of "baiting my trap", I let it be known to one of the lesser ranked Stewards that the Intelligence Section had a "captured Japanese flag" in their room, but I did not think that they would part with it. Later, during the same day, there was a knock at our door and in walked a Chief Steward with a pot of coffee and a tray of sandwiches. "Fellows," He said. "I know you've been locked up in here for some time and I thought you might like to have some extra food, so enjoy." Nothing more was said, although we thanked him, and he left. We enjoyed, and I knew that he or some one else would be back later. The next morning we were brought more coffee and some sweet rolls, however this time he (and we too) knew what he was after when he said. "It's rumored that you fellows might have a Japanese Flag that you might part with." I told him. "Yes, we do have one that was taken from a dead Jap Officer at the Main Command Post on TARAWA, but it belongs to all of us and I don't think the fellows would want to part with it." While the conversation continued, I went to our locker box and pulled out an old battle-worn Jap (home-made in Hawaii) Flag. I saw his mouth drop, and I knew that he would have given us this LST, if it had been his to give, in return for this Flag.

He made some offers and I told him that we would discuss it with the others and let him know of our decision. We, finally accepted his deal of providing us with sandwiches and coffee for the rest of the journey, PLUS one and a half gallon of vanilla ice cream. We had to promise never to reveal our transaction to anyone while we were aboard this ship. We passed the word to as many of our group as we could find, when the ice cream was delivered, and we all enjoyed a little taste of heaven, until the bottom of the pail was scraped clean. The ice cream was a one time deal, but not the coffee and sandwiches.

We listened to evening "Tokyo Rose" broadcasts over the ships PA system and the popular American music that she played for our ears. She told us more about our troop movements, units involved and other information, that U.S. Admirals and Generals thought was classified. In a way, she probably did more for our morale than to demoralize it.

These "oversized sardine cans" (LSTs) were very uncomfortable when we encountered some rough sea, the flat bottoms caused us to be tossed and in turn it was hard to keep a meal down long enough to be digested. As each calendar day was crossed we finally reached June 14, and tomorrow was our scheduled "D"-day (June 15, 1944). We cleaned weapons, checked and packed our gear, filled canteens and made ready to go ashore early in the morning. I had in addition to my regular gear, my map pack with extra maps, message books and etc. I would also carry my "M1" Garand Rifle and a can of peaches.

The Chaplains call for church services was announced during the early afternoon, then later in the evening a quietness seemed to blanket our ship, everyone seemed to be absorbed in inner and or their personal thoughts.

As night fell around us the ships in the convoy began to gather a little closer to one another, slowing their speed and running with total "blackout", from this point we would proceed and make our approach from the eastern side of the island under a darken sky that was in our favor. The Japanese Commander on Saipan, General Saito was certain that if our troops were to invade that it would be on the eastern shores and he had positioned his defensive forces on that shoreline. We maneuvered our ships around the northern tip of Saipan, during the night then circled back along the western coastline in the early morning hours of June 15, and positioned our Carriers, Battleships, Cruisers and Troop Ships far enough from shore to avoid being hit by any shells from shore. Within two hours after our two-oclock "wake-up call", we were climbing into our LVT-1s (Armored Amphibious Tractors, which I will call Amtracs), which were in the ships hold. We had been given our breakfast of toast, coffee, scrambled (powdered) eggs, navy beans with ketchup and an orange. If you ever read a story where a person was given "Steak n Eggs" as their final landing morning breakfast, then you can be assured that this was a Red Cross Representative, a Private News Correspondent, Chaplain or a Marine Officer. They did not waste this type of food on us "Grunts".

As our front LST unloading ramps lowered, our tractors carried us off the ramp into the water and darkness, other troops were unloading down rope ladders from the larger transports onto LCVPs (Higgin Boats). Then all of us in different Combat Landing Teams assembled and went in large holding pattern circles awaiting our time to head to our designated landing beach. Around 0700 hour (7:am) it was daylight, yet there was a sense of darkness due to the heavy shelling of the landing beaches by our ships. Battleships were cruising between Tinian and Saipan firing their large guns on the airstrips and other targets, while also receiving counter-fire. Navy Dive Bombers arrived to help silence the Japanese guns and keep any Japanese planes from taking to the air.

To the right of our assigned landing beaches (Green Beach 1 and 2) was the islands "sugar mill" town of Charan Kanoa, and directly in front of our landing area was the Charan Kanoa airfield that was to be our first objective. Then like nothing any of us had ever witnessed, 161 Navy Bombers dropped from the clouds and made runs on the Ushi airfield at the northern tip of Tinian and then runs on the major Saipan Aslito airfield on Saipans southern end and then the town and airstrip at Charan Kanoa.

The "Ushi" airfield on Tinian would be the same airfield where the U.S. Air Force B-29 Superfortress Bomber "Enola Gay" would (fourteen months later) load the first ATOMIC BOMB ever used in war and drop it above Hiroshima, Japan. And the same air field where the B-29 Bomber "BOCKs' CAR" loaded and later dropped the second and last ATOMIC BOMB every used in war (making the Japanese surrender), above the industrial area at Nagasaki. I make mention of this, at this point in my story because of its importance in history.

There was so much smoke from the dumps and buildings being damaged, that we knew whatever was being destroyed by these courageous pilots would lessen our burden, once we were ashore. These 161 planes took only fifteen minutes to do their strafing and bombing, but they left a tremendous amount of destruction and enemy confusion. While the planes had been in the air, the Battleship "California" (that had been re-floated from the Pearl Harbor disaster) pulled in close to shore and fired inland, using their powerful guns. Their rapid pace of sending shells ashore also damaged the lining in their large guns. At the same time, Admiral Spruance on his Cruiser "Indianapolis" Flagship edged closer to the reef to shell and help clear landing beaches, however some large guns on shore made some hits on the "Flagship" and the Admiral slowly withdrew.

LCIs (Landing Craft with Rockets) moved close in and unleashed a tremendous barrage of rockets that made a scary screaming noise as they lifted in the air and headed ashore. We were following closely behind the LCIs in our Amphibian (I will refer to as Amtracs) Tractors and behind us were others and then troops in Higgin Boats. Navy Coxswains had been assigned to each Combat Team to have control of guiding the vehicles to the proper assigned landing beaches. The Coxswain guiding Colonel Crowes Combat Team Eight, made a terrific error in judgement and we were taken ashore to the far left side of our assigned "Green Beach 1 and 2", I arrived at about 0850 hour (8:50am), around seven minutes after the first Amtrac had landed. By this time the Japanese had repositioned and aligned their mortars, artillery, anti-boat guns and all other firepower at our landing beaches, and training many weapons upon our Amtracs, Tanks and Higgin Boats. Heavy shells were finding targets and bursting everywhere. In the water, sand, hitting many of our Tanks and vessels loaded with Marines, and exploding in the air above us. Searing hot shrapnel was flying everywhere, one large piece of exploding shell made a screeching sound and skimmed about a foot past my left side at ear level and buried itself in a palm tree with a resounding thud. Everyone in our group was heading inland, keeping to the right in an effort to correct for our landing error. We were all scared, but we were too busy trying to find a safer haven than to worry about the moment. I followed others of our Battalion about 25 to 30 yards inland, where we were sheltered from view by trees and brush. Finding a small ravine, I jumped in, but I found that I was not alone or safe as I found one dead Jap, two wounded Marines and a Navy Corpsman (Medic). The Japs were now directing their shelling inland from the beach and some shells were getting pretty close. The "Medic" asked that I help him get the wounded to the beach where they would now, perhaps be safer than our present position, and could be taken care of. We moved quickly, but dropped a few times to avoid the exploding nearby shells, then we were back on the beach. We witnessed several dead, then one Officer appeared to still be alive, however shrapnel had removed his skull as skillfully as a Professional Surgeon might have done and his brain was exposed to the sun and sand. We left a mark for the Medics to locate him and then I took off again heading inland to find my group.

I was not alone as several started joining me and we proceeded inland toward the airfield, where I located Radtke, Gunner Day, Grant and Major Chamberlin. It was here that I first learned of Colonel Crowe being seriously wounded and Major Chamberlin was presently in charge of our Battalion. As the day progressed, all that we could do in the 2-8 Command Post (CP) was dig in and hope that the Japanese would direct their mortars and artillery in some other direction. The real heroes were those on the front lines, in front just a few yards ahead of us, or on our flanks. Generally, when we were notified that they were moving forward, we did also. We were always reminded that enemy snipers could be hiding at our rear and could give us hell any time they wanted, so we were very cautious.

Runners (Scouts) from our Intelligence Section were bringing information back to the CP during the day and I took this data and plotted it on my master map. Chamberlin and others looked at it quite often and it gave them a "picture" of where our Companies and adjacent units were plus what our Scouts had reported of known enemy positions and strengths.

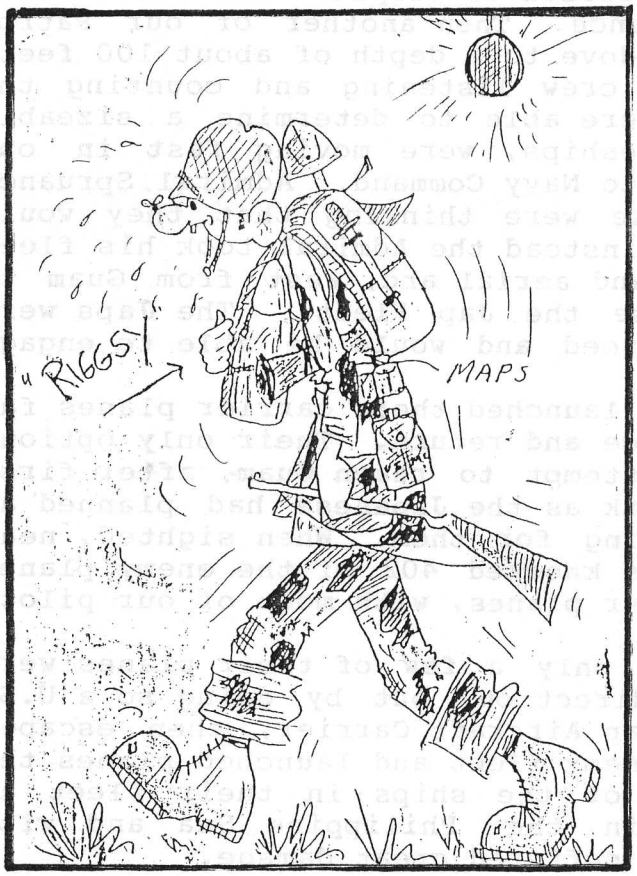
It seemed to be the longest day of my life, but just before darkness, Major Chamberlin passed the word to dig-in for the night. Our CP was inland now a few hundred yards on higher ground and looking back toward the beach we had a clear or "picture perfect" view of the Battleships, Cruisers and other ships off shore, who were when ordered, still sending salvos on enemy positions. Then one of the strangest things happened that I shall never forget. An enemy observation plane appeared from some unknown location, flying about 100 to 200 feet above the landing beach heading north toward Tanapag Harbor. The pilot and his observer could easily be seen, one behind the other within their small glass dome "birdcage" that covered them. They were in no hurry and the sound of their single engine droned without effort. What I will never understand is why they were never shot out of the sky. They circled, making several passes while every ship at sea and our men with weapons on shore filled the sky all around them with lead inter-mixed with red streaks from tracers shells. Then finally they disappeared as if they were "thumbing their nose" at the whole U.S. Navy for being such poor marksmen. Now, when we analyze what the Jap pilot had done was to draw fire power from the ships and the hot lead was falling all around the American Marines, in the canefields on shore. The plane, unknowingly had caused more injuries to us than they would have, had they had made a strafing and a bombing run. And our injuries were caused by Admiral Nimitz "friendly fire". I could not imaged that what I had just witnessed could be real, it was as though a "Ghost Plane" had suddenly appeared and "Guardian Angels" had been in the cockpit.

We had identified where all of our Companies were located, when darkness came, except for "Easy" Company, Marvin Sheppard was the assigned Scout and we were very concerned about their and his welfare. Soon after darkness we received a radio message that they had progressed so rapidly during the day that they had dug-in several hundred feet ahead of other troops. This left them in a bad exposed position and had the Japs known of their isolation they could have been in serious trouble, but do to the Japs being caught off-guard and confused this first day, "Easy" Company survived the night.

In my story, I have described in lengthy detail, two first day assault landings (the first being at TARAWA), perhaps in more detail than I should have. I felt that it was important to illustrate just how different, but yet how dangerous and deadly that each was to be. From this point forward I will only concentrate on the summation of the actions and highlights of events, as they remain in my memory.

It has been documented that even with the tremendous losses on our first day at TARAWA, more Majors and Colonels had been wounded or killed here on the first day on Saipan than had ever been previously reported in any Marine Corps History, for losses during one day in a single battle. The Second Marine Division had 315 missing in action, 1022 wounded and 238 killed on this first day. We fought the enemy for twenty-six fierce fighting days before the island was declared secure or where we had control.

Because of the early and heavy loss of key Officers, many NCOs (non-commissioned officers) were spot (field promoted) to higher ranks. The Marine Corps, due to their structure and training had capable men to step in and take charge of a squad, platoon or Company and continue to lead regardless of a bad situation. Each is taught to rely and stand by one another, to work as a team.



Bernard Riggs On Saipan

Saipan, Marianas Islands (delayed) - By a coincidence of the alphabet, Radtke and Riggs found themselves standing next to each other the day they began Marine recruit training in San Diego, Calif., 19 months ago. They've been together ever since. Today they are fighting Japs and sharing the same foxhole on Saipan in their second major campaign. Both are veterans of Tarawa.

They did duty at Camp Elliott, Calif., together, came overseas on the same ship, and were assigned to the same unit.

Corporal Harlan C. Radtke, of Sanborn, Michigan, wounded at Tarawa, was awarded the Purple Heart.

Private First Class Bernard L. Riggs, of 1423 West Broadway, Webb City, Mo., came through the heavy artillery shelling of D-day without a scratch.

Their second night on Saipan, the two Marines shared a can of peaches which they had purchased together a month and a half earlier for just that occasion.

"It sure tasted good," they said in unison.

June 16th (Second day): Our CP moved forward as the Companies advanced, and each move caused me ("Riggsy"- Gunner Days tag for me) to re-pack, strap everything somewhere on my body and follow Major Chamberlin and Staff to wherever he decided to stop.

After digging foxholes for the night, we opened our field rations and tried to enjoy, then Dutch Radtke asked. "RIGGS, where is our can of peaches?" "Right here." I replied, pulling them from my back-pack. We ate between sounds like "oh-boy, that tasted good." A Marine Combat Correspondent, Sergeant Herb Shultz (from Albany New York) had been with us all day and we shared with him. He wrote the story as how two Marines had been together since Boot Camp, TARAWA, and now on Saipan sharing foxholes and a can of peaches the second night in battle was picked-up from the "wire service" and published in some Missouri Newspapers, however through an error on Radtkes behalf, the news was forwarded to Michigan, instead of Radtkes home State of Minnesota, therefore he would not learn of its publication until years later.

Artillery from the hills kept raining shells on us all night. Japanese Bombers flew overhead before midnight and again in the early morning hours and their bombs falling with a screaming sound, once heard would never be forgotten. Then for many of the nights that followed, the old ghost plane that survived Guadalcanal and Tarawa, "Wash Machine Charlie" put in his appearance, passing slowly overhead dropping bombs, sometimes in our area and sometimes on his own men. One thing about "Charlie", he did not discriminate.

June 19th (Fifth day): Richard "Dick" Johnson, a United Press Correspondent, best described this day as the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot". This incident was not on Saipan, however it involved this island and is important to mention here. One of our American Submarines had spotted the Japanese Fleet leaving the Philippines, with Aircraft Carriers heading in the direction of Saipan. The information was passed through to Navy Intelligence. Then another of our Patrol Subs (Submarines) spotted them, then dove to a depth of about 100 feet, shut down all sound, and by his crew listening and counting the propellers turning overhead, they were able to determine a sizeable enemy fleet, including some Battleships, were moving fast in our direction and they radioed this data to Navy Command. Admiral Spruance was pretty certain that the Japanese were thinking that they would catch the U.S. Navy by surprise, but instead the Admiral took his fleet and by placing them in a surface and aerial arc, west from Guam to Saipan, he hoped to secretly surprise the Jap Fleet. The Japs were heading in our direction at maximum speed and would be able to engage battle before the day was over.

For some unknown reason the enemy launched their carrier planes far to soon for them to strike our force and return. Their only option, once leaving their carriers was to attempt to reach Guam, after first striking at our force. It did not work as the Japanese had planned as our Navy had planes in the air waiting for them. When sighted, near mid-day our superior pilots and planes knocked 402 of the enemy planes out of the sky, while losing 106 of our planes, with most of our pilots and crew being rescued at sea.

After the Japanese learned that only a few of their planes were going to return, the fleet reversed direction, but by doing so a U.S. Submarine was waiting and sank a Jap Aircraft Carrier, then escaped unharmed. Our carriers pursued the enemy fleet and launched planes the following day to destroy as many of the ships in their fleet as possible. They located the enemy in the Philippine Sea and with torpedoes and bombs the Japanese Navy suffered great damage.

On Saipan, this night the Japs, being desperate, put troops on thirteen of their barges in Tanapag Harbor (north of us) and floated them under the cover of darkness, hoping to land them south of our lines, in an effort to get behind our troops. Our Command had anticipated such an attempt and was waiting for them with rocket boats, 75mm guns, machine guns and rifles. The floating Japs were caught in a cross-fire and all barges were sank, and Marine sharpshooters made certain that no live Jap reached the shore.

June 21st (Seventh day): The natives of Saipan, Tinian and Guam were called "Chamorros", they did not want this war , however they were caught-up in it with nowhere to run. Those that did survive the shellings and surrendered to our troops appeared pleased to be released from the Japanese domination of them. They were small in stature, brown skinned (similar to other natives on these Pacific Islands), scared, and confused but friendly, after they found that we were not going to kill the men and rape the women, as they had previously been told by the Japanese, before our landing.

The civilians were being brought into a compound area where they could be cared for. The enclosure was established near the radio tower, just east near the north end of the Charan Kanoa air field. This was an unfortunate location because we had a large ammunition dump just north of their compound that exploded around 9pm, sending shells in many directions and causing other explosions throughout the night. In addition to the many casualties within the civilian compound, a few hundred yards north of the dump, Marines had been at work within the Second Marine Division Cemetery and they were killed by the explosions. This brought back memories of my work detail at the ammunition dump in Hawaii, a few months ago. Then the thought of our men dying within our own cemetery brought a few more chills through my body.

June 24th (Tenth day): We had gained ground each day, it was not easy and we paid a high price, but at last we were now very close to reaching the highest point of land on this island, Mount Tapotchau. Major Chamberlin told us to hold for the night and dig our foxholes as deep as we possible could. Again, we found that we were dirty, tired, hungry and needed some sleep. I had learned that a good foxhole could be a lifesaver, so I took my little Government Issued (GI) shovel, but I couldn't make much headway as I found that in this higher mountain area there was rock hidden under the six inches of soil covering it. I was able to borrow a pick from Ray Simon and that helped, but I kept chopping and chipping until my hands were bleeding and then I kept going until it was deep enough to afford me a little extra room to squirm.

Dutch Radtke was one that believed that if he ever needed a foxhole, he would jump in with someone, but this kind of digging was for the "birds" as far as he was concerned. The Japanese that had control of this high ground was not going to let us have it, so during the evening after darkness, they started a barrage of mortar and artillery over the mountain top in our direction. The first shells that started landing in our area caused some casualties and Radtke took advantage of our friendship and became an unwanted guest, but after reflecting upon the situation I found a little comfort having him with me, and also the way we were packed, a shell would have to go through him first to get to me.

We had an artillery point man to assist Major Chamberlin, and when ordered he asked for the Marine Artillery Unit (far below the mountain and to our rear) to start shelling the Japs on the other side of the mountain. NOW - what happened was this, the advance man sent range and elevation data back, and something went wrong, because we were getting "friendly fire" dropping on us. We were catching "HELL" now from both sides and our men were cursing our artillery crew. Chamberlin stood up and shouted. "If you stay in your foxhole, the incoming shells can make you wish to hell you were home, but they're less able to hurt you." GOD-help us, because now enemy bombers were overhead and they were dropping their "eggs" in and all around us. It wasn't very comforting to know that your own artillery was trying to help the enemy, but finally the artillery did get the right elevation and distance and that helped ease our pain an suffering, but we were still cussing our artillery through-out the night as medics helped to evacuate our wounded. The Bombers made only one pass, as I remember, but there must have been quite a few planes trying to level this mountain top.

We learned of Roland Wilsey being wounded the following day, from this nights shelling. He had been in front of our CP with "Easy" Company Commander Captain Robert H. Rogers and Marvin Sheppard when he received his first wound of the war.

June 25th (Eleventh day): With Easy Companies advanced patrol and the newly formed 29th Marine Battalion, we took control of this mountain from the stubborn Japanese defenders. As soon as we were able to establish an observation post (OP), I took a sketching pad and secured a place where I was able to see the northern and eastern portion of the island, still in enemy hands. The "E" Company mortar squad observer, using field glasses was scanning for potential targets, and also watching enemy troops and vehicles heading north in the far distance, out of our mortar range.

Below the ridge that protected and hid us, was a flat plateau, perhaps about 400 feet down and to our east. We notice a cleared field extending from our mountain ridge to a row of trees, running in a north and south direction about 900 feet to the east, where a single Japanese soldier was spotted, squatting with his pants down, apparently trying to get his bowels to work and give him some relief. He appeared small from our position above, but we could not resist the temptation to help this poor soul out by sending some mortar rounds his way. The observer estimated his distance, elevation and location on his map then forwarded this data back to the mortar squad by phone (as wire had been laid), The first 81mm mortar shell landed short and to the right. The next round came a little closer, but was still far enough away not to frighten the little man. Then with some adjustments in range and elevation a new volley of shells started landing close enough that the man, with out haste pulled his pants up and moved several feet farther away and squatted again. After ten shells had been fired, the un-frighten soldier became discouraged, but not scared, and slowly pulled his pants up and headed northward. The observer was disappointed, but he did get some good practice, and the group had some amusement and some laughter, which was rare.

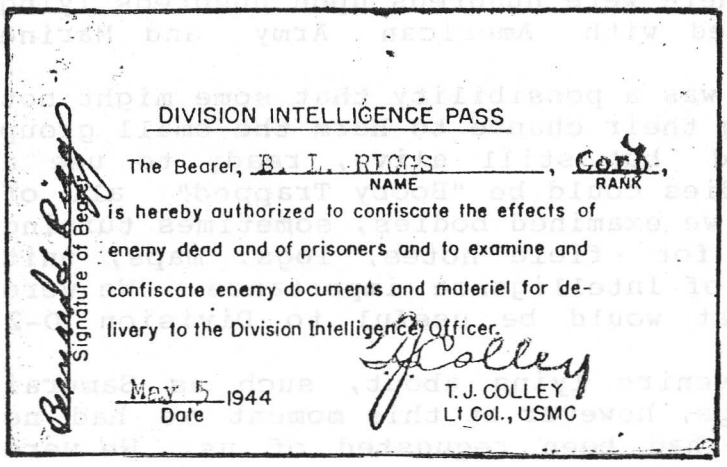
Our move from the mountain top would now take a swing to our left and we advanced in an northwesterly arc toward the coastline. It was a very costly descent and we incurred many casualties.

July 4th (Twentieth day): Today we had reached and was overlooking the village of Tanapag on the west side of Saipan. The Japanese Navy had used Tanapag Harbor for many of their ships and seaplanes. We established our Battalion CP on a high ridge with Tanapag to the right and the city of Garapan to our left, below near sea level.

After the fighting subsided in these two towns, many of our troops went down the steep hill to explore and plunder. They found storage areas with wrist watches, rice, canned crab meat and beer and saki, among many other items such as clothes and brightly colored parasols. They had a feast and washed the food down with the newly found drinks, but only after they had those captured eat and drink first. By mid-afternoon things really got happy in the two villages, we witnessed what we thought was to be a parade of "circus clowns" singing, while attempting to climb the steep slope to return to their respective units. These Marines, while getting soused on saki and beer had wrapped themselves in colorful kimonos and were trying to carry opened parasols that were just as bright. They were hardly recognizable as Marines, with the outer layer of clothing, but it was a sight, never to be forgotten.

The first group of "clowns" reaching the top were followed by two of our Intelligence Section men, Jack "Obie" O'Brien and our language expert J.D. Nix. They had some captured Japs with them who were either mental cases or bombed out of their heads by too much eating and of saki and beer tasting. As Nix approach Gunner Day and our group, he spoke some words to these men that we did not understand.

James Nix must have told them that Gunner John Day was the "General-In-Charge", because they fell to their knees in front of us, uttering some strange words and bowing as though they had an audience with the "Emperor of Japan". Gunner Day was laughing with the rest of us and shaking his head at the same time. These captured soldiers were so happily drunk that they were of no value to us in their present condition. Gunner, with a big grin on his face looked at O'Brien and Nix and said. "You brought them here, but they can not be interrogated while in this drunk condition, so I want you two to take them back to Division Command and turn them over to Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Jack Colley in D-2. Maybe they will be soberer when you get there."



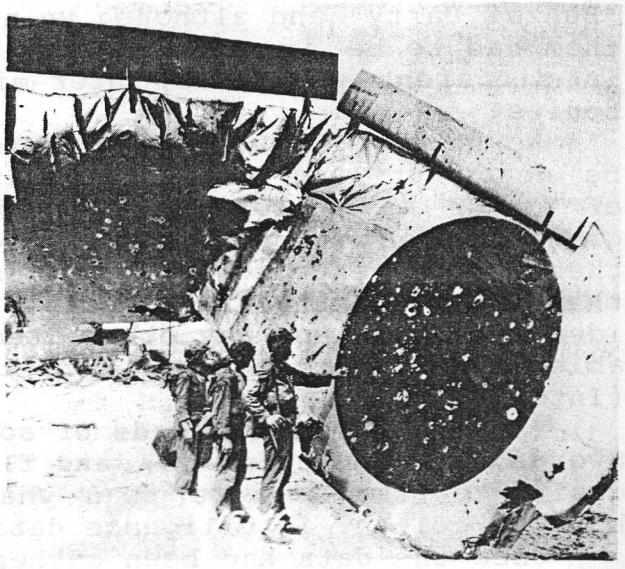
DIVISION INTELLIGENCE PASS

The Bearer, B. L. RIGGS (NAME), Corp. (RANK), is hereby authorized to confiscate the effects of enemy dead and of prisoners and to examine and confiscate enemy documents and materiel for delivery to the Division Intelligence Officer.

Signature of Bearer: Bernard L. Riggs

May 5 1944 (Date)

T. J. COLLEY
Lt Col., USMC



Later in the day, I ventured down the slope into the Tanapag village and was astounded by the sight of a large Japanese naval aircraft that had been destroyed by our forces. To satisfy my desire for a souvenir, I ripped a small piece of metal from the large red Japanese "Rising Sun" symbol painted on the crippled wing (This piece still remains in my scrapbook as does some sand from Tarawa).

Before returning to our CP, high above, I loaded up with as many cans of crab meat as I could carry. Over the next several days, I would eat so much of it that I got to the point of thinking that field rations weren't all that bad.

July 6th (Twenty-second day): We had finally squeezed the remaining defenders to the northern portion of the island and General Saito, realizing that he was losing this battle, gave orders to make a final "Banzai" attack against the "devil" U.S. Marines. Then through the later capture of a Japanese Officer we learned that the General first drew blood with his own sword, then was shot in the head by his adjutant and his body was cremated.

July 7th (Twenty-third day): The enemy forces that were left assembled early this morning for a final attack. They only had a few tanks, machine guns and other small weapons, some made spears with bamboo and lashed bayonets on to wooden sticks, they were determined to fight to the very end. Soon after 4:30am they found a gap in between two U.S. Army Battalions and started their charge. The two Army Battalions suffered heavy losses from their mistake, but this also allowed the Japs to overwhelm and surround members of the Third Battalion of the Tenth Marine Regiment. Instead of getting a days rest, our Eighth Regimemt was called in to support the Sixth Marine Regiment in a fight to eliminate the remaining suicidal Japs.

We entered the battle area early in the afternoon and were directed to provide assistance and support to the Twenty-Seventh Army placed under Marine Command. After digging-in (making foxholes) for the night we established a very tight security around our perimeter.

July 8th (Twenty-fourth day): At daybreak we passed through the Army lines and entered a canefield of American and Japanese corpses. Bodies were everywhere, sometimes lying over another. They were in ditches, ravines and in the flat canefields. The Battalion moved on forward, but myself and a few others from our Intelligence Section were ordered to remain in this "Field Of The Dead" to search and collect whatever intelligence data that we could.

It was estimated that 2500 Japanese may have participated in this "Banzai Party" and although we never took an actual body count, most of them had to be in this field. There were hundreds upon hundreds lying in different positions inter-mixed with American Army and Marine bodies.

We were well aware that there was a possibility that some might not be dead but lying still, awaiting their chance to harm the small group of us or maybe seriously wounded but still alive, ready to use a grenade when we got close. Bodies could be "Booby Trapped" all of these things entered our minds as we examined bodies, sometimes turning them over looking in pockets for field notes, logs, maps, unit identification and any other item of Intelligence importance. We were able to assemble much data that would be useful to Division D-2 (Intelligence).

There were truck loads of souvenirs lying about, such as Samurai Swords, rifles, pistols, and flags, however at this moment we had no desire to take anymore than what had been requested of us. We were here to collect intelligence data only.

Once the data had been gathered we presented it to Gunner Day, then after a few words with Major Chamberlin, I heard that familiar voice say. "Riggsy, come with me." This time, Major Chamberlin got into the front seat of his chauffeured "Jeep" and Gunner and I climbed into the back with our packet of gathered data and we headed back down the trail toward Division Headquarters.

Again we passed through the "Field Of The Dead" and watched as troops had moved in the area to identify the American dead and remove their precious bodies to a proper burial ground. Others were there to plunder, and they were roaming through the cane field like "buzzards", plucking souvenirs from the dead and now bloating Japanese bodies. Later, I learned that some of these preying "buzzards" had actually pried open the mouths of the dead to remove gold teeth. One such person showed me three "Bull Durham" tobacco cloth bags full of gold and let me have a choice of one. I did chose one which I later affixed to a chain and wore around my neck through the next battle on Tinian.

July 9th (Twenty-fifth day): The Battalion now made a left turn, taking us out of the hills and we joined with Combat Team Six (CT-6) on the beach. Division Command relieved our Battalion for a well deserved rest. Trucks took us to a bivouac area. At 1600 hour or 4pm on this day, the island was declared as "Secured", but we knew that Japs were still hiding in the caves and mountains and all was not safe. Many Japs would stay in hiding here long after the wars end.

Combat Team Two (CT-2) made up of the Second Marine Regiment, being attached to the Fourth Marine Division had landed at the northern portion of the island to flush out the remaining defenders near and around "Marpi Point". They became witness to and were sickened and helpless as they watched mothers toss the young and babies over the cliffs to the water and rocks below.

The Japanese had told the civilians "horror-stories" about what American Troops would do if they were captured, we also were told that the Japanese had told the civilians that unless they took their own lives, they would be shot by Japanese soldiers, so many families felt as though they had no choice.

Radtke, Schapendonk, Kohnle, Simon, Adams, Sheppard, Grant and I as well as most of the landing team still had on the same outer clothes that we had landed with twenty-five (25) days before. We had been able to change socks every so often, but not much more. We were down right "filthy", and you can imagine how the uniform had soaked-up body odor, dirt and everything else during this time. The uniforms were stiff and so far gone, that when a bath and new clothes were available we felt that the discarded clothes should have had a burial ceremony. To be clean again, shaven, new clothes, and clean bodies, helped to give us a new lease on life, for awhile anyway.

It is important to explain that this was the first time that we had ever landed with U.S. Army Troops being under direct orders of Marine Corps Command. I analyzed that two things went wrong; First, the Army had been trained differently from the Marines. Secondly, the Army Officers would not obey the direct orders given them by Marine Command.

On the tenth day ashore, the 106th Regiment of the Twenty-Seventh Army Division was given orders to move forward at an appointed time, with the Marine Combat Team Eight (CT-8) on their left flank and the Fourth Marine Division on their right. It was extremely important that a continuous joint line always be closed and un-broken by all troops advancing together. NOW, when it came time to advance forward, the two Marine Units moved, but the Army Command in the center did not. This allowed both Marine Units to be exposed and unprotected on their respective right and left flanks. Major General Ralph Smith, Commanding the Army Twenty-Seventh Division was immediately relieved of his Command by direction of Marine Lieutenant General H. M. Smith.

Then on the twenty-third day of battle, the two Battalions of the Army Twenty-Seventh Division allowed the enemy with their "Banzai Attack" to penetrate back of the Marine lines causing heavy losses to both, Army and Marines. Although the Army soldiers fought and died as bravely as the Marines, the two serious "blunders" allowing them to happen must be placed on the "shoulders" of their (Army) Officers.

Around midnight on the day the island was declared as "Secure", someone forgot to tell the Japs, because about fifty had gathered and staged another "Banzai Charge", then on July 10th, one day later we (Marines) killed 2000 more.

Pfc. John E. Kohnle

Dayton News, Sunday, July 23, 1944.

"SAIPAN, Marianas Island (Delayed). One ofthe first Marines to reach the 1,554 foot summit of Mount Topotchau, highest point on this 12 mile long island, was PFC John E. Kohnle. He moved to the crest of the rugged volcanic peak at 4:30pm five days ago and, with other Marines, prepared to hold the position against the Japanese resistance during the night. Later Marine supporting units arrived, and the first group of mountain soldiers withdrew. The trip was made through pockets of enemy resistance. Snipers got one of Kohnle's unit. At another point, the Marines wounded three Japs with a burst from a lightmachine gun. All three committed hara-kiri,blowing themselves up with grenades."

July 15th (Thirtieth day): The Second Marine Division was completely relieved and Garrison Troops would now have charge of the defense of this island. From a combined total from all units involved, we would count 16,624 American casualties, which was a very high price to pay for seventy-two square miles of real estate. This averaged 554 casualties per day, or 231 casualties for every square mile taken.

As a group we could not be happier, but our two Division Cemeteries reminded us of our losses, both in total number and those of our small group. Jack M. Freeman, Joseph J. Rutkowski, Ole C. Wibholm, Jr. and Charles R. Lindahl from our Section and Stanli Soltys of "Easy" Company would remain until much later when their bodies would be relocated or sent home. In addition I made note that Thurman D. Toon, Harlan C. "Dutch" Radtke and Roland Wilsey had been wounded. Four dead and three more being wounded out of our small Intelligence Section made our casualty percentage rate close to 50% (Fifty Percent). Based on these figures, had the battle continued for another thirty days, we could have been completely "wiped-out"!!!

We were allowed about a week of rest, a few hot meals and we become acquainted with a few replacements. We had been alerted that we would make an assault on the adjacent island of Tinian within ten days and this did not help to boost our morale. This was something that we were not looking forward to. Many were thinking the same thoughts that was going through my mind. "When will our luck run out?" Over the next fifteen months we would leave and return to Saipan three more times.

Landing on Tinian was scheduled for July 25th and would be referred to as "Jig-day". The island had been under daily bombardment since May 1, either by ships, carrier based planes, Air Force planes flying now from Saipan fields and Marine artillery directed from the south end of Saipan.

Tinian, lying only two and one half miles south of Saipan, was a much smaller island, being only eleven miles long and five miles across at its widest point. The highest elevation would be 500 feet above sea level.

Two beaches on the northwestern shore had been selected as landing areas. Again we assumed the Japs would anticipate that we would land on lower level beaches, and would perhaps be caught-off-guard if we landed near the strategic airfield, scaling high cliffs to reach the flat plateau above. The night before "Jig-day" some select Second Division Marines in rubber boats landed, scaled the walls and provided information on enemy strength and landing conditions in this area. On "Jig-day" morning a feint landing took place near the lower beaches, while the Fourth Marine Division landed on the selected northern beaches near the airfield, then climb and scale the cliffs. We were successful in catching the Japanese forces "off-guard", keeping our casualties light. However, the following took place before any landings were made.

The Destroyer "Norman Scott" and the Battleship "Colorado" started shelling the various beach areas from a short distance off shore from Tinian Town and gave the areas a terrific pounding. Our ships were soon to find out that the Japs had some large shore guns hidden in the ridges of the hills north of town and they started firing back at the two U.S. Ships. We were nearby watching all of this on our APA (Troop Transport) and were privileged to witness a close-up battle taking place between the large guns on shore and the ships, just a few hundred yards from shore. At first the shore batteries were overshooting their targets, then adjusting their range they did get some hits on the "Colorado", but the fearless Battleship, in their version of the "OK-Coral Shoot-out" stood steady and kept sending salvos into the hills, while the Destroyer relocated out of "harms-way". The Navy launched aircraft from the nearby carriers and the Air Force sent planes from the southern old Aslito airfield, now renamed "Isely Field" to honor a Navy Pilot. Rocket Boats moved in and sent their salvos into our selected landing areas. We witnessed history being made this morning when planes dropped for the first time ever in any war, "Napalm Bombs" on Tinian Town, the big shore guns and on other selected targets. Napalm is a jellied gasoline (or fuel) mixture that upon detonation spreads fire over a large area, consuming every thing it touches. In contrast a tank mounted or hand held flame thrower was limited to smaller individual targets.

The Fourth Marine Division landed and established a line of offense on "Jig-day", then early morning on July 25th (second day) we followed ashore to relieve them and take our position to commence our assignment. With CT-8 and CT-2 (Combat Team) now in the lines, the Fourth Marine Division would move to the right and head inland with large General Sherman Tanks to lend them support.

Our strategic objective was the airfield, which we planned to enlarge and use for the U.S. Air Force to land and use their long range "B-29" Bombers to strike directly on Japan.

The responsibility for seeking control of this island was going to be a joint venture. An imaginary line was drawn through the middle length of Tinian, with the Fourth Division being responsible for securing the western half and the Second Division would secure the eastern half, with our starting point from the northern end and moving south. Being trained differently than Army Units, Marines were schooled to extend our line to join with other units and to coordinate our forward movement whereas no gaps would exist to allow the enemy to penetrate or to attack our rear.

It would take us nine days to defeat the Japanese forces on this island, and in doing so we would capture 252 prisoners, intern 9000 civilians and destroy 5000 enemy soldiers. In this process, the Second Marine Division would identify 3 Marines as missing, 654 wounded and 104 as KIA (killed in action). I have no knowledge as to the losses of the Fourth Marine Division, but must assume they were similar to ours.

There were approximately eight separate events that took place on this island that remain vivid in my memory. I will attempt to describe them in the order that they occurred without identifying dates, except on certain special happenings.

Once we were ashore we made a swing to the left and secured the very northern end of Tinian and the Ushi Airdrome, then we made a right turn and headed south. Using our imaginary line with the Fourth Division on our right flank and our left flank extending to the eastern shore. We secured the Airdrome fairly fast, but as we proceeded south across the airstrip the Japanese were shelling us with artillery and mortars. Leaving the airstrip we found that we were in what was called "canebrakes" or was once cultivated cane fields.

I had just entered the canebrake and walking behind a tank, when a large shell exploded within twenty feet of my right rear, I felt the concussion as well as some large object striking me in the right rear hip area and knocking me to the ground. I felt no pain nor did I see any blood, so I got up and moved on. Later that day, when taking a rest break, I reached behind to extract my canteen from the canvas cover and cup, but I could not pull it out. Taking my webbed cartridge belt off I then found that a "lemon-size" chunk of shrapnel had lodged in my canteen cup and canteen, ruining both. I knew that someone above had been watching over me this day, as had it not been for the canteen absorbing the shrapnel, I might have had a large size hole in my hip.

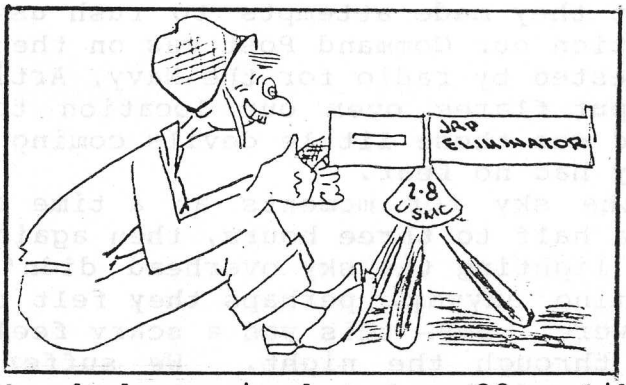
We had received a few new replacements just before leaving Saipan, now some new members would join us here in the field. It was unfair, I thought to bring new members into the lines that had never been shot at, however we were delighted to have them. Radtke, Wilsey, Kohnle, O'Brien, Nix, Schapendonk and I did have a chance to train with veterans, before seeing our first action, but the new members would learn through "on the job training", and they too would become veterans fast. We were also very fortunate as those assigned to us would prove to be "the cream of the crop".

The oldest member was Jerome Meyer, then Joseph Diley, Meade Kinser, Charles Dee and Michael Kowalchuk. Each would adapt quickly and well into our Section.

On our third day, after being in the flat plateau of the cane fields, we were confronted with trying to find our way upward to reach another plateau level. Facing us was a high ridge having a rough jungle like terrain. We did find a narrow winding path that would take us, in single file to an area on top where we establish our CP.

I should point out that for the Tinian assault a career Marine Officer had been appointed to take command of our Second Battalion by the name of Lieutenant Colonel Lane C. Kendall (from New York), and Major Chamberlin was his Executive, as he had been under Col. Crowe. The Marine Corps proved again that the career Officers were always going to get the promotions, however those of us who had served under Major Chamberlin always thought of him in terms of being our leader.

The Companies established their lines a hundred feet or so ahead of our Command Post and we dug our protective holes for the night, Each of us had to be sure that our perimeter was protected and we would take turns through the night standing watch. One concern that we had was that the trail that had lead us up to this plateau might allow enemy troops to ascend and surprise us fron the rear. Before darkness some of our men went down the trail and strung "barbed-wire" then tied cans with rocks inside on the wire. The purpose being that if anyone should be foolish enough to be on this trail during the night, we would hear the rattling of cans to alert us in time. Men were stationed to guard this area with machine guns, and their other handy weapons.



Mike Kowalchuk had acquired a new 38 caliber Smith and Weston Pistol soon after joining our group, so he took pride in cleaning it this night, in hopes that something exciting might happen as he was anxious to try it out. Now, through-out the night the Japs did what we always expected, and that was to keep us awake by their continual harassment in one form or another.

About an hour before daybreak we heard the rattling of cans on the trail below and behind us. We were all awake at this time when the sound of machine gun fire started chattering in our ears, then every man nearby with a weapon started firing in the direction of the machine guns tracer bullets. Mike Kowalchuk was so keyed-up that he started firing to empty his chamber and was making ready to reload when everything became quieter than an "abandoned cemetery" at midnight.

Mike and the rest of the "firing squad" sat and waited until daylight to examine the 100 plus Japs that they had killed this morning, visioning also that each would be given the "Medal Of Honor" for saving our Battalion from being annihilated. Dawn seemed a long time coming, but finally it did and the trail was examined. The selected scouting party came back up the narrow trail and was almost ashamed to tell Major Chamberlin that the island now had twelve less live goats.

As we moved slowly south the sun seemed as though it was cooperating with the enemy. The heat was making many of the Marines sick and it also was re-activating the "malaria bug" in the Guadalcanal veterans, taking many of them out of action and into rear medical units for treatment. Flies were another insect that we had to contend with. When any type of food was opened, before you could place food in your mouth, it and your whole hand and arm was solid black.

The Japs gave us a fight every day, but on our eighth day (Jig-day plus eight) they wanted to stand their ground and fight it out by throwing everything they had at us. After much fighting we were able to push the enemy back to where there was another plateau above us that we would have to climb, and once we were on top we had to make sure that we held on to it. There wasn't much comfort in finding that it was barren with little trees and brush. In front of us was some rolling ground, about fifteen to twenty feet higher than that where we were. It gave me a feeling that we were in a small valley, and Japs had been spotted by our scouts at darkness, as being about fifty feet away, just over the small rolling ridge in front of us.

We now had taken about seventy-five percent (75%) of the island and the enemy was beginning to realize that they didn't have much more to lose, so they gave us one hell of a fight, this night. We strung barbed wire where we could and dug holes as deep as we could.

From about 10:30pm on through the early morning hours, small groups rushed our lines shouting their "Banzai" sounds, then some shouted words in English. "You're going to die Marine" or "Help-me I've been hit". During the night they made attempts to rush us on all sides and for the sake of protection our Command Post was on the front line, also Major Chamberlin requested by radio for the Navy, Artillery, Air Force or anybody that could put flares over our location to do so, without delay, so that we could see these little devils coming over the ridges charging as though they had no fear.

Flares did light the sky for moments at a time covering a period lasting about two and a half to three hours, then again it was complete darkness. The flares lighting the sky overhead didn't slow the Japs down as they kept coming anyway, perhaps they felt that we were also being exposed, and we were. Boy- this was a scary feeling and the Japs continued charging all through the night. We suffered heavy losses, but since we were dug in and they had to come to us, they were to pay the higher price. Daylight was a welcome sight and we did not know what we would find on the other side of the rolling ridge. The Japs had withdrawn leaving behind hundreds of dead bodies all around our foxholes, on the ridge slopes and on the other side, having been killed by our rifles, grenades and mortar fire. We were not encountering any enemy fire as we explored over the ridge line, so we could only assume that those remaining had retreated to their last remaining piece of land to our left.

The battle was not yet over, but we knew that we were on our final push, looking south we could see that the ground would recede several feet to a lower plateau and we could see the Pacific Ocean several hundred yards ahead. To our left was "Marpo Point" where we were to witness mass suicide taking place by civilians as had happened on Saipan at "Marpi Point". Navy ships were cruising close to the shore line with loud speakers trying to convince the civilians that we would help, not harm them.

Being a young man and witness to such self destruction as mass suicide I would have this picture embedded into my brain forever, making me realize that each moment in life is very precious.

At 6:55pm, August 2, 1944 the island was declared "Secure" and we had been fighting nine of the ten days that it took to take this island. Our Regiment would remain for the purpose of "mopping-up" or cleaning out pockets of the remaining enemy that might be hiding in the hills, caves below Marpo Point, and or in other areas. Individual snipers would now be our worst enemy. The other American troops would return to Saipan. Except for a short rest we had been enemy targets since landed on Saipan, forty-eight days ago, and were exhausted.

After setting-up a bivouac area on the southern end, our Intelligence Scouts, working with Company Commanders and interpreters, would go daily into various surrounding areas to encourage civilians to come into our compound for safety, food and clothing. They were successful and they brought some soldiers in who had decided to surrender rather than commit suicide. For the first time ever, we started seeing MPs (Military Police) with trained dogs, some were "Doberman Pinschers" and I was teased for being afraid of them.

The mosquitoes took so many of us out of the lines that I was beginning to suspect that these "Dengue Fever" carrying insects were perhaps a Japanese secret weapon. Marvin Sheppard, John Kohnle and I would be in the same field hospital at the same time with this dreadful fever. I, as well as many others, would pass-out while at the hospital chow line and would be carried back to our bed by a buddy. The fever also carried much pain in our joints, and lasted about a week to ten days before recovery. Unlike Malaria, thank goodness, it was not re-occurring.

On August 4th, Gunner Day called our group together and said. "Fellows, we Guadalcanal veterans will load ship on August 7, to return Stateside and Lt. Stacy Davis from "E" Company will be taking my place. I want you to give him the same support that you have given me." Then he went on to say. "Marvin Sheppard has been recognized to return also and enter Officers Candidate Schooling (OCS). John Kohnle has been selected to return to finish his schooling at "Colgate" under a new program to become an Officer upon graduation." Then Gunner proceeded with. "Now, I've also got some news you're not going to like. Headquarters Companies new First Sergeant is Guy V. Towsley, Jr. and you know from past experience that he hates our (the Intelligence Section) guts." I thought. "OH-My God, the world is coming to an end." In the months ahead we would suffer much from this "bad news".

Although the island had been declared "Secure", we could not afford to relax our guard, as we would occasionally be shot at by snipers and we had not as yet penetrated the southeastern tip of Marpo Point. We did have the luxury of taking showers, eating some warm meals and while not out on scouting patrol we could sleep or find a card game that we could afford to get into.

One of the Navy "Medics" (Corpsman) let us know that one of his mates was being shipped back to the States and wanted an enemy flag to take with him. We thought that we might have another "sucker", so we asked Theron Frazier to send his friend over to talk. The same day, he showed up and we showed him our "last" enemy flag. A deal was made that we would trade for a gallon of "sick-bay" alcohol and a can of powdered lemon drink mix. After the trade we grinned, knowing that we had pulled another "fast-one". We held onto the alcohol until his ship had left before we started drinking, and soon found out that after downing most of it with no "buzz" , we realized that he had "turned the table" on us by "watering it down", then after our initial "shock" we had more fun laughing than we would have had if we had drank the "real-stuff".

On the evening of August 6th, we acquired some beer, rum, gin, scotch and Coca Colas' from several Officers returning to the States. Many of them had a close working relationship with our Intelligence Section and wanted to show their appreciation and to leave us something to remember them by.

The following day was a sad day, as those of us remaining watched Adams, Gunner Day, Grant, Kohnle, Sheppard, Simon from our Section and other friends leave to board ship and return home. Those of us that had joined these veterans in New Zealand were left with a sense of loss and a lonely feeling, yet we were also happy that they were returning home alive. Ed Grant and Marvin Sheppard, once reaching the States wrote to Marie assuring her that when they left me, I had been in good health and shape. Their letters meant a great deal to Marie.

August 8th, we witnessed J.D. Nix, Albert Miller and Carl "The Russian" Kudroshoff returning from a scouting patrol mission with several civilians, including women and small children and one Japanese soldier. The soldier seemed to be real happy and very anxious to please. It was around 4:30 in the afternoon and after placing the civilians in an area by themselves, the soldier was following Nix like a little "puppy-dog". Several of us started drinking some warm beer and we even offered to share with the newly acquired enemy "pet". Nix, through his language training conversed with the soldier and at times they both were laughing as though they had been exchanging "dirty" jokes. Several of us had taken some language training in Hawaii, however I never understood any of their conversation. Our small guest was enjoying his beer and socializing and I too was feeling pretty good. I looked at the little "happy-man" and said the first word to come out of my mouth, which was. "SIENKO?" He grabbed his crotch and started laughing and repeating. "SUNKO-SUNKO." I tried to correct him again by repeating. "No, SIENKO." Then, perhaps in an effort to please me, a big grin came on his face and he started jumping up and down, still keeping his hand on his crotch repeating "Sienko" over and over again until Nix said some word to stop him. The little Jap almost killed us from our laughing so hard.

Division Command started relocating to join the others on Saipan on the morning of August 9th and by August 13th, our Eighth Regiment was the only remaining Division Marines on this island. Meanwhile, the Division was having a semi-permanent camp erected on Saipan. The rainy season was just beginning and the hot sun was causing steam to rise from mud, which made it that much more miserable.

Lt. Stacy Davis, our new Intelligence Section leader fit into our group with ease. He was no stranger as we (Radtke and I) had known him since being in New Zealand and his being wounded on Tarawa while landing with "Easy" Company. He had previously worked closely with Gunner Day, and the rest of our Section, both in training and battle.

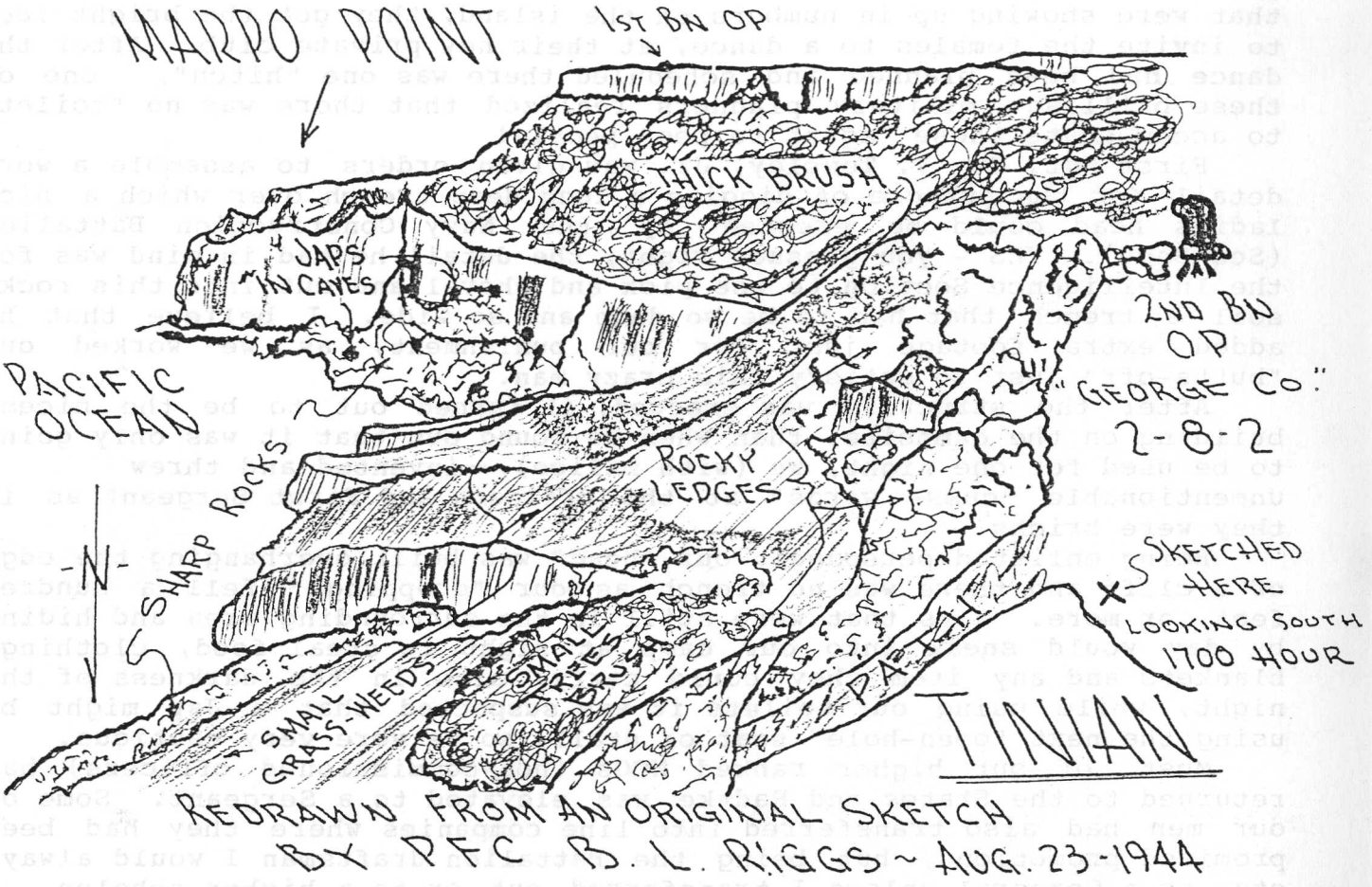
On August 22nd, we started working our way toward the lower plateau of Marpo Point, then slowly feeling our way around the many ledges and ragged cliffs. I was with an advance patrol of "George" Company and our mission was to find and establish an Observation Post (OP) that would afford us the best location to view the coastline where remaining Japanese soldiers could be hiding among the jagged rocks, crevasses, and in caves above the ocean water and below Marpo Point. The First Battalion had established their OP on the flat plateau above and overlooking Marpo Point to the west. From the First Battalions position they were looking northward in our direction and seeing many things hidden from our view, and from our location, looking south we were able to view much that was hidden from their vantage point.

The patrol had found an excellent spot to give us a commanding view, and we had brought a Japanese tripod mounted set of observation binoculars that our Intelligence Section had found and confiscated from Mount Tapotchau, while on Saipan. By looking through the binoculars at a lower level the scope lens were reflective whereas an observer could be protected while only the lens appeared exposed above.

Our purpose for establishing this post was not for the purpose of directing any mortar or artillery rounds, but only to identify on a map and or sketch, the terrain where caves and the enemy might possibly be hiding. The data that we obtained would then be used to help direct other patrols over and around the cliff area, with language experts to talk with any remaining civilians or soldiers asking for them to surrender peacefully. We watched many Japanese soldiers near rock ledges and cave openings, and I'm sure that they were also observing us. They did not appear to be hostile as I saw no visible weapons.

Darkness fell upon us before we could do any more than settle-in for the night, however we maintained our post without incident. It had appeared to us that the remaining soldiers had no more will to fight, yet they seemed immune to the loudspeakers from the nearby ships asking for their safety surrender. As dawn arrived on August 23rd, I identified as much data with coordinates on our map, however there was much that a flat map could not show. In early afternoon I started sketching the terrain, cliffs and caves below the overhanging ridge of Marpo Point. What I saw and identified by sketch would aid our patrols that were to move into that area early tomorrow morning. On my sketch I transfered coordinate lines (the redrawn sketch on Page 95 omits coordinates) from the map in order that a patrol would know exactly where they were at all times.

As soon as I had finished my sketch of the terrain to our south it was 1700 hour (5:pm) and it was important that it be in proper hands, so Charlie Dee, James Nix and I found the trail and made it back safely to Battalion (2-8) Headquarters where the information was transfered to other maps and a tracing was made from my original sketch to identify possible enemy cave positions. We had left Jerome Meyer, Robert Goldstein, Mike Kowalchuk, Joe Diley and Meade Kinser at the George Company Observation Post and before dark they returned to Headquarters. We would agree that it was a scene that would be etched in our memory, however it was the events that were to follow the next day that we all wished we could forget. It was not an easy task to be lowered over a cliff on a rope to search for an enemy, or throw grenades in caves after trying to talk someone out. Then the sound of an enemy grenade or a pistol "crack" within a cave indicating suicide. Then to look above at the edge of "MARPO POINT" and watch as mothers with babies in their arms jumped, or little children being tossed and families as a group jumping together to die on the rocks, nearby. We wacthed from the rocks with great sorrow, as we were helpless to prevent it.



After the Marpo Point "clean-up" we stayed on the island through the month of September. During the stay we lost one of our new replacements, PFC Lysinger. I have no record of his first name, however for his first time in action he was a very brave and important part of our team. He was unfortunately killed during one of our last days at Marpo Point.

We were transfered back to our temporary camp-site on Saipan. Then in the early part of October, Radtke, Nix and I had now earned our well deserved "Corporal Stripes" and we were no longer sleeping on the ground. We were having hot meals, but our supply of food wasn't too good.

On October 12th, we watched as the first Air Force (Super-Bomber) B-29 came in low from the west, landing on the new Isely Field runway. Later we would watch these "Metal Giants" take off from Saipan and Tinian loaded with explosives, including the new Napalm Bomb, heading for cities and targets on the Japanese mainland.

The air bases were accessible by hitching a ride on a jeep or a truck. We often headed to these fields, where we were always welcome for the excellent food that was served. During one visit I was able to barter one of my flags for a new Navy Issued 45 Caliber Automatic Pistol, from a pilot that was headed Stateside.

Our Battalion Officers were now getting their monthly rations of various liquors and the extra, or that which they didn't want, they shared with us. We were also getting rations, but it was in the form of Coco-Colas and can beer.

With their liquor rations and "free time", the Officers established an "OFFICERS CLUB", and with the Red Cross women and the Navy Nurses that were showing up in numbers on the island, they got the bright idea to invite the females to a dance, at their new private club. After the dance had been planned and scheduled there was one "hitch", one of these brilliant military planners realized that there was no "toilet" to accommodate these "squat to pee" people!

First Sgt. Guy V. Towsley, Jr. was given orders to assemble a work detail for the purpose of digging a long deep trench over which a nice ladies head could be erected by the Navy Construction Battalion (Sea-Bees). YES - you guessed right, the detail he had in mind was for the Intelligence Section to use pick and shovel and cut into this rocky soil a trench that had to be so deep and so wide. I believe that he added extra footage just for our punishment, as we worked our "butts-off" just to satisfy this crazy man.

After the structure was erected, it turned out to be the nicest building on the campsite, then when we found out that it was only going to be used for one night, we (with malice),—invented and threw unmentionable "cuss- words" at the Officers and First Sergeant as if they were bricks.

Being enlisted personnel, our "head" was built overhanging the edge of a cliff and there was no trench as our "droppings" fell a hundred feet, or more. Japs that were still in the surrounding area and hiding by day would sneak into our camp at night to steal food, clothing, blankets and any item they could carry, also in the darkness of the night, while using our toilets it was suspected that a Jap might be using the next "open-hole" seat or stall, so we were very cautious.

Most of our higher ranked NCOs (non-commissioned officers) had returned to the States and Radtke was elevated to a Sergeant. Some of our men had also transferred into line companies where they had been promised promotions, but being the Battalion draftsman I would always stay as a Corporal unless I transferred out or to a higher echelon. I liked where I was and my job.

First Sgt. Towsley got his "kicks" by continual harassment inspection of our Intelligence Section, at most times when he knew that Lt. Stacy Davis was elsewhere. Radtke was embarrassed one day by having to be asked to dump the contents of his "sea-bag" on his bunk. This went on for a few times until Lt. Stacy Davis became aware and put a stop to it. The First Sgt. had his feelings hurt, but then he discovered other ways to give us trouble.

One day, Joe Diley had made some kind of a joking remark to Sgt. Radtke, but Radtke was either in a bad mood or took the remark the wrong way and "passed the buck" down to me to make Joe walk "Post" for two hours with full pack and rifle. I knew that Joe did not deserve this punishment, but the orders were carried out while Radtke disappeared to parts unknown. After 1½ hours had passed I was going to put a halt to it, when I noticed that Sarg. had returned and I was pretty insistent that he call off the "order", which he did. Poor Joe was so worn-out that he rested his tired feet and body on his bunk, and never moved until morning.

On Christmas Day, 1944 just about everyone that could left camp and again hitched rides to a nearby Navy or Air Force Base for a good meal. Our Commander had previously told us, after we had been complaining, that rations were in short supply, however he would see to it that we had "Pork Chops", since turkey was not going to be available. We knew that the Officers were not going to miss out, and they would have a good meal. The food being served was getting so bad that it was "rumored", the Marines had a lower priority rating than the RED CROSS.

New Years Eve arrived and both J.D. Nix and Riggs were assigned "Corporal Of The Guard" duty. Different groups were crowding into the various tents to socialize, play cards, tell "tall stories" and drink whatever was available. One lonely man was doing his celebrating alone. About twenty minutes before midnight, the "Captain Of The Guard" told me that the First Sgt. wanted to see me. I knew that this was going to mean trouble, but when told to do something, you do it, without question.

Arriving outside his tent, I knocked on the wood frame, both for "good-luck" and to get his attention. As I stuck my head into the opening of the tent flaps, I heard. "Come on in Riggs, draw up a chair and sit down." "Sarg," I said. "I was told that you wanted to see me." "Well," He replied. "It's New Years Eve, I thought that we might have a chat before the end of the year." This didn't make any sense to me, and I started to "smell a rat" when he reached to pour himself another canteen cup of Scotch Whiskey. I played his game by listening to his glorious rendition and impression of the "Old Marine Corps", before this new generation got involved.

Sitting behind his "homemade" desk he kept talking and sipping and in between he was trying to encourage me to sip with him. "No, thanks Sarg, I'm on duty right now." What I didn't tell him was that I didn't like Scotch. "Come on Riggs, this is New Years Eve and no one will ever know." He kept repeating. "Sarg, I'll take a "rain check" and will have a drink with you just as soon as I'm relieved." I told him and started to get to my feet. It was near midnight and I had to get out of there. "Just have a little sip Riggs," He said. "then you can go." I gave in and said. "OK- Sarg, we will toast the New Year in but I've got to go." He poured a little scotch in a metal cup, and that didn't help the taste either. He toasted the New Year and I left. I immediately found Lieutenant Stacy Davis and explained what had happened. Stacy said. "Riggs, you know that you shouldn't have had a drink with him, but I can understand the position that he put you in. Tell the Captain just what you told me, when you get back to the Guard House." I thanked the Lieutenant and headed for the Guard House.

As soon as I entered the door, the Captain grinned and asked. "Riggs, did you go to the First Sergeants tent?" "Yes sir, I did." I answered. Then he asked. "Did you have a drink with him?" "Yes sir," I responded, knowing full well that my "tail could be in a wringer". "but with your permission sir, I would like to explain what took place." The Captain was kind enough to listen to my sad story, and before I had finished, Lt. Davis came in to support what I had said. All was forgiven with these words. "Don't let the First Sarg put anything over on you again, as soon as you left his tent he phoned the Guard House to "rat" on you." I thanked them both for understanding. I made my "Change of Guard" rounds with Nix, and my shift was over. I hit the "sack" and slept, if I had any dreams, I'm sure that it would have included a "sick" Sergeant.

We became suspicious, after the first of the year, of another landing assignment, when we were told to turn in any shoes needing repair to the quartermaster. I had two pair, so I turned in the worst pair, several weeks went by and they were never returned, then another final request for shoe repair was issued. I turned in my last pair and started wearing my "back-up, canvas shoes". After a week or two that pair was also never returned. Now I had donated my two pair of shoes to an unknown source, as the quartermaster couldn't locate them.

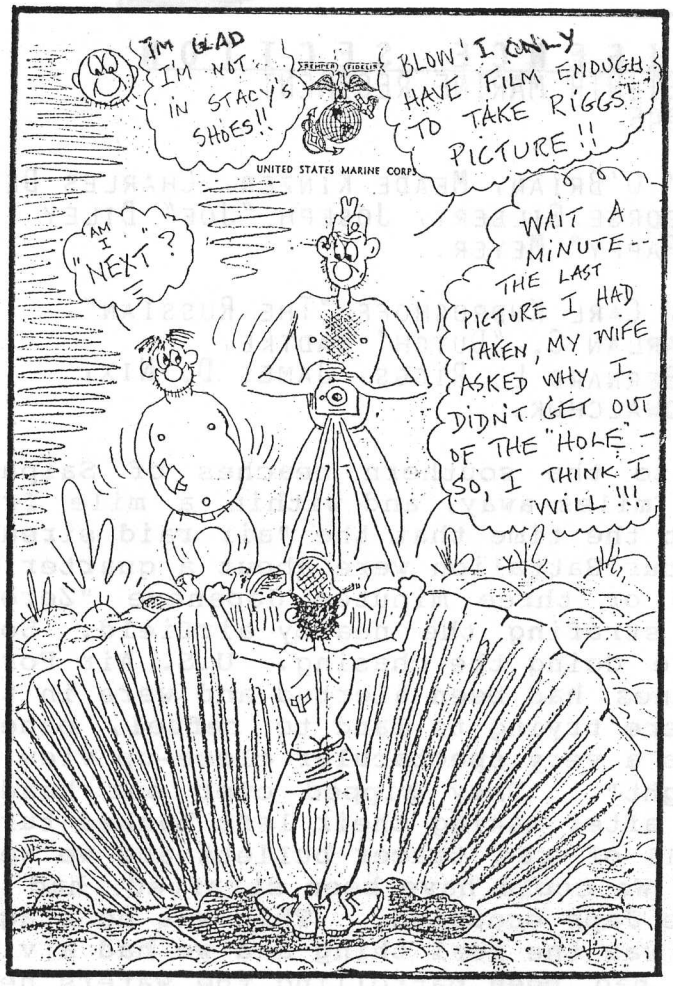
First Sergeant Towsley caught me off-guard one day by calling for a surprise formation rifle inspection. Well, there I stood in the front row in a pair of "tennis-style" shoes, otherwise in proper dress. He started at the far end of the line, then when he reach me, he looked me up and down, while his face was changing colors and he almost choked saying. "Riggs, get out of formation and go put your GI (government issue) shoes on." I looked him in the eye and said. "I can't Sir." Then in a sharper and louder tone he said. "Riggs, you are out of uniform, now get the hell back to your quarters and change shoes." Again, I repeated. "I can't sir." As I tried to explain why, he was in no mood to listen to my story, but I did get this much out. "Sergeant, both pair were turned in for repair and never returned." He snorted and started raving like a maniac trying to get me to respond. Since he wouldn't accept my explanation, and knowing that if I did open my mouth, I was in a losing game that I didn't want to play. I was going to be in trouble if I opened my mouth and I was also in trouble by not arguing with him. He was like a "raging-bull" looking me straight in the eye, and I was staring back in the depth of his "eyeball". I was thinking, if this guy was ever going to have a heart attack, it is going to be NOW. The rest of the group was about to burst at the seams with laughter. Then when the Sarg realized that I was not going to be in-subordinate by talking back, he became so confused that I thought that he was going to swallow his tongue when he suddenly turned red again and shouted. "DAM YOU RIGGS, I'm going to run you in for "Silent Contempt", With a short pause then. "Company Dismissed."

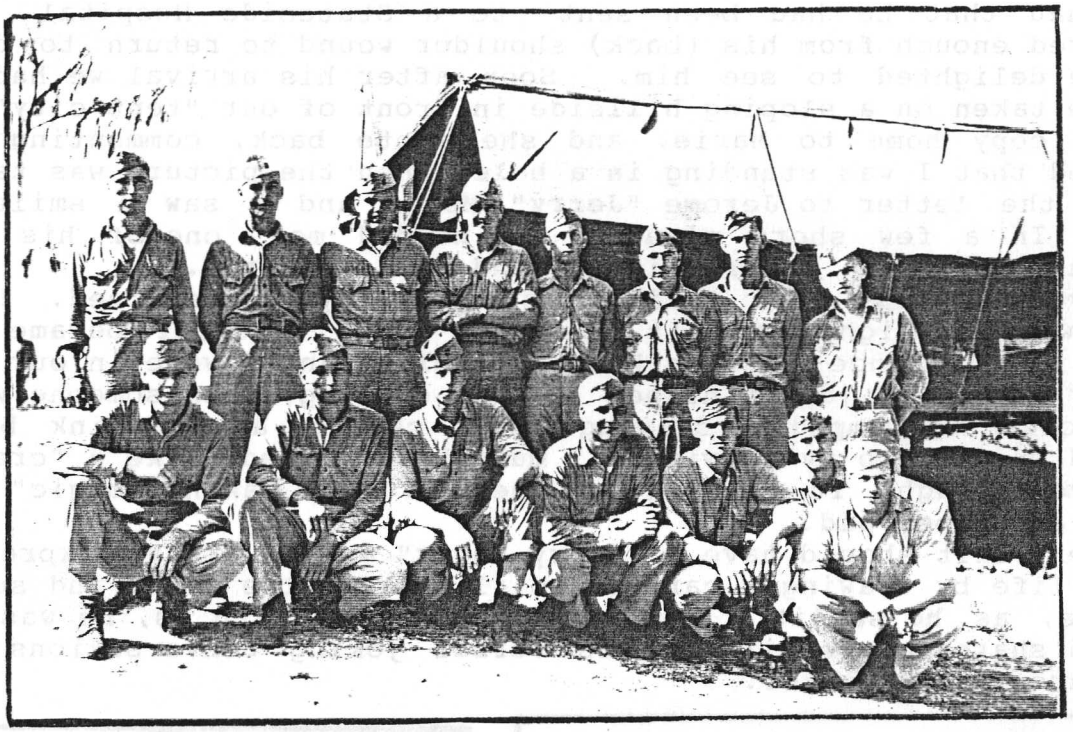
Headquarters Company was happy, because I had saved over two thirds of them from being inspected, but I also knew that my "tail was in the wringer", again. I headed to find Lt. Davis, and asked Stacy. "Can the Sarg get me for Silent Contempt, is there such a thing?" His answer was. "Yes, you did the right thing because he could have charged you for "In-Subordination" if you had talked back. Riggs, you were in a "no win" situation. The Sarg never did press charges and Stacy made sure that I had two new pair of shoes before the next day went by. When I questioned the Lt. why Sarg didn't pursue the Silent Comtempt charge, he said. "Riggs, you probably had him so mad and confused that he didn't really know what to do".

Corporal Roland D. Wilsey surprised us by arriving unexpectedly one day. It had been rumored that after he was wounded near Mount Tapotchau that he had been sent to a Stateside Hospital. He had recovered enough from his (back) shoulder wound to return to duty, and we were delighted to see him. Soon after his arrival we had a group picture taken on a sloping hillside in front of our "tent city". I had sent a copy home to Marie, and she wrote back, commenting that it appeared that I was standing in a hole, when the picture was taken. I showed the letter to Jerome "Jerry" Meyer and I saw a smile on his face. In a few short minutes, he handed me a one of his "special cartoons" and said. "Here Rigor, send this to Marie."

Several things were taking place, Wilsey had returned. Lt. Stacy Davis was reassigned and Lt. Jerome "Jerry" Tuckner became our new Combat Intelligence Section Leader. Roland and I were in our "office" one day and I had just finished with a drawing, when someone walked by and accidently bumped my drawing table, causing a black ink bottle to tip and spill onto my drawing. I must have yelled, like a "crazy man", but Meyer thought it amusing, as he was soon making "magic" with his pencil and paper pad.

Every unit should have a "Jerry Meyer" as he always expressed his joy of life by drawing a cartoon to illustrate the funny and sunny side of life, as he saw it. Every day that he was with us, he was able to use his sharpened pencil, or his verbal joking conversations to turn our tears into laughter.





COMBAT INTELLIGENCE SECTION
SECOND BATTALION - EIGHTH MARINE REGIMENT
1945

FRONT ROW (L-R); W.J. Jack "O'Bie" O'Brian, Meade Kinzer, Charles Dee Raymond Knauf, George Gilbert, Joseph "Joe" Diley Jerome "Jerry"-"Pappy" Meyer.

BACK ROW (L-R); Roland D. Wilsey, Carl Kudroshoff "The Russian", Albert Miller, Harlan C. "Dutch" Radtke, Stacy C. Davis, Bernard L. Riggs, James D. Nix, Michael "Mike" Kowalchuk.

Rubber Boat training took us to the southern beaches of Saipan, where we could see Tinian a few miles away, and within a mile from Iseley Airfield. I was on shore at the time that the "air raid sirens" started sounding, however many of our Battalion were about a quarter of a mile from shore. Within two or three minutes Japanese "Zeros" dropped out of the sky and started strafing the nearby airfield. Some were being chased and others were doing the chasing. U.S. Air Force and Carrier Based Navy Fighter Planes had been alerted and were in the sky, while some of our fighters were trying to land to refuel, others were taking-off. The chase gave us a very spectacular close-up view of a very dramatic "Aerial Dog Fight". They zipped over our heads, sometimes as low as tree top level after making their left banked turns from the airfield. The sky was full of red tracer bullets and we were exposed, with no place to hide. We could have been strafted, had it not been for our planes keeping the Japs occupied. This was no staged show for a "Hollywood Movie", this was the real thing and we had a view to witness it all. Light cruisers had been patrolling the waters near our shore line, and when one cruiser shot a "Zero" out of the sky, we cheered and waved and they proudly waved back.

Saipans temperature stays around 79 degrees Fahrenheit most of the year, with an average rainfall of 83.5 inches and humidity level of close to 82 percent. We had spent many nights in the open while living in "foxholes", and we were now appreciative of the canvas tent over our beds that protected us from the rain, however I don't believe that I could ever become accustom to the "hellish" humidity. Nights did give us a little more comfort.

USO (United Services Organization) groups were now presenting live entertainment from the States. Many movie stars, band leaders, and other entertainers traveled to the islands, and also to Europe for the troops. The entertainment group lead by Betty Hutton, a popular blonde movie star of the early forties was the show that I remember best. As I returned to our camp after watching her USO Show one night, I reached for the chain that had been around my neck for the last few months and found that it was missing, along with the "gold tooth".

When we were starting to enjoy some of the comforts, it came as no surprise when we were told that we were about to board ship again for another "great adventure". Again, with all of our "Battle-Gear" we were transported from our temporary camp to Tanapag Harbor where in the last week of March, 1945 we boarded an APA (Troop Transport) for another "Government Paid Cruise".

As soon as we "sailed" it became known that we would be in Reserve, and would not have to be part of the original landing team. This news came as quite a pleasant "shock" because we had always been "sacrificial lambs" for the Navy, in the past. Within our Intelligence Section Stateroom, we unsealed the maps that had been marked "Secret" and our destination was revealed.

We were headed for a chain of (55) islands in the Okinawa Gunto group. The largest island, Okinawa was to be the objective, it was 67 miles long and three to ten miles in width. This invasion, if successful would provide us with three major airfields, many seaports and put us within 1300 air miles of Tokyo and only 300 miles from the southern tip of the Japanese mainland. Intelligence reported that there were 440,000 civilians and around 75,000 Japanese military that would have to be subdued.

Landing day was scheduled for April 1, (April Fools Day) and in keeping with the phonetic alphabet, "L" would become "Love-Day". As had happened prior to other landings, the Air Force and Navy planes had blasted the airfields, Naval Bases, harbors and all other essential targets, to neutralize the enemy, in order to help lessen our losses when landing. Two full Corps were on ships, making this the largest group ever assembled in the Central Pacific for an invasion.

Before we boarded ship at Tanapag Harbor, I had convinced Lieutenant Jerome Tuckner to allow me to turn-in my heavy rifle, for either a pistol or the lighter weight M1-Carbine, that was available and because of my Map-Pack with drawing board and all the extra weight that I was carrying, he allowed me to trade for the "M1-Carbine". Then while enroute to the "war-zone" First Sergeant Towsley called for the Intelligence Section to come "top-side" (from quarters to upper deck) as he was going to entertain us again with one of his famous "rifle inspections". Well, some of the fellows didn't have clean enough rifles to suit the Sarg, and he made them clean them again. Then when he got to me, I offered my small M1- Carbine for him to inspect and he looked at me with a dumbfounded look on his face, then said. "Dam-it Riggs, your not carrying the weapon that you were issued, Where in the HELL is the rifle that you were issued?" "This has been issued, Sarg." I tried to tell him. He handed it back to me and after inspecting the rest, he dismissed us. Later, that afternoon I was summoned for "Captains Mass" in the Colonels Chambers and I was told to bring my weapon. God- what have I done now, was going though my mind. I was brought in front of the Battalion Commander Colonel C.R. Wallace. The Colonel asked the First Sarg. "What has Corporal Riggs done, Sergeant?" The Sarg stepped forward and erect and said. "Colonel, the Corporal is not carrying the weapon that was issued him, SIR." Colonel Wallace looked at me, and asked. "Corporal, is that your assigned and proper issued weapon?" "Yes, Sir." I told him. "Because of the heavy load I carry ashore, Lieutenant Tuckner allowed me to exchange weapons prior to boarding ship." Lieutenant Tuckner was requested, and when he arrived and confirmed my story, I thought that the Sarg was going to kill me with the "daggers" coming from his eyes in my direction.

April Fools day finally arrived and at the appointed "H" hour the First and Sixth Marine Divisions landed on the western shore from the East China Sea, while the Second Marine Division (assigned to the Third Corps Reserve) feinted a landing on the southeast coast. We assumed that depending upon the Japanese resistance and strategy, we might have to be committed in the lines, most any time.

Two Army Divisions landed flanking the First and Sixth Division Marines on the south. No lives were reported as being lost on the first day, and only small resistance reported during the first week.

The Second Marine Division while at sea on the APAs and LSTs was not as fortunate as the landing teams. The Third Battalion Headquarters of the Second Regiment was on the U.S.S. Hinsdale (APA-120) and the rest of the Battalion (2-3) was riding on LSTs several miles ahead of APA-120. During the early morning hours of the first day, just before daylight, the enemy planes were making a sound in the sky as if it was "rolling thunder". We at first suspected Japanese Bombers had broken through our protective air defense and was planning to dive and release torpedoes. Our ships had taken action to separate from one body, into smaller groups in order to be less of a centralized target. At around 5:20am the first Japanese "Kamikaze" (suicide) pilot dove his single engine plane loaded with explosives into the unprotected side of the "Hinsdale", at the waterline just forward of the engine room. Within minutes a Japanese "Zero" smashed through the hull of LST 884 (carrying "I" Company of 2-3). The LST burned and the sinking ship was abandoned. Many of the Marines were never found. The Hinsdale, became a "sitting duck" with no power and most of the crew had to transfer to another "overloaded" LST. The Navy crewmen on the Hinsdale suffered the most casualties. Another Kamikaze was able to guide his plane into the fantail of another LST and others were in the sky trying to penetrate our anti-aircraft shells to do as much damage as they had promised their Emperor during their final prayer, before take-off. Our Navy fire power from ships and planes were deterring many of the enemy by keeping them "at a distance" and hitting many, that either exploded or was driven into the sea.

"Easter-Sunday" wasn't a good day for the Second Marine Division as we were taking some very heavy losses. Then something that lowered our spirits a little more was the news that (the first time ever) we were being placed under the command of Lieutenant General Simon Boliver Buckner of the U.S. Tenth Army. "My-God", I was thinking, before this war is over, the "Red-Cross" will be given us orders! It was bad enough taking orders from the Navy Admirals that had never slept in mud, and now the Army that would not take orders from Marine Command while on Saipan!!! Boy-at this moment I was wishing to be "home". The only good news was that no other ships had been hit.

Keeping up with what Intelligence we were getting from the troops on shore allowed us to plot on our map what we knew. On shore the Japanese had established their main line of defense across the lower part of the island extending from Naha, a city on the western side to Shuri, an inland village then to the southwestern harbor of Nakagasuku Wan, which protected an enemy Naval Base.

Our initial landings had been in an area about twelve or more miles north of Naha City, and this area had been chosen in order to secure the large airbase at Zachino. There were two other airfields that we would have to secure later. This placed our troops approximately twenty-four miles from the southern tip and about forty plus miles from the northern end of Okinawa.

After the damage to the Reserve Troops by the "Kamikaze" pilots, our ships remained in a circling pattern in the East China Sea until April 12, 1945. There was much joy in our hearts when word was given that we were returning to Saipan. This would be our third time for returning to this "temporary base camp".

Soon after returning, we were informed that we had a new Battalion Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Harry A. Waldorf. The new Commander didn't think much of his "crew" because we irritated the "hell" out of him by going on "Hunger-Strike" and refusing to eat the lousy food that was being served us. The Cooks could only serve food delivered to them. So we kept eating at the Navy and Air Force Bases.

The Lt. Col. was so mad at us for boycotting the mess hall that he called the Battalion in formation one day and gave us a "dressing-down", but he never offered to let us eat "chow" at the Officers Mess. For a new Commander, he wasn't "hitting-it-off" to well with the enlisted troops. A clerk from the office showed up, looking for Radtke, saying. "Dutch, the Colonel wants to see you, right now." "What does he want?" Dutch asked. The clerk said. "He heard about your art work and he wants you to paint his name on a sign that can be placed at the entrance to his tent." "Do I have to?" Dutch responded. "You do," Said the clerk. "unless you want to be a private tomorrow."

Soon after our return to Saipan, things began to worsen for the forces left at Okinawa, Kamikazi pilots were still committing suicidal attacks on the U.S. Ships and the American Defense System was handicapped by not having an appropriate location to establish a good radar search facility to better warn us in advance of enemy planes approaching. Two islands were chosen for radar locations one was a small island almost due west of Naha City, called Aguna Shima and the other island, Iheya Shima was located a few miles northwest of Okinawa. Our Eighth Marine Regiment was selected to assault and take Iheya Shima for that purpose.

We loaded this time on LSTs' and headed back in the direction of Okinawa on May 16, 1945. There were twenty-six LSTs in our flotilla, protected again by some light cruisers, we separated from the larger group as we neared our destination and on June 3rd under heavy Naval bombardment we went ashore. Many of our Marines were wounded and would eventually receive their "Purple Heart" awards from being wounded by the U.S. Navy, as there were no Japanese military on this island.

Roland Wilsey was wounded again in the lower stomach area by shrapnel (his second wound) as I stepped ashore a Marine was lying on his back crying from a piece of shrapnel that had pierced his penis. I felt sorry for the fellow and stayed with him until I caught the attention of a Medical Corpsman, I thought to be Robert Goldstein. U.S. Naval shells that should have been falling on the inland was still falling in our midst, however we assumed that they were coming from the enemy. It was soon thereafter, when we had a chance to interrogate some civilians, we learned that the only enemy we had this day was the U.S. Navy. Being shelled like that and hoping that exploding fragments will pass you by, is scary as Hell. And it doesn't make it any better to know that your own government through "friendly fire" is wounding some of your best friends. Wilsey was able to stay with us.

The civilians were very frightened, but after the U.S. Navy ships quit firing, we tried to assure them that we were there to help, not harm them. There was a very pretty young teenage girl about eighteen years of age in the civilian group that was stark naked, Marines tried to offer her clothing, but she would not wear any. Some of the women told us that the young one was "mentally disturbed".

We had been given ample warning, before landing to treat all civilians with respect and sex with any of them would not be tolerated. During the day we had sent an advance scouting party to investigate the furthermost part of the island as we had been told that there was a "Leper Colony" (those afflicted with Leprosy) there. During the afternoon rain we had sought shelter under trees inland, but during a break in the weather, just before nightfall, Headquarters and a few Companies set-up a bivouac for the night on a nice sandy but very wet beach. The others remained inland as a perimeter for our protection, if we were wrong about no Japs being here. It was a pleasant night knowing that this was our first landing assault where we were not being fired at. But the downpour of rain made our first night uncomfortable.

When the sun started shining as dawn broke, the beach facing the China Sea was a wonderful place to be. Within an hour after sunrise I witnessed one of the "funniest and strangest" sights that I will ever be privileged to see. About sixty Marines were lined up, some removing their clothes and others naked as "they had arrived in this world" in front of the Medical Tent. The Doctor and Corpsmen were painting their genital area with a Copper-Sulphate ointment referred to as "Blue Vitriol". After being painted they ran along the beach facing the sun waiting for the substance to dry purple, before putting their clothes back on. It gave the appearance of some "Nudist Colony having a Beach Party". Yes, it was funny and unforgettable

Those of us watching were laughing so hard that it caught the attention of Lt. Col. Harry A. Waldorf. He arrived to discuss the matter with the Doctor and Corpsman. These men had violated the warning given them and they had found some partner for sex during the night. The Lt. Col. wanted the name, rank and serial number of each man that had received treatment for "Court Martial", but he didn't get any satisfaction, as he was told that if they were punished, then others would not report in for treatment ever again, and the whole unit might become diseased. So this was one time that the Lt. Col. unhappily retreated. Nothing more of the incident was ever mentioned or repeated, to my knowledge. I believe that the boys were so embarrassed (bare-assed) that they were taught a lesson.

During this second day, demolition teams with a few native men (divers) set some charges off in the reefs close to shore. The explosives either killed or stunned the fish, then divers went below to recover those that did not float to the surface. Fish were brought ashore and offered to those who wanted to clean and cook them, and the rest were given to the civilians. I loved seafood, however I refused as I felt to lazy to clean and cook. One fish that I saw was called a "Parrot Fish", the coloring, shape of beak (jaw) and head resembled the bird, for which it had been named.

The natives were very kind and friendly to us, and our Navy Corpsmen and Doctor provided medical treatment to those in need. The houses in the village were on terraced hillsides with tiled roofs, seemed odd to me, as most southern island roofs had no tile. We received news one day that a well known and respected War Correspondent Ernie Pyle had been killed on one of the nearby islands. It was sad news as "Ernie" had the reputation of being an "enlisted mans type of guy and friend", from the his many stories written about them.

Near the middle of June the Army General Simon Boliver Buckner needed the Second Marine Division on the main island. We reloaded on our standby LSTs and "sailed" a short distance to where we were just south of the City of Naha. I shall never forget the day we were ordered ashore, June 17,1945 as I tried to fill my two canteens with water and found that no fresh (drinking) water was available on this LST. I did manage to have one full before departing and I had to make this last me throughout the full day of marching under a hot and humid sky. We landed on the Oroku Peninsula, across the bay south of Naha, and once ashore we were placed under the command of The First Marine Division. After an all day march we stopped at a small village, Tera and our Eighth Regiment stayed at this location, establishing a Command Post. The rest of the Battalion troops proceeded onward until we were just behind the front line of the First Division Marine troops at a point called Mezado Ridge. We found ground to sleep on and were informed that tomorrow morning we would take over the front line, presently being held by the First Marine Division. We were not anxious to be on the front line, however we would take our chances, once again.

We were awaken at 6:30am and our Second Battalion took the lead and relieved the front line troops at 7:30am June 18th. Our mission was to proceed south, staying between high mountains to our right and left. We were to stay to the right of Makabe and Komesu villages and drive forward until we reached the southern end and shore of Okinawa.

The Japanese sensed that new troops were on the line and they were ready. As our Companies tried to descend from Mezado Ridge, the Japs started firing at us with mortars and artillery, and catching us from the sides with rifle and light machine gun fire. We established our Command Post (CP) at the foot of Mezado Ridge on the western side where we thought that it might be safe with the large boulders surrounding us. We also had established an Observation Post (OP) on the high eastern side of the ridge. The view was so good that by looking south we were able to view the remaining ground to be taken and the sea. I went forward to the OP to obtain intelligence data to locate our troops and enemy positions, then I returned to plot this data on my master map, in case any Officer requested it. I had left Lt. Tuckner, Major Chamberlin, Col. Wallace, Lt. Col. Waldorf, Kinzer, Diley, Meyer, Kowalchuk, Miller, Schapendonk, Gilbert, Nix, O'Brien, Kudroshoff, Roland Wilsey and Radtke up on the ridge, so I was pretty much alone, however they were less than fifty yards from me on the ridge.

MEZADO RIDGE - OKINAWA - EIGHTH BATTALION OP
MAJOR WILLIAM CHAMBERLIN - LT. GENERAL SIMON BOLIVER BUCKNER
COL. CLARENCE R. WALLACE

GENERAL BUCKNER WAS KILLED BY ENEMY SHELLING A FEW MINUTES AFTER THIS PICTURE WAS TAKEN. (HE IS AT THE EXTREME RIGHT) HE WAS COMMANDER IN CHIEF OF THE OKINAWA OPERATION. THE DATE WAS JUNE 18, 1945. (OUR MEN GIVE A "FIFTY YEAR LATER ACCOUNT ON PAGE 107).

Not all of our men stayed on the ridge, but most did. I was taken by surprise when a Jeep pulled up just a few feet away from me. The Stars and Flag brought me to my feet in quick order as this was the Army Commander In Chief of this Okinawa Operation. The General approached and asked me if someone could take him to what was now to be the Regimental Observation Post. "Yes, sir." I replied, and before I could say anymore, someone from our CP interceded, saying. "Just follow me General." And they climbed the steep slope, and that was a moment to remember. Within fifteen minutes of his being that close to me the Japanese started a barrage of exploding airial bursts directly above us and we had no protection at all, this plus artillery and mortar rounds was pretty frightening. Shortly afterwards, perhaps between 1:20pm and 1:45pm men started returning to the Command Post crying. The General had been bravely standing while viewing the area in front of the OP when he was mortally wounded. His chauffeur came back down the slope as others were carrying the General on a stretcher. He was carefully placed on his Jeep and with an escort of others from the Regiment he was taken north, probably to the nearest Army and or Navy medical unit.

THIS STORY APPEARED FIFTY YEARS LATER

THE MEADVILLE TRIBUNE MONDAY, October 16, 1995

By SCOTT KLEINBERG
TRIBUNE

WOODCOCK — As the American flag billowed in the breeze outside Joe Diley's home on Gravel Run Road, five World War II veterans drank coffee and reminisced in the living room.

They talked about meeting more than 50 years ago while serving in the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine, 2nd Marine Division of the U.S. Marine Corps. Back then, they fought to stay alive as the sounds of warfare exploded all around them.

Sometimes, death got too close for comfort. Four were less than 20 feet away from General Simon Bolivar Buchner, the highest ranking officer killed in the war, when he was felled by what they thought was a sniper's assault.

Assigned to the Marines combat intelligence section, they were in charge of setting up observation posts to keep a watchful eye on enemy troops. Roland D. Wilsey of St. Paul, Minn., said he remembers the moment the men came under fire from an aerial attack.

"One general called this duty a 'ringside seat to the greatest show on Earth,' " Wilsey said. "It was, because we saw Buchner go down and there was no question he was killed instantly."

But this was no circus. There was little to smile at when the high general was down with a deep gash extending from the right side of his neck to his chest. The laughter came later, though, when the five escaped the ambushed area and lived to tell their stories to one another.

"It was the first time we came under fire from an aerial assault and it was intense," said Meade Kinzer of Walla Walla, Wash. "After the initial shock wore off of seeing the general down, we scattered — boy, did we ever."

They must have. They've been stationed all over the world and back, from Guadalcanal and Hawaii to Okinawa and Hiroshima.

Mike Kowalchuk of Brasher Falls, N.Y., said that if the United States hadn't dropped the atomic bomb on Nagasaki, after the initial attack on Hiroshima, their battalion would have been the first to invade the country.

"We were definitely one of the most celebrated and well-known divisions in the war," Diley said. "Even though there were more than five in the battalion, there's a lot of history among us."

Wilsey left Japan shortly after the attack on Nagasaki, one of the first two in the Marines to be sent home to the United States. He said soldiers were awarded points based on years of service, injuries and other factors. Wilsey accumulated a lot in his fighting days.

"Traveling by boat in the service was always at night. Everything was pitch black and not a sound could be heard," Wilsey said he remembers vividly. "I'll never forget how wonderful it was going home — music was playing and we were all eating ice cream on deck."

When all five finally returned home, their group was split. It took 47 years for them to all get together for their first reunion, three years ago in Rapid City, S.D.

And as Kinzer leaned forward to have his coffee mug refilled, he asked Jerry "Shorty" Meyer, of Salamanca, N.Y. — who remained speechless for most of the day — if he had anything to say.

"Yes, I certainly do. I already know this stuff because it was me who won the war," he said. "I really did, and don't you forget it."

As night fell June 18, we were south of Mezado Ridge. We placed a security line on our left, at the north edge of the town, Makabe. We extended our line in a north-south direction capturing the main road (Road 33), cutting off the enemy supply line from the west. Our Intelligence alerted us that there was a large build-up of enemy troops and artillery pieces being assembled in and near town. We used artillery, howitzers, 4.2mm mortars through rocket launchers and even Sherman Tanks to continually pound and destroy the town. In turn they threw every thing they had available at us, but when their activity started to slacken, we knew we had the upper-hand.

Off-shore, in the darkness of the night we watched one of our ships explode from an enemy submarine torpedo. It was too far away for us to identify as to its make. Since we were looking south, it was just to the right of our front lines near the southern tip of Okinawa.

As dawn came, we left troops to finish the fight at Makabe and the hills to our right and left. The rest of the Eighth Marines pushed through Ibaru Ridge, then at 4:23pm, June 19, 1945 we had completed our objective by reaching the southern shore-line. Except for some isolated enemy we had control of the southern portion of Okinawa. We joined with the First and Sixth Division Marines in a "cleaning-out" operation. Then at the first opportunity, I obtained a "gasoline-can" of water to clean-up filthy "Riggsy".

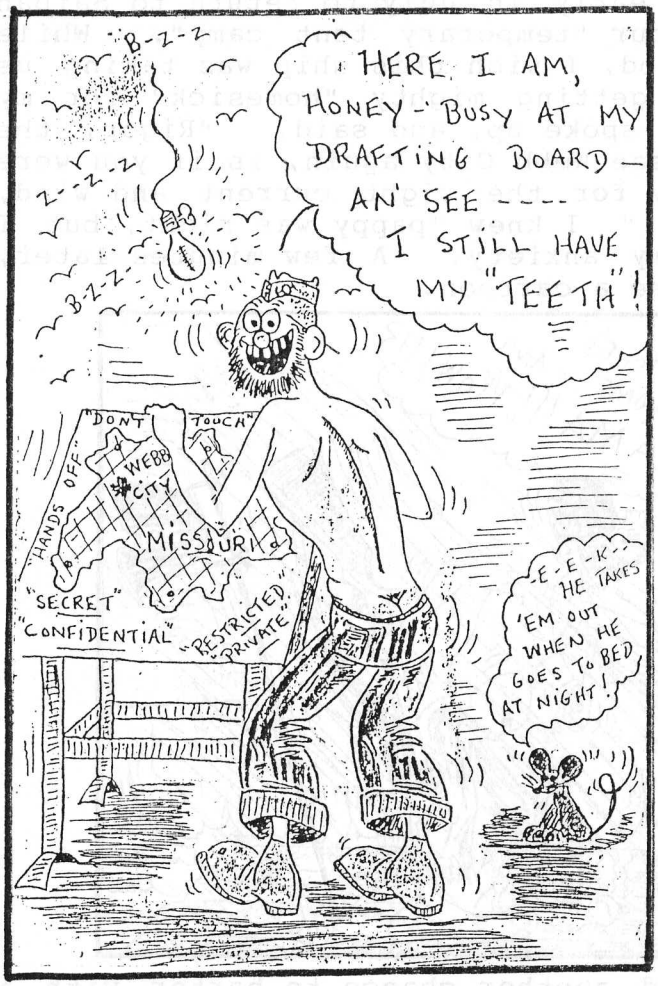
The Marine trained "war dogs" proved very valuable in our mop-up, and partly due to their skill, it helped speed our departure. The Eighth Regiment loaded aboard ship early in July to return to Saipan for the fourth time. And again to our "temporary tent camp". While aboard ship I spoke-out, saying. "God, I wish this ship was taking us all back to the States, because I'm getting mighty "homesick" for my wife, Marie." Jerome (Pappy) Meyer spoke up, and said. "Rigor, the only way that you're ever going to see Webb City again, is if you were to build yourself a steady raft, pray for the right current and wind, then go AWOL (absent without leave)." I knew "pappy was right, but I was getting tight chest pains from my anxiety. A few minutes later, after some laughter, "Pappy" handed me a cartoon.

While returning to Saipan I had another chance to barter with a Sailor, trading one of my crazy home-made (guaranteed-authentic) Jap Flags for a beautiful, but slightly used, battery powered portable radio. Once I had "clear title" to this wonderful machine, I became a very popular man. After reaching camp, men would gather while we listened to popular music, news from the States, world news and of course "Tokyo Rose" with her daily broadcasts of U.S. music and news about how the U.S. Marines were going to be annihilated.

My radio used a special type of battery, and I was at a great loss as to how I might find a battery supply or source. I was fortunate as one of our Radio Operators showed me how to convert and use one of the military batteries from a field pack radio. He was kind enough to mark one of the new batteries as "dead" in order to dispose of it legally. Being grateful for his assistance, I presented him with a "flag".

I had many offers to sell this "magic box" and James Nix was always afraid that it might stop working before he could buy it. And I must admit that there were some times that I took the "guts" out to tinker with, hoping for better reception.

Returning to Saipan was a glorious happening, as lots of mail had accumulated during our absence to Iheya Shima and Okinawa. Marie had written many letters that I knew I had to take time to answer. There were also letters from friends and other family members so I had a lot of letters that I had to reply to. In one of Maries letters, she asked if I still had my original teeth. So to ease her mind, Jerry Meyer drew another cartoon and said. "Here Rigor, send this home to "mama".

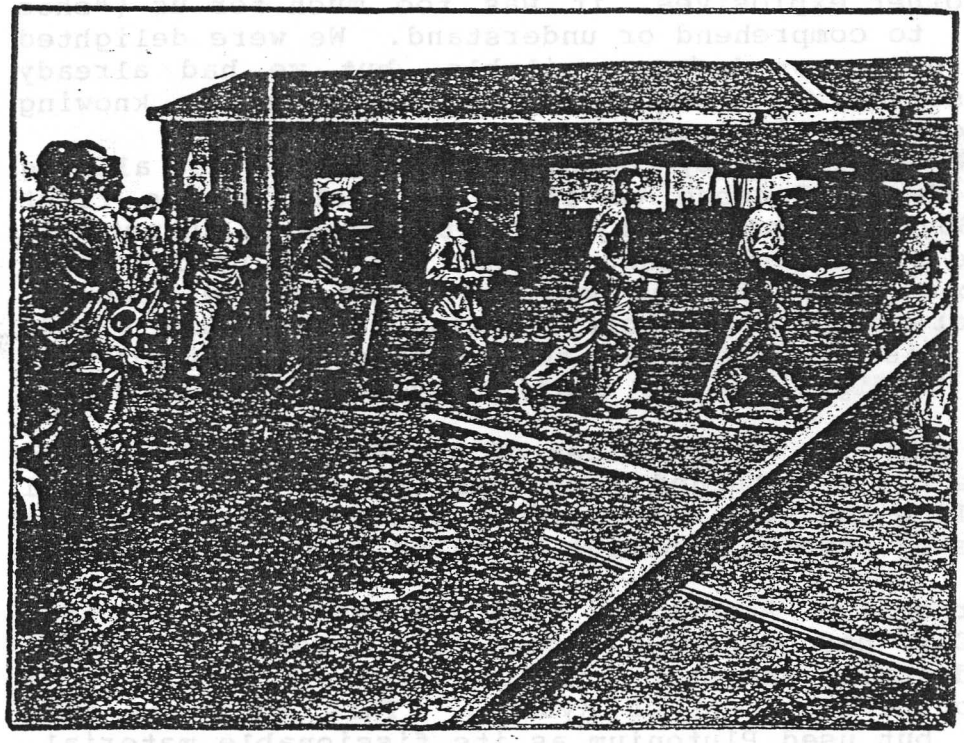


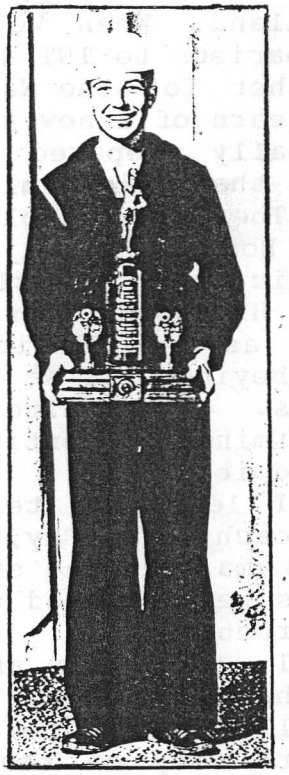
While we were on Okinawa, my brother Jack had been to Saipan to visit me and was disappointed to learn I was not there. Jack was two years younger than I and had joined the U.S. Navy after finishing High School. He had been in the Mediterranean Sea on Tankers and or Supply Ships and been ashore in North Africa and many other ports, and now was located on nearby Guam as a Navy Quartermaster. I made radio contact to let him know I was safe and back on Saipan, and would try to get leave soon to visit him.

My father-in-law, Herman Hoerning was a wonderful man, that passed away before I would return home, however through his letters I had the chance to know, understand and love him. He was of German ancestry and he loved his beer and "Limburger Cheese" on Saturday night. He often teased me when I dated and married his daughter, for liking "pickled pigs feet". Well, bless him as he went to his tool shed and designed and built a special wooden crate container to house a large glass jar of this specialty, which arrived on Saipan unbroken.

I was beginning to have a little trouble with my radio, but I kept it working long enough to sell it to James D. Nix for Fifty American Dollars. Then I had a chance to sell my Navy Issued 45 caliber automatic pistol. I was getting a little uneasy about having it, because if someone had ever asked questions or had checked the serial number, I could have been in some "hot water" and I didn't want any "mess-up" to keep me from going home as soon as this lousy war was over. I sold the pistol for a nice profit and had a clean "slate".

Our food had improved very little since our last leaving the island. The cooks were just as disappointed as we were, because they were not receiving any decent food to prepare. One evening after the evening meal had been prepared, served and the pots and pans cleaned by the exhausted kitchen crew, some "Heavy Brass" arrived in Jeeps with some Red Cross vehicles. As the sun was setting the Battalion was called out in formation and Lt. Col. Harry Waldorf told us that the Red Cross was going to serve us "Doughnuts and Coffee" in about forty-five minutes. What he didn't tell us was that they (the Red Cross) had only brought some dough, to be made into doughnuts. Our tired Mess Crew had to roll dough, cut doughnuts, heat oil and fry, plus prepare new vats of coffee. Once all this dirty work was done they also had a mess to clean-up, while the "beautiful people" in their clean Red Cross uniforms handed each of us in line, two doughnuts and offered us some coffee if we had our canteen cups and were willing to pour. Boy- I thought, this is great, maybe I joined the wrong outfit because the last time we saw these "beautiful people" offering doughnuts was in New Zealand, a long time ago.





JACK W. RIGGS

I had made a request for a three day "Pass" and air transportation to visit my brother on Guam. It was finally approved with Class IV Priority and I left on August 1st, 1945 with final destination, the Agana Field on Guam, however we had an enroute stop, both going and returning, at the Tinian New Super Airdrome (for the Superfortress B-29 Bombers, formerly the old Japanese, "Ushi" Airfield. I enjoyed a wonderful visit with my brother, then returned on August 3rd with a stop at Tinian Airfield, then back to "Isely Airfield" on Saipan. The dates of me being on the Tinian Airfield are IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER.

I enjoyed being out of battle, yet I was aware of the continuous roar of the B-29 Bombers with their heavy loads of explosives, including Napalm, taking-off from Saipan and Tinian was for the purpose of neutralizing the Japanese mainland. We all knew that after Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan, Iheya Shima, and Okinawa, we were being readied to invade the Japanese mainland.

One dark night, sometime after 11:pm we heard an outcry for help, a Marine came running through the camp area wanting flashlights and some help. Before retiring he had taken a "rest-call" and because the toilet overlooked a ridge with a winding road below he was able to witness the headlights of a Jeep that had missed a curve and rolled into the ravine below. Several of us went below to search the area, but all that we found was a billfold with identification and money that had fell out when the vehicle turned over. There were no lights coming from the vehicle and we could not get a voice response, so we returned up the hill to camp and notified the Military Police. We learned the next day that there was only one body of a Marine found and he had died instantly when the Jeep had rolled over him.

Japanese bombers were no longer disturbing our night of sleep anymore because our forces had deprived them of airfields, so we were enjoying the extra uninterrupted rest. Then on the 6th day of August we were given some news that a B-29 Bomber flying from Tinian, just a few miles away, had dropped a new type of bomb on the Japanese mainland. When we were told as to its "mega ton" destruction power in comparison to TNT and other explosives, it was too much for us ("shoe leather for the Navy") to comprehend or understand. We were delighted to learn of a new type of weapon being available, but we had already mentally prepared ourselves for a Japanese mainland invasion, knowing also that this would cost the lives of many of us.

The B-29, "Enola Gay" piloted by Colonel Paul Tibbets, Jr. allowed his Bombardier Major Thomas Ferebee to sight and release the first Atomic Bomb ("Little Boy") dropped in any war, at 8:15am on August 6th over Hiroshima, on the island of Honshu Japan. The bomb used Uranium 235 as a fissionable material and was detonated above ground, destroying over 4½ square miles of the city, taking an estimated 92,000 lives. Even after this devastation the Japanese Military was determined to continue to fight "to the end", they would not surrender or admit defeat.

I learned later, that the Third Fleet of the Navy had planned to approach Tokyo Bay, the day I returned from Guam (August 3rd) to shell Yokohama, but the shelling had been cancelled by Admiral Halsey and the ships were ordered to stay several hundreds of miles away and wait for instructions.

In the early afternoon of August 9, 1945 we were informed that another B-29, "Bock's Car" had dropped a second Atomic Bomb ("Fat Man") at 11:01am over the industrial and ship building area of Nagasaki. A major city on the southern island of Kyushu. This Bomb was also detonated above ground but used Plutonium as its fissionable material. It was reported to have destroyed over 1½ square miles of the city, taking 40,000 lives. It was later learned that Nagasaki was chosen at the last moment due to limited visibility over the primary target Kokura, on the same island. The Pilot was later identified as Major Charles Sweeney, who had piloted a monitoring plane with the first drop at Hiroshima. A story has been told that Major Sweeneys B-29 ("The Great Artiste") was preparing to carry the "Fat Man", but developed mechanical problems and the Bomb was transferred and fitted to Captain Fred Bocks' B-29 ("Bock's Car"), with Major Chuck Sweeney as the Pilot. Another story has been told that Captain Fred Bock had flown a plane on both missions as an observer, (however I have never been able to confirm this).

It is interesting that both B-29s' left from the Tinian Airfield (that I had helped to take) on the 6th and 9th of August, and I had been on this field the 1st and 3rd of August. The planes and bombs were there at the time, but unknown to me.

While in "Boot Camp" I had purchased a small 6 by 9 inch Marine Corps "Memories Scrapbook and Diary", and once we had reached New Zealand, I had each member of our unit sign his name, with birthday and home towns noted. In the diary section I had made two entries that reads as follows;

"TODAY, IS A DAY THAT SHALL GO DOWN IN HISTORY AS ONE OF THE MOST GLORIOUS DAYS OF MY LIFE, BECAUSE THIS MORNING OF AUGUST 15TH, 1945 WE RECEIVED WORD THAT THE JAPANESE HAD ACCEPTED OUR PEACE TERMS, WHICH MEANS THAT THE WAR IS OVER AND NO MORE LIVES WILL BE LOST, DUE TO ACTUAL FIGHTING.

I HAVE BEEN IN THE MARINE CORPS CLOSE TO THIRTY-TWO MONTHS, AND TWENTY EIGHT OF THAT HAS BEEN OVERSEAS, IN THE PACIFIC. I HAVE BEEN MARRIED THREE YEARS, AS OF THE 19TH OF THIS MONTH, TO A WONDERFUL WOMAN, AND HAVE LIVED WITH HER ONLY FOUR MONTHS, SO I HAVE A LOT TO LOOK FORWARD TO. I AM HOPING THAT I MIGHT CONTINUE WITH MY CIVILIAN LIFE IN THE VERY NEAR FUTURE, WHICH WILL PROBABLY BE IN ABOUT 2 TO 3 YEARS? - YOURS TRULY."

Another diary entry, made on the same day, reads;

"AUGUST 15, 1945, 2200 HOUR (10:PM), ICE COLD BEER WAS HAD BY ALL HANDS THAT WANTED IT, AND I MUST SAY AT THIS TIME OF WRITING, ALMOST EVERYONE IN CAMP IS PRETTY WELL INTOXICATED AND HAVING A GAY TIME.

MYSELF, I DRANK ONLY EIGHT CANS AND FEEL HAPPY, BUT I AM NOT DRUNK. IT IS ONLY TEN MINUTES UNTIL TAPS AND EVERYONE IS GOING STRONG, BUT I'LL BE A BIT DIFFERENT THAN THE REST AND TURN-IN EARLY TONIGHT, AND MAYBE IN THE MORNING I'LL WAKE-UP FEELING BETTER THAN THE REST OF THE GROUP. TAPS, JUST SOUNDED, SO I'LL TURN LIGHTS OUT AND TRY TO INDULGE IN SOME SLEEP."

Knowing that the war was over gave everyone a mental and spiritual up-lift, yet in our young minds it was hard for us to absorb the shocking news as being for real. We had already prepared ourselves mentally for the invasion of Japan. As time passed, a point system had been established, whereas points were given for months in service Purple Hearts earned, battles engaged in, married status, and so on. Once accumulating a maximum number of points, a person had priority for returning home. If for example, 80 points were required then it was homeward bound for those lucky ones. The rest of us would stay behind and go to Japan as occupational troops, to maintain calm and peace. Roland Wilsey returned to the States, but was hospitalized at the Great Lakes Navy Base Hospital due to a stomach wound.

At the time, we never gave thought or realized the important part that each of us had played in this war, working together as a team. We lost friends and blood, but we were told to do a job and we did it, with "the Grace of God", sheer guts, determination and "esprit de corps". History will remember the "Enola Gay", but little will ever be written or recorded of "Bock's Car", that dropped the bomb forcing the end of the war, or the thousands of young men who so bravely followed orders and assaulted islands from Guadalcanal to Tokyo in order that the planes could eventually reach the mainland.

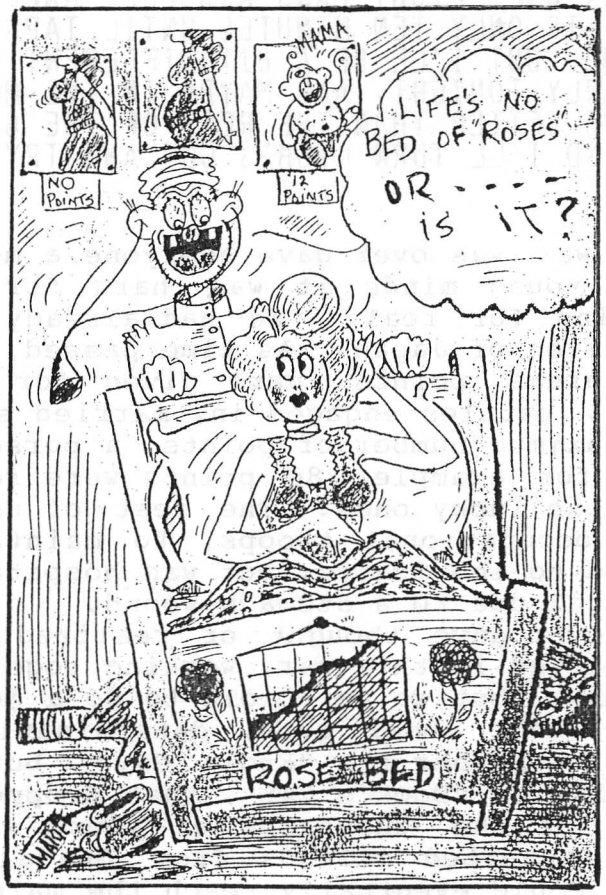
The Second Marine Division was an honorable and proud unit, we had participated in "War-Time" battles against the Japanese at Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Saipan, Tinian, Iheya Shima and Okinawa. The Division had been awarded a "PRESIDENTIAL UNIT CITATION" for our costly seizure and occupation of the Tarawa Atoll. We were very pleased and proud that we had received this award as it was shared with all who played a part by reinforcing our unit.

The award lost a lot of its meaning and my respect for it, when about a year later the Secretary of the Navy gave the same award to the Fourth Marine Division for their participation on Saipan and Tinian which was an equally shared landing by both Marine Divisions. The Second Division was not mentioned in this award!!!!!!

After the battle for Okinawa, the First Division to whom we had been assigned was awarded this "PRESIDENTIAL" award and no glory was shared with the Second Marine Division, nor were we even given recognition.

We had entered the "Corps" as boys, but after all that we had endured we were now men. Politics played a major role in award giving and if rightly earned and shared then it should be looked at with distinguished pride. However politics soiled its rightful meaning, We were not bitter, but disappointed and accepted it as a way of life.

I was called into the Battalion Headquarters Office on September 5th. Waiting for me was Lt. Jerome Tuckner, Sgt. Guy Towsley, the Chaplain and a Red Cross representative. My first thoughts were that something dreadful had happened to one of my family members. I was scared and shaking as if I had a "cold chill". The Red Cross member handed me a copy of a certified letter mailed from a Stateside Red Cross office. It read that my wife was to undergo a serious throat operation and the Doctor felt my presence there was necessary.



Orders requesting a transfer home was typed and I signed it on September 6th, it was then forwarded to Regimental Headquarters for approval. I had accumulated 72 points and felt that there was a good chance for approval. Then about a week later we received orders to board ship for the occupation of Japan, and my spirits were at an all time low as I had received no notice of approval or disapproval. Jerry Meyer knew that I was worried about Maries condition and came through again by saying. "Don't worry Rigor, Marie is going to be all right, and besides we need you." With that he handed me another cartoon, which brighten my gloomy day.

We were not to happy, about boarding ship (APAs) for Japan, but this was going to be a different type of adventure and there was not the tense feeling one has before battle, we were much more relaxed. Then one morning, just 45 days after the "Fat Man" bomb had been dropped on Nagasaki, we awoke to find that we had docked in the Nagasaki Harbor. On this September 23rd day, as I can recall from memory the sky was overcast and the morning air had a feeling of dampness like mist.

We left the ship, climbed aboard the beds of military trucks that drove us through the devastated city, witnessing no sign of life. What appeared to be odd was the fact that many of the buildings near the harbor area were still standing, some with blown-out and broken windows and some were not. As we approached the higher ground in the industrial valley, we witnessed complete devastation. Every thing had been leveled to the ground. Large steel columns and beams that did frame buildings had been warped and twisted by the intense heat of the bomb blast that they took shapes like large "safety pins".

As we left this area we saw a different Japan, however time will never erase from our memory what we had seen. The bomb had been dropped only 1½ months ago and we had just passed through the center of the ruins, if we were exposed to any radiation levels, we were never told and we knew so little about radiation being absorbed in our lungs and skin that we did not even think to ask, at that time.

September 23rd was a very long day, as I remember. I do not recall having any noon meal, but as afternoon approached and we unloaded, we were at an air field near the city of Kumamoto and training planes, Zeros, and gliders were everywhere. I took refuge within one of the hangers for a nap, but there were too many of the Marines that had energy to burn-off, so they took a look around the airfield to find an easy way to commit suicide.

Kumamoto had a military academy for Japanese pilots and this airfield was crowded with planes. To let off energy, many of these crazy Marines climbed in cockpits and found ways to start an engine and then taxi all around the field. If they wrecked one then they would climb in another and drive it around. Some even were brave enough to allow being pulled in a glider until they tore it up. It was a crazy day until some officers decided that somebody might get killed, but by this time the foot pedaling Marines had probably set a new record for destroying the most Jap planes in one day. It was noisy, scary and crazy, however they had the best "free carnival ride" of their life.

The Second Battalion was relocated the following day to the Academy, where we found some decent quarters and bathing facilities. The tiled rectangular pits in the bath houses could be filled with water, then heated to the temperature you might desire by the use of steam. We were to find that this type of public bathing was quite common in Japan, We had been deprived from a good bath for many months so we took every advantage that we could by enjoying the facility as long as it was available to us.

Letters started arriving from home, which was a morale booster, as I learned that Marie had made it through her throat operation and was recovering better than expected. I was most grateful for this news, and after I had told the group of Maries condition, "Pappy" Meyer said. "Send her this, Rigor." And gave me another drawing. GOD Bless, Jerome Meyer for keeping all of us in good spirits through his positive humor and drawings. If I had been a Catholic Pope, I would have elevated "Jerry" to Sainthood status while he was still among us.

Within a few days we relocated again. This time a campsite was set-up near Kumamoto, with a security fence surrounding it. I am not sure what the fence was for, because many of the Marines climbed over or under and found excitement in town, then would sneak back before daylight. What they did during those hours I don't know.

Liberty was frequent, but most of the places that a Marine wanted to go, were off-limits. The civilians at first were "distant" with us then when we began to enter their shops to spend money and communicate, they began to smile and accept our presence. Radtke, Gilbert, Miller, Schapendonk, Dee and I went to one of their movie houses, and left within a few minutes as we could not understand a thing. We visited their Post Office and bought a few stamps, then because of the many off-limit signs posted, and MPs (U.S. Marine Police) riding around in Jeeps (some with trailers), our boundries were somewhat limited and most often would return early.

It was the custom that when entering a home, restaurant, and or a "Geisha House" (as examples) shoes were removed and left at the front door. It took us a while to figure out why the MPs with their Jeeps were pulling trailers. They drove through the "Off-Limits" areas and loaded GI shoes, when they found them on the sidewalk. One day as I returned from liberty there were a pile of shoes at the Security Entrance Gate and several Marines wearing socks scrambling for a couple of shoes to fit their feet.

Since the Japanese Government had been defeated, the U.S. Government had authorized and issued (Issued Pursuant To Military Proclamation) "Military Currency" for our use, in denominations being used in Japan, such as "YEN" and "SEN". We traded our U.S. Dollars to the "Paymaster" for military currency. The merchants were skeptical of it at first, but soon wanted all they could get.

We were told not to drink any of their water, so we drank their beer instead, which was very good and came in larger bottles than the U.S. producers. After the civilians realized that we were "good people" they started offering their home grown fruit and vegetables, and we also had been advised not to consume anything unless it was cooked first. The reason being, the Japanese saved all of their "human waste" and placed it on their garden for fertilizer. Their private growing areas were small and they took advantage of what was available to them. They did not have large acreage for farming as we have in the United States.

To accommodate the civilian gardeners, our toilets were built whereas the waste would run to a concrete trough in back, and the families would generally come as a group during the early morning hours with their "honey-buckets" precociously balanced on each end of a bamboo pole.

Our Intelligence Section was getting anxious to start doing something productive, then one day we were given an assignment to search warehouses in and around town that might house any guns or weapons, and then to identify the location and contents on maps. There were five in my group when we started out one morning walking through some back yards to get to a warehouse spotted beyond. We were being carefully watched by families peering from their back windows and doors. All of a sudden George Gilberts left leg fell through a "barrel like bucket" full of human waste that had been buried in one back yard, and barely covered with a rotten rectangular board.

The family all rushed out very apologetic, with wash basin, soap, towels and a bucket of water and started cleaning Georges trousers. The lady wanted him to take them off, while she would wash , dry and iron them. We thanked this nice family and moved on, but once out of their sight we all doubled-up with laughter.

On another scouting day we were fortunate to meet an English speaking gentleman, that appeared to be in his late fifties. He introduced himself as Himmu Mikoto and told us that he had been educated in the United States, graduating from the University of Connecticut. He returned to teach in Japan, until his retirement, then settled in the rural area south of Kumamoto where he had been born and raised. He told us that on the day the bomb exploded over Nagasaki he was about twenty miles from the city on his bicycle, when a strong blast of wind blew him and his bicycle a hundred or more yards from the road. He was glad the war was over and had always liked the Americans.

Two Marines from our Battalion were in an "Off-Limit" area, they were riding in the rear area of an electric "trolley", when it made a stop for two Marine MPs to step aboard. Two young girls hid the boys and the MPs stood only at the front and not seeing any Marines they stepped off. The two knew some Japanese language, as one had been through Division Language School, they were grateful and became acquainted with the girls, who were sisters. During the following nights the two "Gyrines" would sneak in and out of camp during the night to be with the young ladies. Near the end of the week they were trying to sell items or borrow money, because the girls father had offered them a deal. The father owned a small business and he and his wife lived on the first floor behind the business. His two daughters lived upstairs and had been entertaining the two Marines at night.

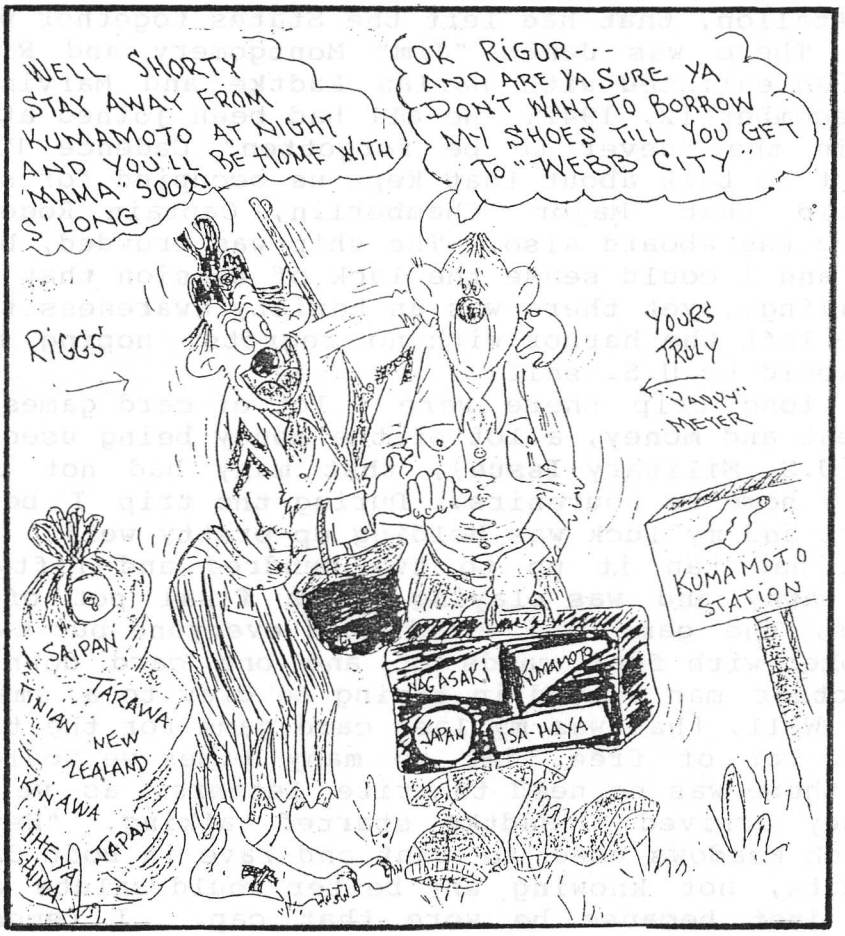
The father had offered the "boys" the two daughters, who would provide them comfort and housekeeping for two hundred American dollars, as long as they were here. Whenever the "boys" were to ship-out for home, the father said that he would buy the daughters back, at a reduced price. YES, the father was a business man!

Early in November a list of those eligible to return to the States on the next available ship, was posted. We had waited a long time for this to occur. A bazaar was set up by the local Japanese for those returning to purchase a few gifts to take with us.

Radtke, O'Brien and I were the only ones from our Section that had enough points to return, and we had learned that Roland Wilsey had been hospitalized after returning to the States, but we had no knowledge as to where. It was hard to contain our joy of knowing we were going home, yet it was also sad to know that we would leave behind friends, that we never expected to see again.

The Combat Intelligence Section (2-8-2) gathered for a final group picture, on the grounds of the military school in Kumamoto. There were fifteen of our group in the photo, but Jerome Meyer was not available at the time, and was not included.

Jerome Meyer, sometimes called "Shorty", because of his height was (and is) a dear and close friend and I think that he actually felt my loss by leaving as much as I felt, leaving him. The morning that I left for the Kumamoto Railroad Station, we said our goodbye and he handed me two drawings, one to give to Marie when I reached home.



Most of us had been born, soon after the "First World War", and were young kids when Charles Lindbergh made his historical flight over the Atlantic Ocean. We had seen automobiles develop from the "old Ford Model T', to one with a "V-8" (eight cylinder) engine. Now through the War with Japan we witnessed the development of aircraft, rockets, P-T boats, amphibian tanks, napalm bombs and giant B-29 Bomber planes that appeared to be too heavy to fly.

Then we heard about, and saw with our own eyes, the destruction caused by this new "Atomic Bomb", our minds were dazzled by the rapid changes brought about by the war and wondered what the next twenty five years would bring in new technology.

I do not recall the name of the APA (troop ship) waiting for us at Nagasaki, but it could have been an old rusty "tin can" and it still would have looked good to a bunch of long overdue and homesick boys. Leaving this southern island of Japan, I felt no hatred in my heart for the civilian population as they showed us respect and kindness. However, this generation of the Japanese Military and their Emperor, I don't believe, in my heart, that I can ever forgive. And I wonder too, if the next generation of Japanese will ever be told the true story?

Trucks took us to the rail station, where we would board and ride, intermixed with civilians to Nagasaki. The train ride was exciting as it gave us a chance to see civilians in their daily life working in their small rural gardens, many of them were terraced, and tending to their tea groves, much in the manner that grape vines are maintained in California.

Once aboard the transport, Radtke, O'Brien and I roamed the upper outside decks, looking for perhaps a familiar face. I felt a tug on my sleeve and "Dutch" with a grin on his face said. "Riggs,- look over there on the port railing." I did and it was like our old Sixteenth Replacement Battalion, that had left the States together were returning as a group. There was James "Jim" Montgomery and Richard "Dick" Meadows, who had enlisted with Harlan Radtke and Marvin Sheppard in Minneapolis, December 12, 1942. We all had been joined at "Boot Camp", being placed in the "never to be forgotten" Cadence Platoon 1234. Wow-we had a lot to talk about that kept us occupied for several hours.

We were told that Major Chamberlin, Captain Rogers and First Sergeant Towsley was aboard also. The ship was crowded, but there were no complaints, and I could sense the lack of tension that had been with us on other sailings, yet there was an anxiety awareness that every one had inside. We left the harbor with no regrets, hoping that the next sight of land would be U.S. soil.

During the long trip there were a lot of card games being played for entertainment and money, a lot of the money being used was with the Japanese Yen (U.S. Military Issue), that many had not redeemed, but planned to carry home as souvenirs. During the trip I became involved with five others and my luck was holding up pretty well. Starting with fifty dollars I had ran it up to two hundred and fifty. I put my original fifty away and was playing for a final pot of about eight hundred dollars, the game had eliminated everyone but two of us. We were playing poker with four cards up and one card down. I had two pair and the other man stayed in trying to draw to a small straight, and he got it. Well, that was my last card game for the trip.

We all had a lot of free time so many times we would just gather and reminisce, there was no need to write letters, as we hoped to be home before they arrived. Radtke started talking. "Hey-do you guys remember how Dick Meadows used to rant and rave in Boot Camp, and then we green recruits, not knowing any better would salute a Navy Chief Petty Officer, just because he wore that cap. I remember at Camp Elliott, a fifty year old redhead and bearded Gunnery Sergeant used to march us to the mess hall. One day when a lot of people were watching he put on one of his "shows" with his rendition of HUP-TWO-THREE-FOUR, putting us through some close order drill, which was his specialty. He let us get about a block ahead of him, then he shouted, where all of Elliott could hear, COLUMN LEFT--HOOH!"

I reminded Dutch that he and I had gone twenty eight days without a bath while on Saipan, there were a lot of things to recall and stories to tell, while others listened with smiles on their faces.

Some talked of going back to college and of their plans for the future. We discussed about how many islands we had taken for the British and other Countries sacrificing American lives.

Probably, the most often subject discussed was how the new Atomic Bomb had came along at the right time, as we knew that had we landed in Japan, there was no way to determine how many American lives would have been lost, or the number of years we would fight there to defeat them. In addition, had we been forced to fight on their mainland, the civilian casualties would have been tremendous. So we were grateful.

Our ship after leaving Japan took a northeastern (swerving) route and there were days that the weather was too frigid to be on the outer decks. Radtke was keeping track of the days for us. We had another Thanksgiving dinner aboard ship and we discussed just how many Islands and or Countries we had been at or on since leaving San Diego many months ago. I named; AMERICAN SAMOA, NEW CALEDONIA, AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND, NEW HEBRIDES, BETIO, BAIRIKI (Tarawa-Atoll), OAHU (twice), Hawaii, Eniwetok, Saipan (five times), TINIAN (three times), GUAM, OKINAWA (twice), IHEYA SHIMA and KYUSHU. Radtke had made all of these also, except Guam. I estimated that we had spent approximately eleven months aboard ships, either on maneuvers or from one place to another. I did not attempt to count the number of different sea going vessels that carried us, but when we pulled into the San Diego Harbor, eighteen days after leaving Nagasaki, we had been "full circle" and had logged approximately thirty thousand (30,000) sea miles.

By late afternoon we were off ship and on the back of "six-by" trucks heading for Camp Pendleton. Marines were starting to form lines for evening chow as our trucks rolled slowly by. After three years we saw platoons and or squads of Black Marines for the first time. One smart-alec yelled from the back of our truck. "Hey-there nigger, what are you doing?" And a most dignified reply came from a very proud individual. "I am not a "nigger" SIR, I am a colored MARINE." Well, that shut the "smart alec" up, and made the rest of us smile with pride. I never heard another racial remark after that.

As soon as we unloaded and were shown bunks for the night, there was a mad dash for the nearest "coin operated pay phones". The lines became so long that no one was allowed but five minutes to call home. I finally got my call through to Marie, her birthday was December 3rd and I wished her greetings. After hearing her voice again after almost three years, I was very anxious to get my discharge and go home.

The next day we returned our rifles and other GI issued equipment, then around mid-morning we were taken to the parade ground where there were piles of Japaneses pistols, rifles, swords, bayonets and other confiscated trinkets. The enlisted personnel were restricted to rifles and bayonets, but Officers could have their choice. I selected two rifles with bayonets and mailed to my father and grandfather. Both were quite proud when they received them about a week later.

Those needing new dress clothing (winter greens) and shoes were outfitted with a new winter coat added. Our 30,000 sea mile "sea bags" were packed with personal clothing and other items, tagged with home addresses to be forwarded later. We kept our everyday items, shaving gear, extra clothing, etc. in a smaller bag. We had been told that we were going by train to the Marine Separation Center, Navy Training Center, Great Lakes, Illinois for discharge. That didn't make a lot of sense to many of us, but we were willing to do most anything to get out. On the third day back, we boarded the train to Chicago, it was winter and cold as we traveled inland. Radtke, Meadows, O'Brien and I stayed together in the same car. Jim Montgomery had been left behind as he was on special duty when we were ready to leave. We could not have been so lucky, because First Sergeant Towsley liked us so well that he made a point to sit with us and chat. He was only going as far as New Mexico on a 30 day leave, but this was not the Towsley we were overseas with. This one was friendly and even wished us well, when he departed.

Once reaching Chicago and the Great Lakes, everything moved so fast that many of us did not have a chance to say goodbye to one another. We had arrived at night, and the next morning they started processing at a fast pace, which was alright with us.

These processing boys had a lot of "guts" by asking each of us if we wanted to remain in the service, full time or as reserve. NOT ME BOY-All I want is OUT, was going through my mind. A Junior Grade Navy Lieutenant, R. Gilder, Jr. gave me a physical examination (I don't know what would have happened if I had not passed), then Second Lieutenant, USMC, John Hollingshaus prepared and signed my final discharge papers, which noted that my pay at time of discharge was sixty six dollars a month, The United States Government was then kind enough to allow me five cents (5¢) a mile for my transportation home, or from point of swearing in which was St. Louis, Missouri (300 miles from home). As I went out the door they handed me ninty-nine dollars and fifty six cents along with my discharge papers. The date was December 8, 1945 and I was a free man. We learned that Roland Wilsey was at the Navy Hospital here, but we were rushed so fast out the door and put on trains that we did not have time to seek him out and visit.

My route home took me from Chicago to St. Louis then to Carthage Missouri, about fifteen miles from home. I had notified Marie, by phone to meet me there. As I stepped off the train and our eyes met, I saw a young and beautiful woman, and I fell in love, all over again.

Taking that step off the train made me feel as though I was leaving the past behind me. I had made a covenant with my Maker while lying in the sand at Tarawa, and from this day forward I pledged to prove that I was worth saving. Yes, I am a believer because in my short life I have seen miraculous happenings that can not be explained.

The War was over and I was back with my family. We knew plans had to be made for the future, but now Christmas time was near and Marie had received word that my former engineering position in Illinois was being held for me. My brother would also be home soon and the family would be whole again. It would take me some time to readjust. I would not go hunting again because the sound of gunfire made me "freeze".

The first night home as I held Marie in my arms again, and remembering all that we had been through, I knew that I was the luckiest man alive and lucky to be alive. We did not know what the future might have in store, but we would start with a new beginning.

B I O G R A P H Y O f
B E R N A R D L E E R I G G S

Bernard Lee Riggs was born in Joplin, Missouri, May 11, 1922 to Samuel W. and Ruth Lavon Rogers Riggs. He was raised in that area and graduated as President of his 1941 Webb City High School Senior Class.

Bernard married Alice Marie Hoerning, of Webb City, Missouri August 19, 1942, prior to joining the Marines. They were blessed with a son, Jeffrey Lee and a daughter, Janice Marie. As of this date they enjoy six grandchildren. Bernard and Marie are members of the United Methodist Church and at the time of this writing, have celebrated their Fifty-Third Wedding Anniversary. The entire family resides in Vicksburg, Mississippi, where their son Jeffrey is a County Judge.

His Marine Corps Service in the Pacific Theatre, during World War II (1942-1945), earned him the Presidential Unit Citation for his participation at "TARAWA", Asiatic Pacific Ribbon and Medal, Four (4) Stars for action seen at Tarawa, Saipan, Tinian, Iheya Shima and Okinawa, and the Occupation Ribbon and Medal for Japan.

Mr. Riggs engineering career began in 1941, after first completing technical schooling at Joplin (Missouri) Junior College and the University of Missouri at Rolla. He began his career as an engineering draftsman, before entering the Marine Corps in December 1942. After the war he continued his career as a Senior Engineering Technician, involved in design and drafting. In the following years he invented several drafting tools, and several of his documented designs and patent ideas were used in the Petroleum, Automotive, Home and Entertainment Industry.

He became one of the founders of the Association of Professional Draftsmen and the American Institute for Design and Drafting, serving as one of the original members of the Board of Directors. He also chaired committees of these organizations which worked in association with the United Nations (UNESCO) in the interchange of technical information concerning Design and Drafting. In 1961 Mr. Riggs was selected by the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) to serve as one of the original members of the Board of Trustees for the Institute for the Certification of Engineering Technicians, and was honored by becoming the first Engineering Technician ever recognized by the Engineering Profession, receiving Certificate Number One. In 1964 he was asked to join the Staff of NSPE to manage the office for the Certification of Engineering Technicians. He became a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and a Member of the Engineering Council for Professional Development Accreditation Team. He made a career change in early 1970 to become involved in the Nuclear Industry, until his retirement.

B I O G R A P H Y O f
B E R N A R D L E E R I G G S

It is ironic that the development of the nuclear bomb, then the nuclear industry, has played such an important role in his life.

1. Bernard Riggs was one of the Marines that captured the northern Tinian air-field which allowed the airstrip to be prepared for the U.S. Air Force to base their "B-29" Bombers.

2. He was on the Tinian airstrip August 1 and again on August 3rd., 1945, while enroute to, and returning from the island of Guam on special leave to visit his brother, who was a Quartermaster within the Navy. The Atomic Bombs that were to be dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki August 6th and 9th were also at the same airfield when he was there.

3. He was on Saipan, about ten miles from the B-29s, when they took-off on their historical flights with the bombs

4. Mr. Riggs was with the first Marines to occupy Japan by off-loading ship in the Nagasaki Harbor, traversing the center of that city and the industrial valley where the detonation of the atomic bomb did the most damage. He was never told of any radiation level and or danger before going into that area.

5. In the early 1970s' Mr. Riggs was employed by a large nuclear reactor manufacture, the Combustion Engineering Company, Windsor, Connecticut as Supervisor of Quality Assurance Planning. He prepared and wrote Quality Assurance Manuals for the corporation and its' suppliers to follow in order to be in compliance with the standards set forth by the regulatory requirements of the United States Nuclear Energy Commission.

6. In 1979, he joined the Bechtel Corporation, a constructor of Nuclear Powers Plants, as a Nuclear Quality Assurance Engineer and retired from their San Francisco headquarters in 1985.

(This biography prepared by Jeffrey Lee Riggs and Janice Marie Boswell)

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