CHAPTER EIGHT

SAMOA

We docked at Pago Pago harbor around eleven o'clock one night in mid-September. Someone had everything planned for us, because the powers-that-be thought those who were going to be in charge of defensive positions should go out to their stations that night. That way everything would be set up for the troops in the morning. I was loaded aboard a jeep, supposedly to be driven to a village called Vaitogi, miles down the coast. But when the driver stopped, it was all dark, silent jungle. Not a soul in sight. I asked the driver if he was sure this was the place. "This is it, mac," he said and roared off down the road. Hell, I couldn't see anything, hear anything and didn't even have a flashlight. I dug out my mosquito head net and, using my sea bag for a pillow, went to sleep.

I awoke at daylight and was leaning against a tree, smoking a cigarette and contemplating my situation, when I saw a half dozen Samoan girls coming down the trail. They wore only a towel around their mid section. They were beautiful. They approached, giggling, and one said, "Talofa."

"Hello," I said.

"You go to live here?" she asked.

"Yes."

"What you do now?"

I said, "Nothing. What are you doing?"

"Oh, just fuckin' around," she replied. I knew the marines had been here before.

They told me where the village was and continued down the trail to bathe in a stream. That damn driver had let me off a quarter mile from the village, but I'd already made up my mind I was going to like Samoa.

My platoon arrived shortly and we busied ourselves setting up the 50s and some light 30s for beach defense, digging emplacements, and getting acquainted with the natives. Corporal Martin, my refined Burns City buddy, and I went on a scouting trip on each side of the village. We came to a stream with a bridge over it. On the bridge rail sat five Samoans, singing with a guitar in beautiful harmony, "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine--"

Martin snorted and growled, "That damn disease has spread all over the world." It was practically the Samoan national anthem.

The village was situated on high ground, in a space of about 500 yards, between two rugged, cliff-like formations that rose about 100 feet above the lodges. The terrain sloped gently down from the village to a beautiful beach. You could always hear the gentle slap-slap of the waves on the beach from the village. Beyond the hills on each side of the village, the beach for miles was a very narrow strip of sand butted up against sheer cliffs. During storms the waves had gouged out huge cavernous structures all along these cliffs. You could walk the narrow beach, duck into a natural room with a sandy floor and have all the privacy in the world.

A fale (pronounced folly, the Samoan word for house) was a circle of posts with a heavy framework of poles forming the roof, covered by a foot-thick thatch of coconut fronds. The villagers had their fales arranged in an oblong circle, with a big expanse of open ground in the middle. Here they held all the village activities and here the toddlers played under mama's watchful eyes. Here the village crier would stand and announce the chief's daily orders and the day's news. He was almost musical with it, and when he spoke everyone was very quiet and attentive.

Back of the village was miles of jungle, with one little jeep trail through it. Every village had a stone fence enclosure in the jungle, where pigs ran and propagated wild. The Samoans ate only the piglets,

as the adults were full of grubs. Anyone was welcome at any time to brave the wrath of a sow, seize a young pig and roast it. We learned to stay out of pig fields on operations. The old sows and boars were vicious.

About a quarter mile into the jungle was a five-acre clearing, created by a tornado or a twister hurricane. Here were the village gardens, where they raised taro and other tropical vegetables. Breadfruit, coconuts, bananas and pineapples grew everywhere. This was all share and share alike--everyone used the produce.

The outfit before us had built gun emplacements of cement, right down on the beach. They looked very foreign in the midst of this peaceful place. I took one look at them and decided I wouldn't want to be in them in case of a Japanese landing. Martin and I got a Samoan to take us out to sea in his outrigger to look at the beaches from there. Martin said, "Jesus Christ, those emplacements show up like a white bean in a black cat's ass."

The next day we began a whole new defense system on the two hills on either side of the village. We built underground bunkers of coconut logs and sand bags, that you could live in if need be. We arranged apertures so we could defend them from all directions. We placed them so we could help each other from hill to hill. We

dug a good trench system all over the hills and down to the village. I made up my mind not one of us would ever go to the "sitting duck" emplacements on the beach, until the Japanese were so close that the ships couldn't use naval gunfire. When Colonel Cauldwell saw the setup, he fairly beamed and several times brought visitors out to inspect it.

Life in Vaitogi was a tropical paradise. The marines were practically adopted into the Samoan families. The Samoans lived like all people should. They had their communal gardens, food grew everywhere in abundance and the fishing was easy and provident. Everything was family and the father ruled with an iron hand. If you wanted the acquaintance of a girl, you first had to receive the blessings of the father. This sometimes took months. There was very little illicit sex, or "push, push in the bush" as they called it. Any marine who at first thought the scanty dress was a sign of easy times was soon discouraged. It was just a mark of innocence as was the salty lingo they picked up.

As I was in charge I was expected to hobnob with the "High-talking Chief." He liked to play pinochle. He and his wife and I spent many a pleasant hour playing cutthroat for a penny a point.

There was one plywood fale in the village. The chief insisted that I move in. Lo and behold, it had an indoor toilet! It worked when you poured a bucket of water into it. A Samoan girl told me Dorothy LaMour had lived there when she made the movie which I think was called "Rain." The girl said that she was in the movie. I was immediately besieged with requests to use the toilet, because all the men wanted to use a stool that Dorothy LaMour had used.

I loved the food prepared by the Samoan women and took my meals with them whenever possible. Most of the food was prepared on a bed of coals and baked and steamed between thick layers of green leaves, the original slow cooker, I guess. They made many delicious dishes from green bananas, bread fruit, taro root, etc. Some of it tasted similar to things at home, smoked sausage and the like. Pig was roasted on a spit over an open fire, cooking a layer about three-quarters of an inch deep, peeling it off and eating it, while another layer roasted. I didn't like this as you always got some rare meat. So, I did some horse trading, managed to get a dutch oven, and roasted piglets well done. The Samoans liked them better this way, too, and the oven was always in use.

Upon returning to the village from the beach defenses one day, I saw the village belle sitting on a stone fence eating something. She

said, "Talofa Ron, want some?" I looked closer and she was eating a raw fish like an ear of corn. I was never able to master this bit.

There were two people in the village that were special to me. One was a beautifully-built guy about my age who was the island champion boxer. We had plenty of athletic gear, including boxing gloves. He immediately challenged me and afterwards decided he had some things to learn. Had he been trained by Walter, Howard and Joe Marbaugh, it would've been a close decision. Everything was in good humor, however, and I gave him a rubber mouthpiece to keep. He wore it even when he wasn't boxing. From then on we had a friendly bout almost every day, and he was at my heels constantly.

The other person was the chief's daughter, who was about sixteen years old. I asked her to read me the village "tappa cloths," which were the island's historical records. She was also an expert in the jungle when it came to foraging food. Between these two people, I learned to identify about everything edible in the South Pacific. It came in handy several times.

Her desire was to acquire a guitar. I drew one from the recreation department and left it with her when I left the village. I was going to tell the recreation department a jeep ran over it, but

I was never asked to account for it. She played and sang beautifully.

The Samoan love song was a beautiful thing. They were the most natural harmonizers I've ever heard. I tried to get the chief's daughter to translate it into English for me. I could never get her to understand what I wanted. Each time she would start out, "One time a long time ago, nothing grew and we were starving. A man took a boat and went to sea. When he returned he had pigs in the boat. We've never been hungry since." Now isn't that a lovely love song?

The Samoans were deathly afraid of iitus, ghosts, and burned lights all night, either a fire or kerosene lamp. This worried the brass. So we tried to explain to the villagers that the lights made targets for Japanese subs, ships and aircraft, but to no avail. We finally got orders to extinguish them by force. They were relit as soon as we left. We got orders to threaten to shoot the lawbreakers. They just said, "Me no care. Me do no wrong. Me go to heaven." The lights burned on as long as I was there.

The Samoan beaches are among the most magnificent in the world to look at. As you draw near them you notice a strange odor. All over these beauty spots the Samoans dig little holes like cats and deficate in them. I tell you, when we made practice landings, I was careful not to hit the deck until clear of the sand. It was funny

to see men wiping their shoes in the jungle grass after running across the beach. General Larson, the island commander, said this had to stop, so we started patroling the beaches. Daylight was easy, but at night when a light was shined down the beach, there they were, squatting like chickens going to roost. We even fired some warning shots but that stopped nothing.

Well, it was decided to build long wooden walkways out over the water and put outhouses out there. We had learned that nothing was ever accomplished without going through the chiefs. Also, the chief never decided anything without a three-day feast, which all the officers had to attend. So, we had the feast and my chief took me along. It was a gala affair with singing, dancing and quantities of food and drink. Finally it was agreed that if we built them, the chiefs would see that they were used. They were built at every village. In all the time I spent on Samoa, I never saw one person, except an occasional marine, use these outhouses.

The next crisis to arise was the fact that some of the women wore a lava lava around their waist but nothing above. General Larson was bound to cover those pretty mounds with cloth. The feast was held and it was even better than the first--fire dances, sword dances, roast pig, kava kava and the whole nine yards. The

decision was, after three days, that if the Navy issued two green tee shirts to each woman, the chiefs would see that they were worn. The morning after the issue, they all appeared, wearing the tee shirts. But they all had cut two holes in front and every breast was bare!

However, later on they took to wearing their lava lava clear up to their armpits. The rank and file did not favor this.

The Seabees, the engineer corps, built a huge reservoir high in the mountains. All camps had running water. A pipe was run to each village, and out in the village square the pipe was elevated and curved into a shower and laundry. Now the women could beat their clothes clean on the smooth cement floor and bathe without going to the streams. At about five p.m. every day, the women and girls gathered at the showers to bathe after their daily chores. The marines gathered, too. This was fine, except there were complaints that the boys were laughing and making snide remarks. The feast was called. Immediately afterwards a general order was posted stating that it was permissible to watch the bathing in silence and with a straight face. Our C.O. told us, "Okay, you can watch the butt-scrubbing, but I'll bust the first man to crack a smile."

If by relating some of these incidents I am conveying a wrong impression of the Samoans, let me put it straight. They were one of the most moral and beautiful people I have ever seen. Every night at bedtime each family would gather in a circle in their fale and sing a religious song. Sometimes I'd be walking along and I'd stop outside of those fales and listen to that beautiful harmony. It always sent a chill up my spine.

There were so many good things about Samoa that one tends to forget about the rats. The soil there was very shallow, and directly underneath was a jumble of volcanic rock and coral, a perfect home for rats, and they abounded. Leave a cake of soap out and you got no sleep with their fighting and squealing, until it was gone. Once we were out on an overnight bivouac. Gunnery Sergeant Wiggins had a big handlebar moustache. Having no wax, he waxed it with Life Buoy soap. He was a sound sleeper. It was moonlight and the ground was crawling with rats. Someone noticed a rat eating the sergeant's moustache as he slept. He would snort and toss but the rat would come right back. It ate one whole side off while we clutched our sides in mirth. Someone finally drove it off.

The next morning old Wiggins fell his men in and no one could keep a straight face. He got irked. Finally someone told him about

the half-gone moustache.

He roared, "You bunch of lousy bastards! Lay around and let the livestock eat a man up!"

The chief's daughter read me a tappa cloth which said that a long time ago there were no rats on Samoa. One day a ship floated in, swarming with rats. The crew was all dead and nothing was left but skeletons.

Speaking of rats, whenever I happened by the Company M office, I always stopped to see Oscar, the white mouse I had procured in San Diego. Oscar had turned out not to be a mouse at all. He was a huge, fat, happy rat. He loved being fondled and was happiest when going through your pockets, searching for goodies. You couldn't hide gum or peanuts from him. Once I noticed they had a wire cage with all the envelopes in it. The clerk said it was necessary or Oscar would eat all the glue off them. The Samoan rats were deathly afraid of Oscar and stayed clear of the tent. Thus he earned his keep.

One time I stopped by to see Oscar and was told he was missing. This was strange as he seldom ventured outside the tent. Later I learned from a Samoan boy that a certain Samoan gentleman had Oscar for lunch.

Outside of rats, wildlife was scarce on Samoa, but one species was plentiful, the flying foxes. They are a huge bat, larger than a crow, and they hang upside down from the coconut tree fronds. Sometimes the entire underside of a tree would be black with them. As far as I know, they are harmless. I heard that on some of the islands people ate them. On a few islands, only the royalty were allowed to eat them.

One day I met an educated English lady who was living on Tutuila, married to a native, and the mother of three children. We became friends and conversed occasionally. I asked how she had come to live on Samoa. She replied that her scholastic achievements in England had won her a trip around the world. When she had docked at Pago Pago, she had known she would never leave. She looked and acted like a Samoan. And she was very happy.

Our stay at Vaitogi was interrupted too often to suit me. Speed Cauldwell had no intention of wasting the war as a defense unit commander. He started a training program that would produce a jungle combat unit the likes of which the world had never seen. He reduced the defense units to skeletons and rotated them so all hands got the training. When your turn came up, it was goodbye to Utopia and back to snooping and pooping through the jungle.

Operating with us was the Second Battalion of the Second Raider Regiment. The Raiders were a hell of a bunch of good marines, all carefully-screened volunteers. Raider units were floaters--they were attached to marine regiments as needed. On Samoa our Raiders usually played the enemy role during the intensive training. They constantly were popping out at us with knives and bayonets, especially when we were so beat that we couldn't drag one foot ahead of the other.

On one particularly tough week-long problem, we were on the homestretch when we ran into a hellacious Raider ambush. Here they came, some with knives in their mouths and bayonets ready. We had had enough. Some of us turned lethargically toward them and said things such as, "Aw, for christ's sake, get out of here, you silly sons of bitches!"

The last objective of this problem was to mush up Oletele mountain and overcome some defenses manned by the Raiders. We barely made it up the mountain, we were so pooped. As we approached the Raider foxholes, one of our lieutenants screamed, "Charge!"

There was a kid beside me from Philadelphi and he was a clown. He looked wearily at me and sarcastically moaned,

"'Charge,' he says." I got so weak from laughing I couldn't have charged if I'd tried.

Day after day we crept and crawled through mud, water, grass, and rocks, until we were beyond doubt the creepiest outfit ever created. Speed Cauldwell was always popping up at the training exercises. Woe to the marine who was crawling with his butt too high. Speed would take a run and a jump and plant both feet on it. Then you were in the right position. Speed had been shot through the buttocks in World War I and he wasn't going to let that happen to any of his boys.

We operated as fire teams, squads, platoons, companies, battalions, and finally as a regiment. After a session of this training, a group of N. C. O. s and officers were assigned to be attached to an Army division that was landing on Guadalcanal. Speed never missed a bet to give us training and experience. We boarded a ship and sailed out of Pago Pago Harbor, bound for a combat zone.

Guadalcanal was a landmark in the war. It was less than a year after Pearl Harbor, during which the Japanese Empire had thrown

a heck of a scare into us. In one century a backward feudal country had evolved into a modern military power who swept the orient from the traditional powers like a typhoon. They had occupied Thailand, Guam, Wake, Hong Kong, Borneo, the Bismarcks, Singapore, the Netherlands East Indies, the Solomons, Burma, the Phillipines, half of New Guinea, the Marshalls, Gilberts, Sullivans and more, all in eight months. They were threatening Port Moresby, the vital outpost in southeastern New Guinea that guarded the doorstep to Australia. From there they could build up garrisons in the Solomons and seize Samoa, Fiji and New Caledonia, to cut off the American-Australian supply and communication line.

Australia and New Zealand were the big bastion in the Allied Pacific defense and the last retreat. Half of their labor forces were in the service or war production. They furnished most of the food for American troops in the South Pacific, and their factories poured out military supplies. They were bracing for invasion.

Suddenly, we had stopped the Japanese momentum. In the Battle of the Coral Sea in May, 1942, our naval and air forces intercepted an invasion of Port Moresby and sent them back to Tokyo. A month later we destroyed their fleet invasion of Midway Island. Japan's loss of four carriers in that battle crippled their

future operations, and they say this was the turning point in the war.

Then the momentum was waiting to be seized. It was up to the U. S. Marines and Army to uproot the Japanese from the real estate. The problem was we really were in no position to mount much of an offensive against them. The Allies had agreed that Germany was the main threat. The plan was that the U. S. would contain Japan until Hitler and Mussolini were beaten, then all would attack Japan. America was pouring her resources into Europe. Any offensive in the Pacific in the summer of 1942 was going to be Operation Shoestring. That was Guadalcanal.

Rabaul, on New Britain Island, northeast of New Guinea, was the key Japanese military base that had to be knocked out, before we could secure Australia and advance up the long island-hopping road to Japan. With an excellent harbor and good airfields, Rabaul was perfectly situated for Japanese domination over New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, within easy range for bombers and armadas. So, the plans were made to reduce Rabaul with campaigns in New Guinea on the left flank and in the Solomons on the right. To put it simply, we were going to weaken Rabaul's protective outposts and then bomb the hell out of it.

The Solomons lie about 500 miles east of New Guinea. They are a north-south string of islands, stretching some 600 miles from Bougainville, the northernmost, to San Cristobal. Lined up in two chains, they form a channel that became known in the war as "The Slot." Japan had moved into the southern end of the Solomons in early May, seizing Tulagi, a tiny island in a harbor of Florida Island, one of the best harbors in the Pacific. Twenty miles across the channel, they began building an airfield at Lunga Point, on the north coast of Guadalcanal. Once these vital outpost were strengthened, Japan could launch attacks on New Caledonia, Samoa, and the Fijis and cut off the American-Australian suppy route.

Guadalcanal was our toehold in the Solomons. Being combat-ready veterans, the First Marine Division spearheaded our thrust up the islands by landing on Guadalcanal on August 7, 1942. Their objective was to seize and hold the airfield and Tulagi harbor across the channel. They met little resistance at the airstrip, but there were three days of brutal fighting on Tulagi and two other islands in the harbor. Paratroopers were accidentally dropped in the dark between a burning building and the Japanese defenders and they showed up like ducks. One of them was a guy I'd known on the J. Fred Talbott. He was killed.

Then came months of battering by the "Tokyo Express," a steady pipeline from Rabaul of transports, cruisers, destroyers,

fighters and bombers steaming down the Slot, hell-bent on recapturing Guadalcanal. It dragged on and on--horrible naval battles on dark nights at point-blank range, air battles in which as high as a hundred planes and pilots would be lost, almost daily naval and air bombardments of the airfield and the defense positions, waves of freshly-landed troops charging and screaming, "Maline, you die!" Starvation rations, torrential rains, the exhaustion and sickness of prolonged jungle warfare.

At stake was the Allied attempt to contain Japan. Lose Guadalcanal and the enemy was still advancing on the American-Australian lifeline. Win Guadalcanal and the Empire of Japan was at last advancing to the rear.

It was hanging in the balance like that when Speed Cauldwell sent his group of officers and N. C. O.'s over there for a little on-the-job training. Don't get the impression that we had this overall view of the war. We ground-pounders were mostly wrapped up in our immediate objectives.

I think we picked up the Army division in the Fijis. It was at night so I didn't see much of the Fijis. I was attached to a rifle platoon as an observer. The rest of our group were attached to

various units commensurate with their ranks. It was a very green outfit and had a lot of shaking down to do. There was no resistance to our landing on Guadalcanal, but things were unorganized to say the least. The first day in there was very little unloading of the ships. The men just horsed around shooting down coconuts to eat, and so on. That night we got a naval bombardment from the Japanese. The second day air raids forced the ships to leave. The third day brought the news that the Japanese had landed new troops up the coast and were headed our way. "Condition Black" it was called.

The platoon I was with was ordered to set up on a river. With the training I had behind me, the situation seemed like old stuff to me, while the lieutenant platoon leader was green as grass. After discussing the situation--I voiced a few opinions--we placed the B. A. R.'s (Browning Automatic Rifles) and two machine guns to criss-cross fire over some sandbars and shallow points in the river. Then we went to the adjacent platoons and did the same thing and tied in our flanks with cross fire. Then we crossed the river and cut fire lanes through the brushy jungle. A few hundred yards across the river, we set up some four-man outposts. These were to return to the lines at the first contact with the Japanese. Every rifleman had his sector to take care of, unless the situation demanded other action.

Nightfall came and we waited silently at our positions. I had the constant feeling of needing a bowel and kidney movement, which really wasn't the case. This was it. War.

Suddenly, the outposts across the river opened fire. We heard the Japanese shouting, "Banzai!" and "Marine, you die!" A while later, the outposts made it back over the water to our lines. Here came the Japanese. Many of them charged right down the fire lanes we had cut and they were mowed down. When others reached the river, they chose the sandbars and shallow places to make their dashes for our lines. Our cross-fire piled them in that river. With all the noise, excitement, and danger, I felt a sense of exhilaration, kind of like going into a rough ball game. After the first dreaded bodily contact, it didn't seem so bad and maybe even was perversely enjoyed.

Then, just like that, it was over. First Division marines mopped up the disorganized Japanese from the area. Speed's rookie platoon leaders had had our baptism of fire.

We were shipped on a cruiser back to Samoa. By this time the men of the Third Marines never talked about things that young men talk about. We talked combat. Everyone's ambition was to get his knife into a "Jap." As for the harsh training, we relished it.

Speed had one course set up on Samoa that was a dilly. The first step was a three-day water discipline problem, three tough days in the jungle with one canteen of water, and no more. It was a continual thing, with very little rest, and groups of men dressed as Japanese jumping out at you at every whipstitch, especially at the rest stops. After three days in the blistering tropical sun, you can't imagine the thirst.

The end of the course was a simulated last-ditch battle. You crawled for 100 yards under barbed wire, with M. G.'s firing tracers right above you, T. N. T. exploding in holes beside you. Keep in mind our condition after three grueling days without water. Loud-speakers were blaring all the sounds of battle, like the wounded calling for corpsmen, curses, and Japanese screaming, "Banzai!"

After it was all over and we lay exhausted on the ground, a guy lifted his bullhorn and said, "Gentlemen, we know you've had a hard week and you've done well. Now, as a reward we'll play you some sweet music." And they played the Sons of the Pioneers, singing "Cool Water." By that time we could have torn a Japanese Imperial marine to shreds, and also that S. O. B. with the bullhorn.

Everywhere was the process of brainwashing to make you hate the Japanese. There was a record played of a Japanese rape

of American nurses, torture of American prisoners, etc. Everywhere were signs designed to whip you up, like the one I remember seeing later on Guadalcanal--"Along this road on (a certain date during the Battle of Guadalcanal) members of (such and such infantry outfit) the Queen of Battle, were carrying seventy-five wounded soldiers on stretchers. The Japs overwhelmed them and bayoneted all the wounded. Kill the bastards!"

One officer who instructed us in the art of killing a man with every weapon from an axe to a match box always used the same ending, when it came to the point where you had bested your enemy. He would say, "Now you have him thinking of home and mother." Pretty soon he had us feeling guilty to think of home and mother.

It's easy to see why marines are noted for their esprit de corps. In most outfits I was ever in, we had periodic lectures on the heroics of marines in years gone by. They always seemed to be conducted by an officer or N. C. O. whose appearance, bearing and ability one could not help but admire.

On Samoa it was conducted by Major Sidney McMath. Oh, how he could make you realize what superior stock you had come from and what a tradition you had to uphold. I believe if, after one of his talks, he had said, "I need one man to die for the good of the Corps," the

whole audience would have volunteered. Once he said to me, "Sergeant, you are a good marine." I felt there was no higher compliment to pay a man.

Our intensive training was interrupted once more by a trip to Funafuti in the Ellice Islands. Funafuti was practically unoccupied, but I guess we thought we'd take it before the Japanese did. We rushed into the deal without much planning. Every outfit was asked to contribute troops, and there were formed what were called the "X, Y, and Z Companies." It was suspected that all units contributed only their eight balls.

While the ship was loading, I received notice that my whole 50 cal. platoon was going as an anti-aircraft defense. This soon changed and I was given a strange, makeshift platoon that didn't know a 50 cal. from a sewer pipe.

We sailed away. What a snafu it was. There were only seventeen Japanese on the island, as far as I know, and most of them were Korean workers, or something, and were only to happy to surrender. We had far too many casualties from unloading accidents.

There was no fresh water on the island and we were rationed to one canteen per man per day from Navy evaporators. To top it

off, the Japanese bombed us at will and we had no defense against it. I was more than happy when I was relieved after about two weeks. Jungle training on Samoa looked damn good after Funafuti.

Shortly after resuming training, I was assigned to take twelve men and man a lookout station at a place called Steps Point. It was a narrow finger of land that stuck out into the ocean, separated from the mainland by a saltwater swamp that was virtually impassable on foot. This made it a tropical paradise of another color. No one ever came to inspect us except by boat. We seldom had a visitor except the chow boat. We may as well have been thirteen men on a desert island. "Just perfect," we said. The only drawback was it had a reputation for being haunted. The Samoans called it Iitu Valley (Ghost Valley). They wouldn't come near the place, except for a brave few who would come about noon and vanish when the sun began to sink. We soon were to find out why.

There was an old lighthouse on the farthest tip of the point. Here we stood watch for enemy subs, aircraft, and ships. It was our duty to warn the mainland in the event of an attack. Our sole connection with the island was a fragile field telephone wire strung through the swamp to the main base. We mounted a 50 cal. on either side of camp on two

hills. I stretched a field telephone wire to these guns and through the jungle out to the lighthouse. On a night alert we could follow the wire and run full tilt through the brush to our stations. If the Japanese were to land, we would have been cut off from the island. Thus, we considered ourselves expendible.

From the lighthouse you could see the Vaitogi outriggers in the water up the coast. Some of the men missed their girlfriends. Wouldn't you know they found a relatively dry route through the swamp and marked it with field telephone wire and white rags? I let one man go at a time and stood his watch myself. We never divulged this route to anyone. It's no use to try to keep boys from girls and vice versa. "If all the girls lived over the sea, what good swimmers the boys would be."

We lived on top of a hill, well camouflaged from the air by coconut trees. There were steps of flattened coconut logs leading up both sides of the hill to camp. About midnight one night, there was a tromp, tromp, tromp, exactly like someone running up the hill on the steps. We burst from our tents, rifles and bayonets ready, but found nothing. We went uneasily back to bed. At four a.m. tromp, tromp, tromp went the noise down the other side of the hill. Out of the tents we came and, again, nothing. The next night we mounted guard on the steps. Nothing happened. The following night we withdrew

the guard and it was "tromp, tromp, tromp" again at the same times. After this routine was repeated several nights, we learned to ignore it, but we never could explain it, and our superiors wouldn't believe it.

About a week after we arrived at Steps Point, we had finished the evening meal and all of us were out at the lighthouse at dusk. We had a guitarist in the group and we were singing along. Suddenly, out of the jungle behind us came sweet symphony music, clear as a bell. We looked at each other in amazement, and there wasn't a man among us that was not scared piss limber. We reported this to H.Q. and were ridiculed.

In a couple of weeks we had some visitors in camp, some scientists who were in the area researching the magnetic depth charge, testing water temperatures, etc. They had heard of the music bit. I prayed the incident would be repeated while they were there and it was! They concluded that it was a rock and coral formation in the jungle that sometimes received radio waves.

The boys were pretty edgy. We put three bunks out in the lighthouse, so the whole night's guard wouldn't have to traverse the jungle trails by themselves in the dark. Just a precaution, you know, against Japanese, not ghosts. None of us were scared, not us.

Next we began missing chow from the chow tent. We mounted guard. It still came up missing, just a can now and then. We suspected Japanese in the jungle and every other explanation. The guard never saw or heard a thing. We procured several spools of thread and wrapped it around and around the tent. Not a thread was broken and a can of peaches was missing. I finally said to hell with it and we never found an explanation.

As often happens, our nerves turned the commonplace into the unusual. One guy reported that someone was whistling at him from the jungle as he went up a hill to clean the 50 cal. He said it was the kind of whistle you use to hail a taxi. I caught the little varmit in the act. It was a tiny bird no bigger than a sparrow.

I always had trouble getting the men to pick up coconuts in camp and dispose of them. Coconut crabs (some call them "land crabs") were a nuisance on all the islands. They were ugly damn things but were relatively harmless if left alone. They climbed the trees, clipped off coconuts and then bored holes in them and ate the meat. Then flies and mosquitoes bred in them.

One fine morning the lookout spotted a tornado wending its way toward us and sounded the alert. We watched until we could hear it roar and then beat it for our covered foxholes. She hit

pretty close to us and the wind was fierce. The coconuts flew through the air like buckshot, many coming to rest in the open end of our foxholes. We had to crawl over coconuts to get out. From that day on, when a coconut hit the ground, it was pounced upon and flung into the ocean. The twister struck the island in several places, clearing the ground of vegetation over wide areas. This delighted the natives, for it provided areas for their gardens.

We spent a lot of time improving our living conditions and fortifications. Our water supply was a beautiful spring that burst from a hill and flowed across a big, flat expanse of soft rock to the ocean. We picked a huge, square hole in the rock along the water's course and dug a narrow trench far enough through the rock to be lower at its exit than the bottom of the hole. We laid tin cans, with both ends cut out, in the trench and covered all with cement scrounged from the Seabees. Presto, we had a bathtub. Put the plug in the drain, fill the tub, divert the stream past the tub, let it sit all day in the tropical sun, and one man per day had a hot bath. We shot dice for this and the losers had a cold bath.

We found one little drawback with the bath. The eels had visited the spring to spawn long before we had arrived. The tub was an added bonus to them. The first guy that sank blissfully into the tub and felt six or seven slimy eels slide under his butt came out

of that water like a missle from a sub. Thereafter we dipped them out with a net before bathing.

The lighthouse, used before the war, had a propane gaslight. There was quite a bit of copper tubing in there. One of my men had been a North Carolina bootlegger in civilian life. He said he could make a still if he had a cooker. I made a trip to the mainland and talked with a Seabee. The next day they came out in a boat. The moonshiner drew up the plans. The next week they came back with a stainless steel cooker, stainless steel pipes and the whole shebang, plus sugar and cornmeal. This was the beginning of a life of luxury. That still was a real producer. The Seabees furnished us with a twenty-one-foot kerosene refregerator, made us an ingenious wood-burning hot water system for the tub, brought us steak, eggs and all sorts of goodies, and cornmeal and sugar for the still, all in return for whiskey. We could've made a fortune, but I wouldn't let a drop be sold. Whiskey was as much as $100 a quart.

We had the best cook in the Marine Corps in our group. He was a former chef in a Louisville, Kentucky, hotel. The Seabees made us a lovely dutch oven, and the baked goods that guy turned out make my mouth water yet. He cooked on one condition. No one was to let the word out, as he wanted no part of cooking in the regular kitchen corps.

The rats were especially thick at Steps Point. Shooting them made no dent in their numbers. We had no poison. One guy pulverized some glass into powder with a ball-peen hammer and sprinkled it on some fish. It worked, so we would catch the fish, sprinkle on the glass powder, and the rats would swarm over it. They would eat a while, suddenly sit up with a quizzical look on their faces and sprint for their burrows and die. We thought we had them conquered. In about two days the camp stunk so bad we had to move to the lighthouse until it subsided. From then on it was live and let live with the rats.

About a mile and a half from us, separated from Steps Point by an ass-deep swamp, was a place called Eel Bay. There were thirty or forty men there, commanded by a second lieutenant. They had a nice landing beach and a good land route into the island. It was a perfect spot for an invasion by the Japanese.

One night at about eleven o'clock we heard heavy firing over there. We had a field telephone connected to them and we called. The guy that answered said they were being invaded. I told him we'd be over to help and that we'd come through the swamp, following the field telephone wire.

We mushed through the swamp, holding our weapons above our heads with one hand and the telephone wire with the other. There

were nine of us--I left four men at Steps Point. As we approached the camp I hollered, "Hey, in camp!" We got a burst of automatic c weapons fire that spattered all around us. I hollered, "Knock it off, you stupid sl.it-kickers--we're from Steps Point!" I guess they figured no Japanese could cuss like that and we went on in.

The camp was in a complete state of hysteria. One kid had a bullet through the throat, his trachea punctured. The corpsman, who had been an osteopathic surgeon in civilian life, had inserted a tube in his wind pipe and had cut the end out of a fountain pen case and was holding it in place in the pipe with his fingers. The kid later was taken to the field hospital on a stretcher, with the corpsman walking along holding the pen case. He recovered but had no voice.

These guys said there were small boats landing on the far end of the beach. After we got them quieted down, I took my men and circled around through the jungle and approached the beach, with not a shot being fired. When we got to the beach it was littered with dozens of oil barrels, floating in from some sunken ship. There wasn't a single Japanese and never had been. Things like this teach you not to pull the trigger until you're sure of what you're shooting at. When the brass arrived from H. Q., there was a lot of ass-chewing in Eel Bay that night.

One fine Sunday morning the Seabees boat brought out several cases of beer to trade for whiskey. By mid-afternoon much beer had gone down the hatch. We had an old hand-cranked claxton out at the lighthouse that we used for air raids and submarine alerts, and in the midst of the festivities it started making its horrible racket.

I screamed, "Get to the 50's, you drunken bastards!" and took off for my own gun. As I scanned the horizon I couldn't believe my eyes. There must have been forty big four-motored bombers coming right for me, low over the water. None of us had ever seen planes like these and we had no advance warning. I decided to wait and identify them 100 percent before opening up with the 50 caliber. I breathed a sigh of relief when the U. S. emblem showed up. Then I held my breath, waiting for the other gun to open up. It never did because those souses never made it up the hill in time.

We found out on the field telephone that they were B-24 bombers, the first to be sent to the Pacific. Those boys will never know how close they came to getting a dose of 50 caliber bullets. We couldn't have missed. I immediately laid down the law on booze. Fifty percent of the command would remain sober at all times.

Samoa was fraught with natural wonders and beauty, and Steps Point was no exception. On one side of our camp was a narrow cut that the tide and breakers had carved in the rock, which was softer than that on each side. The waves had ground and pounded until they had reached a sheer cliff and had undermined the cliff. Then the water had rushed in and pounded a hole through the ceiling of the undermined cave, and when the water was rough, it would shoot up through the hole, which was about a hundred yards back in the jungle on top of the cliff. We called it a blow hole. We dumped our garbage down it when the water was calm. Thousands of fish would come in after the garbage.

On the other side of camp was a beautiful, sand-bottomed lagoon, about three to six feet deep, with a very narrow inlet to the sea. We piled lava boulders across the inlet to keep out the sharks, and we had a marvelous five-acre swimming pool. Boulders stuck up all over it for diving.

One day I was swimming in the lagoon and I heard quite a lot of firing in camp. I beat it up there and, lo and behold, a giant blackfish whale was stuck in our inlet. He had come in after the fish that had been after our garbage. What in hell prompted my men to shoot him I'll never know. I lit in to them but good. "You bunch of brainless shitheads. If that fish dies there we'll have to move camp. You

better pray that he lives, or you'll eat every damn scrap including the asshole!"

Well, the tide came in and the whale backed out and seemed all right. I hope he lived. I suppose if an angel were to fly over, some "sportsman" would take a shot at it.

One day the sentry shouted from the lighthouse, "Small boat comin'--look alive!" We turned to and spruced up the camp like a lady who had just heard the preacher would visit. It was our first inspection party, or so I thought, Colonel "Radio" Smith, who had been in the detail on Guadalcanal with me, and a captain named Bronson Packard. Colonel Smith was a portly old gentleman of impeccable taste and a very uncommon man. Captain Packard was a self-made former enlisted man, with limited formal education, but one would think from his manners and speech that he was a graduate from the finest English academies.

They were impressed as could be with the camp, but inspection wasn't their mission. Captain Packard took me aside and said, "I say, old boy, how would you like to become an officer?"

I thought he was kidding and replied, "I wouldn't, but I sure would like to make staff sergeant, so someday I can make warrant officer."

"I'm not joking," he said. "Colonel Smith thinks you're officer material and I advise you to try it or put in for a transfer."

Put in for a transfer from Samoa? "I'll try it," I said.

Again I was jerked out of a tropical paradise and thrown into intensive training. But at least I didn't have to leave Tutuila. I was ordered to the Second Marine Brigade School in Mormon Valley. As was my habit, I reported several hours early. I came to a camp of six-man tents set on wooden decks.

There was one other marine student in camp when I arrived, Staff Sergeant Ralph E. Bristow. He was the most perfect physical specimen I have ever seen. He could have made the cover of any magazine for any subject, yet was a rather shy, retiring sort. He had been on Samoa before we arrived and was in charge of a company of Samoan marines.

Bristow and I hit it off right away and conducted a tour of the tents to pick the best one. They all seemed to have big holes in them. Finally he found one without the holes. The other students arrived and moved into the remaining tents. That night it rained in torrents and I've never since respected Bristow's judgment of canvas. That damn tent had a million pinholes in it and we got soaked. The guys

in all the other tents simply moved out from under the big holes and stayed dry. Bristow and I may as well been without a roof. We moved the next day and in a few days we all were moved into very comfortable plywood fales.

The school was one of my life's greatest experiences. There were sixty-six N. C. O.'s trying for a commission and a bevy of lieutenants and N. C. O.'s there just for the schooling. It was twenty-six of the toughest weeks of my life. They wasted no time in going to work on us. The instructors were the best I've ever seen, before or since. Not a minute was wasted, day or night. After a grueling day it was an all night compass march, almost every night. Sleep was a dirty word. The best you could get was the "Happy Hour," where you worked until midnight or after on camp maintenance.

A primary objective was to teach us how to teach, the art of disseminating information in the most proficient, orderly and punctual manner. This was accomplished under Colonel Victor Bleasdale, known behind his back as "the Great Grey Eagle" because of his looks, mannerisms, hair and spirit. He was the most "no nonsense" man I've ever met. I wish he were in charge of all public education right now. I'd bet my bottom dollar that Johnny could read.

The main objective was to turn us into jungle animals. The Marine Corps was developing superior jungle tactics, based on lessons learned from Guadalcanal, which we would then teach our men. For twenty-six weeks, we saw no artificial lights, not even a match at night, ate special diets, and underwent all sorts of experiments to make us see in the dark. Get sick for any length of time and you were out. Get injured and you were out. Get smart or cocky and you were out. Several guys went these routes.

Like in all situations, we had our clown to break the tension and make life more bearable. He was First Lieutenant Fred Finucane, "Fearless Freddie." He was a tall, gangly redhead with a perpetual mischievous grin. He could imitate anyone in the world and was a flawless, fluent orator. One of his favorite routines was mimicking President Roosevelt. If you couldn't have seen Freddie, you would've sworn it was F.D.R. himself. I can still hear his F.D.R. speech to the Ladies Club of Aurora, Illinois. "Ladies," he would conclude, "these marines have really put out and they expect you to really put out."

And then there was, "Eleanah doesn't like wah. I don't like wah. I wonder why in hell we're at wah." Or, "I will nevah send these boys

to take island after island. I will send them to one island and leave them theah."

Fearless Freddie had one misfortune at the school. One of the fearful Samoan centipedes bit him on the penis. He jumped out of bed and ran down to the showers. Bristow and I were showering. It was swollen to the bursting point. He was rushed to the hospital where they circumcised him. It really wasn't funny but you can imagine the ribbing he took, and it would provide a big laugh much later.

Bristow, a sergeant named Jordan and I were once sent on a night compass march. We were supposed to reach our objective at about three a.m., which was a sheer cliff overlooking an artillery impact area. We were to be in position at dawn to spot and adjust the artillery fire on a simulated enemy target.

The night was black as coal and we placed pieces of phosphorous on our packs to follow the lead man through the jungle. It was Jordan's turn to lead with the compass as we approached our objective. All of a sudden Jordan said, "Stop, for christ's sake, stop! My rifle won't touch anything when I jam it on the ground."

Bristow said, "Drop something and listen for it to hit." Jordan found a stick and dropped it.

"Lord," he said, "it sounds like it dropped fifty feet."

I said, "Well, we must be at our objective. Let's get a couple of hours sleep right where we are."

When daylight came, there sat Jordan on a huge tree that protruded out over the cliff and was covered with limbs and brush. Bristow and I were about twenty feet from the sheer drop off. We passed the word back at the school to beware of Jordan on night patrols, that he climbs trees.

On a combat problem Bristow and I were assigned to take twelve men and blow a roadblock to stop a tank attack. We drew six cases of T. N. T. and six cases of dynamite. We buried it in the road and lit the fuse. We ran for cover as far into the jungle as we thought safe. I have never seen such an explosion. Rocks plummeted all around us. Fortunately, no one was hurt. The instructor came roaring up in a jeep.

"Hell, men, I told you to blow a roadblock, not the whole goddamned island!"

Bristow looked at me and said, "He didn't say how big a roadblock, did he?"

On one problem the instructors took us out on Steps Point, where we built bunkers and dug foxholes to defend the place against a simulated attack by the Raiders. Early on in Samoa, I had formed the habit of looking at a piece of terrain and saying to myself, "How would I defend this and how would I attack it?" I'd had plenty of time to do that on Steps Point. I told an instructor I knew a perfect place for an ambush and he said to set it up.

I took some men and a light machine gun to the spot, which was a depression in the ground with a bush growing out of it. Vines had covered the bush, so it was like a little hut inside. No other cover existed along the trail for some distance. I entered the hole and pulled the vines together, setting up the machine gun. The other men positioned themselves the best they could.

A platoon of raiders came snooping down the trail. When we opened up with blank shells, they went after the other men in the ambush. I sat in my hut and theoretically killed every damn raider in that platoon. Some of them were close enough to get hit with the wadding of the blank shells from my machine gun. They never did locate me. Finally, I came out and gave them a good laugh.

"Ah," one of them said, "we just wanted to make you feel good."

All of our instructors were super and pretty good Joes except one we called, "Tiny." He was a huge captain and, although a good instructor, he had some unlikable quirks. Behind his back we called him "Lister Bag," after the big bags of drinking water that hung in every camp. He was conducting "unarmed combat" one morning after a heavy rain. The slop was about four inches deep. He would charge a man and you were supposed to grab him, roll him over your hip and slam him down. His huge bulk was impossible and everyone was flattened in the mud. He enjoyed it visibly.

Bristow's turn came. Tiny made his charge. Bristow siezed him easily, turned him ass over appetite and sailed him through that slop like a coast guard cutter. On hands and knees, dripping mud, Tiny bleated, "Now-that's-the-way-to-do-it! Dismissed!" Since Tiny would be on the final interview board, we all feared for Bristow's future.

One night near the end of school, there was a rare night class in the screened-in mess hall with the lights on. During a break Fearless Freddie was conducting a lecture, imitating Colonel Bleasdale. He had us rolling in the aisles. I was among those gathered outside, listening through the screen. Someone bumped me from behind and I turned around. There stood the Great Grey

Eagle himself. "My god, we're in for it," I thought.

The Eagle gaped and said, "By god, if I wasn't sure I'm out here, I'd think I was in there!"

Life ground on and finally my first twenty-two weeks in Brigade School had passed and it was time for graduation. After the final examinations the interview board assembled, consisting of Colonel Bleasdale, Major McMath and Captain Tiny. I was warned not to go before a board with Colonel Bleasdale on it and say I knew something when I didn't. This warning came from a good friend on the board.

All the students went before the board. I heeded the warning on the last two questions.

"Sergeant, what do you know about the Sykes compensator on a shotgun?" Colonel Bleasdale asked.

"I'm not at all familiar with that, sir."

"How long is the Panama Canal?"

"I'm not at all sure, sir, but I heard it was fifty-four miles."

"That's all, sergeant."

God, did I goof? Did I pass? Yes, I did. I was discharged from the Marine Corps for fifteen seconds and sworn in again as Second Lieutenant R. A. Marbaugh, serial no. 020237.

Sure enough, when it came time for Bristow's interview, Tiny argued every point against him, even going so far as to say he didn't look like an officer. Bleasdale and McMath took a look at Tiny's misshapened body, gave him the horse laugh, and Bristow was in. A better decision was never made.

Out of sixty-six officer candidates six of us got a commission. One of these was a confirmed alcoholic. He carried very little in his pack except beer, Aqua Velva or anything with alcohol in it. We covered for him all through the school, because he was such a good marine when sober, and we hoped he would straighten out. He got drunk, reported to his new post, saluted his colonel and fell flat on his ass. He was busted.

Bristow and I were immediately assigned to four more weeks in the same school in weapons platoon class. Could we take four more weeks of this? They were very benevolent and gave us two whole days off, the first free time since starting the school.

He and I loaded our packs with T. N. T., telephone wire, blasting caps, flashlight batteries and a spear I had made out of a 50 cal. cleaning rod and a rake handle. We trudged across the mountains to a village called Fagasa, on Fagasa Bay on the north coast, where he had quartered his Samoan marines. He wanted to go fishing.

As we approached the village, the natives all came pouring out, shouting, "Mista Bristow! Mista Bristow!" The king had returned.

Ralph said to them, "I want two men to go fishing with us." I thought they were going to fight to determine who was going, but they settled on two well-built lads. Bristow asked, "Where's my outrigger?" The Samoans all looked ashamed and one volunteered to tell him it had been appropriated by the village bully.

They went with us to the beach, where the bully stood defiantly in front of the boat with his arms folded. He was a big muscular fellow. Bristow said, "I want my boat."

"No, boat mine."

"I'm taking that boat."

"We fight for boat. Any way wanted."

They went at it. Two karate chops later, the bully was on the ground shaking his head and rubbing his neck. Someone sloshed him with water. He got up and said, "We wrestle for boat. No holds barred."

Bristow said, "Okay," and they went at it again. Ralph threw a headlock on him, placed his hand on his shoulder, twisted and dropped him on the ground, unconscious. Someone watered him again. He sat up and said, "You best man. You take boat." We went fishing.

We would hook the T. N. T. and blasting caps to the telephone wires, drop it over the side, touch the wires to the flashlight batteries and ker-whoom! Supper on the table. The fish were on the surface, on the bottom and everywhere. Bristow would dive deeper and longer than anyone I've ever seen. He could out-Samoa any Samoan. He'd go down, bring up a load of fish, bite them in the head and throw them in the boat. I was amazed to see a white man do this. The two Samoans deftly bit out the eyes and swallowed them.

I stayed out of the water. I couldn't stand to dive because of my busted eardrum, but mainly because I saw several sizeable sharks glide by. Bristow assured me they were after the fish and not us, but I was deathly afraid of sharks and was taking no chances.

While Bristow was some distance from the boat, his pith helmet, to which he had his wrist watch attached, blew over the side and sank. He yelled, "Get that hat!"

I hollered, "I told you I can't dive and I'm not getting in the water with those damn sharks!"

Bristow upended and went down after the helmet. He was gone for minutes. I don't know how deep he went but when he surfaced he had the hat and was bleeding at the nose and ears. He recovered his breath and then said, "You son of a bitch, I'm going to leave you here."

I picked up the aluminum paddle and said, "Buddy, you'll have to come over here to do it." He simmered right down. I greatly fear that if he'd wanted to leave me there he could have done it. Sometimes a good bluff works. That was the last time he and I even frowned at each other.

We had a tremendous load of fish but he still wanted to do some spearfishing. One of the Samoans surfaced when we got closer to the beach and excitedly told Bristow he had located a huge octopus. Bristow twisted the telephone wire around the spear handle and went after him. He sank the spear and the old boy went between two rocks

and bent the spear double around his body. The four of us slowly worked him toward the beach. I got so excited I even got in the water and helped. On the beach we had plenty of help and horsed him out on the sand. That night the village had a gala feast with all sorts of entertainment and it continued to the wee hours.

Then it was back over the mountains to Mormon Valley and four more weeks of labor. I've been on many a fishing trip but none would ever compare to that one.

The next four weeks were somewhat better than before, mainly, I suppose, because we weren't under pressure to make the grade. We learned the 60mm mortar and the 30 caliber light machine gun from stem to stern, along with tactics, leadership and all the things it takes to be a weapons platoon leader. I've never been so confident of being able to do a job as I was when I got out of Brigade School.

The school was gaining a reputation and making an impression on the Pacific brass. I don't think we fully realized what the school had done to us until a detachment of officers and N.C.O.'s were sent down from Hawaii to run some combat problems with us. We were the enemy and they were on defense. The object was that if you got the other fellow's hat he was dead. We could walk right up

to those dudes, lift their hats, and they would be flailing around in the dark and going crazy.

We realized then that we actually could see in the dark.