CHAPTER TWELVE

THE BATTLE OF BOUGAINVILLE

The trip to Boogie was spent sharpening knives and bayonets, cleaning and oiling weapons, writing home and briefing every last private on the plans and operation. Our mission was to seize an eight-mile perimeter and hold it while the Seabees built a vital airfield, for raids on Rabaul. We were invading the Cape Torokina area of Emperess Augusta Bay, which lies about midway down the southwestern coast of Bougainville. The Japanese had 40,000 men stationed at bases and outposts around the island, and airfields at both ends of the island. These would be neutralized from the air and sea.

The landing zone ran from the Koromokina River, on the left flank, southeast to Cape Torokina, a stretch of four or five miles. They divided the zone into twelve sectors, and our battalion was landing near the center, a ways east of the Koromokina. The spot had been selected because the enemy would never expect a landing there, so bad were the conditions. We didn't know how many Japanese were in the area. We were told to hit the beach and be

ready to deploy in any direction.

The night before we landed I was issued four grenades per man. We already had our other ammo. I went down to our compartment to get some help to carry them and no one was there. I went topside and there they were, kneeling on the deck with a chaplain, holding services. An old sergeant of mine, a rough old cob, looked up at me and, knowing some of his personal history, I impulsively said, "Little late for that, isn't it, Sarge?"

The chaplain was a man we called "The Pimping Parson" because of his habit of arranging dates for the boys. He blew up and snapped, "Lieutenant, you go below!"

Again on an impulse I said, "You go to hell. I have to issue grenades."

He said, "Amen," and lit out for the bridge, where he put me on report.

Oh boy, in trouble again. Colonel King summoned me to his cabin. "Marborough, you dumb ass," he said, "what made you do a thing like that?"

"I really don't know, sir. I guess it just happened."

"You know you'll probably be in for a court martial?"

"Yes sir," I said. He dismissed me and I heard no more of this unwise incident.

Dawn came, November 1, 1943, and with it a sight that, if you haven't seen it, cannot be fully imagined. The ocean off the coast of Empress Augusta Bay was filled with warships, transports and every other type of craft possessed by the Navy. When they opened up on that beach, it was as if the whole island was being churned and beaten by a giant egg beater. We poured on fifty-four minutes of concentrated fire, which up to that time was the heaviest in history. Then came the dive bombers and strafers. They raked the landing zone until it seemed a flea couldn't have survived.

Over the side and down the cargo nets, as we had rehearsed so many times before. Getting into those landing boats takes skill. You are loaded down with heavy gear, you go down twenty-five to forty feet of rope net, and your boat is popping up and down, maybe fifteen to thirty feet, according to the swells. You must time it right or you'll let go when the boat is far below you. This is hell on the faller and the fallee, the guy below you already in the boat. The gear must be worn a prescribed way, or the guys in the boat get a rifle or a steel helmet on their heads.

Once in the boats you head for a rendevous area, where your particular assault wave goes in a circle, awaiting orders to hit the beach. The firing and bombing kept up until the first wave was almost in, then was lifted to positions farther off the beach. You can't imagine the planning and split-second timing it takes to make an operation like this.

I was to land in the third wave with my weapons platoon in support of the rest of the company, the riflemen. On the way in, we passed a coral island that stuck up like a castle out of the bay. It was called Puruata Island. The Japanese must have had this place hollowed out like a honeycomb, for they were a regular hornets' nest. Every time our boat rolled toward them and exposed us, they let loose with machine guns. The bullets spattered, snapped and whined off our bulkheads. Luckily we had no casualties from this except maybe some wet drawers.

Our boat crunched into the sand, the ramp went down, and we poured out without even wetting our feet. We all made it across the sand to the edge of the chopped up jungle. We hit the deck there and, the strange thing was, no one was around. We could hear a steady roar of small arms fire, grenades and satchel charges on both sides of us. I took two men and, leaving Wiggins in charge of the platoon,

pushed inland to see if we could link up with the company.

Up until the time we went to New Zealand I had carried a Reising .45. I liked it. I had reblued it and knew it like the back of my hand. It was a perfect jungle weapon. In New Zealand I had been issued a 30 caliber carbine over my protests. I didn't like it. For one thing the magazine release and the safety were side by side.

We came to some demolished shacks and a lone Japanese popped up with a land mine in his hand. (I think it was a land mine as it looked like some I saw later but it may have been a grenade). I released the safety on my carbine and snapped off a round at that guy and missed him a yard. I squeezed the trigger again and nothing happened. I had released the magazine along with the safety. One of my companions dispatched the Japanese, but not until he had thrown the land mine. It exploded harmlessly in the mud and debris.

About that time four men, a fire team, came out of the jungle from our right. They were from L Company and had been sent out to contact us and guide us to the company. They reported that the company had made it off the beach, but was pinned down in the jungle and Kovacs needed my mortars and machines guns badly.

I later found out my wave had landed where we were supposed to, but the rest of the company had landed on the wrong beach. I had assaulted the beach with 60mm mortars and machine guns! No one had landed on this beach before us. Luckily there had been no defenses left. I took a lot of kidding about assaulting a beach with mortars and machine guns.

Kovacs' fire team led my platoon through the jungle a couple of hundred yards and we made the link up. There were some Japanese in "spider holes" (a hole in the ground with a lid on it) and some snipers in the trees. A few of them had been spotted and Kovacs had me lay down some mortar fire on those areas and give the jungle a good machine gun raking before he sent the riflemen in after them. Kovacs took every precaution to avoid losing a man. Most of the Japanese fled into the jungle when we fired on them. However, we didn't find many of them who were concealed and we unknowingly passed right on by them.

We linked up with our battalion units on both sides and shoved inland, mopping up battered Japanese as we went. My platoon fired mortar missions for the units on both flanks. We had no trouble keeping busy that day. We soon found we were in a swamp that ranged from knee to hip deep. This we would be in for weeks.

There had been no real heavy organized resistance where Company L had landed. Those Japanese had been manning outposts. As far as I know, we had a few minor wounds the first day in and no one killed.

But it was a different story for the First Battalion of the Third Marines a couple miles down the beach at Cape Torokina. They were met by several hundred Japanese holed up in a network of sand and log bunkers and rifle trenches. One pillbox held a big 75mm mountain gun that hit something like ten landing boats as they came ashore, butchering the men. Sergeant Robert Owens placed four of his men in positions to draw fire from the adjacent defenses, and then he charged that bunker, scrambled up through the port and chased the Japanese crew out the back door, where they were gunned down. Owens was shot up badly as he made the charge and shortly thereafter he died.

Japanese fighters dove from the sky and strafed the beach and a dozen Val bombers attacked the transports, forcing them to withdraw. That interrupted unloading and forced a tough decision, whether to continue under the threat of using up the available ammo or wait for the resumption of supplies. The wounded battalion C. O., Major Leonard Mason, made an instant decision--"Get the hell in

there and fight!" The First Battalion steadily advanced on the pillboxes and wiped them out, in brutal hand-to-hand combat. There were about 300 dead Japanese counted afterwards. They say Torokina was the bloodiest beach of the Solomons Campaign.

In the meantime, a company of the Second Raider Regiment performed a special mission, hustling 1,500 yards along the Buretoni Mission Trail, which ran northeast from the cape area to the Piva Trail, a path along the Piva River, which emptied into the bay a mile or so east of the cape. They established a roadblock up there, because this was the most likely avenue for a Japanese counterattack on our beachhead. Japanese troops, massed at Kieta and Numa Numa on the other side of the island, could march across the Crown Prince Mountains on the East-West Trail and the Numa Numa Trail. These trails intersected the Piva Trail north of our beachhead. Also, their troops garrisoned only fifteen miles southeast of Cape Torokina could reach the Piva through a network of trails that were shielded from air observation by dense jungle overgrowth. About 1,500 yards north of the Second Raider roadblock was a small Melanesian village, Piva, and another 1,000 yards north was the all-important junction of the Numa Numa and East-West trails.

Out in the bay, a company of the Third Raider Battalion landed on Puruata Island and swiftly knocked out the emplacements that had machine-gunned everybody during the landing operation. However, the defenses were scattered across the island and on Torokina Island next to it, and the Raiders fought into the next day before clearing out the last of them.

The first night was miserable, as all nights would be on Boogie. We were exhausted. We'd risen at two a.m., landed, and fought and sloshed our way several hundred yards inland. The insects were terrible and dig a four-inch hole and you had four inches of water. But we set up the defenses and dug in the best we could.

I shared a soggy foxhole with Wiggins. He still had his big handlebar moustache. I'd warned him several times to get rid of it, as it would be hard to care for in combat. He would always say, "Ram, I'm shaving this son of a bitch off when they send me home."

We had no time to eat, but I mixed up a canteen cup of lemon powder drink, laced it with sugar, and Wiggins and I shared it in the rain. I took the first watch after dark. You could hear some Japanese, whom we'd by-passed, trying to sneak through our lines. Wiggins tried to sleep but he would snort, snuff and sneeze. I shook him and whispered, "Sarge, you've got to be quiet. The

damn Japs are crawling around out there and I want to hear. You're driving me nuts."

"Lieutenant, if I live till morning, I'm shaving this damn moustache off." He said it itched, tickled and felt like it was going up his nose.

No one slept that night. We had just settled in when we heard airplanes, humming in the distance. Japanese bombers. Their motors were unsynchronized, so they sounded like the old gas-powered washing machines. The First Marines on Guadalcanal had slapped a nickname on the bombers that visited every night, week in and week out--Washing Machine Charlie. Damn, here comes Washing Machine Charlie.

They circled, dove one at a time, and bombed the beach and jungle, time after time. We had plenty of air coverage in the daylight hours, from the air base on Munda, in the central Solomons, but nothing at night. All you could do was hope your time hadn't come.

Then there was artillery fire over by Cape Torokina.

The rain let up and then came down in torrents.

Then a big naval battle rumbled out at sea, miles to the northwest. From the beach they could see the sky out there light up like lightning. The Japanese had sent a big convoy of ships down from Rabaul to bomb us off the map. Our Navy detected them, rushed out and intercepted them, sank a cruiser and several destroyers, and sent them back to Rabaul. Many a time I've toasted the Navy.

We lived through the night and dawn came. I inspected Wiggins' moustache. It had thousands of little red ants in it, after the sugar from that lemon drink! The boys all had a good laugh. Wiggins and his moustache, first rats and then ants. He's having a hell of a time with that moustache.

He shaved it off and for a few days his upper lip looked like a horse had kicked him.

At the crack of dawn, you drag yourself out of your foxhole, spread your pancho, field-strip and clean your weapon, relieve yourself in the bushes while your buddy stands guard, have a smoke and a canteen cup of coffee, dry out the best you can, and open a can of cold C-rations. Then you pack up and, after the patrols return to the lines, move out. The day's objective--to advance the front several hundred yards farther inland. This was to be

our daily grind for the next few weeks.

There was one thing I wish I had a picture of. The jungle was damp, the swamp and mud was bad and it rained every whipstitch. To protect their rifles from the elements, everyone slipped a condom over the muzzle. It always tickled me to see those columns of limp condoms go by.

While we grunted through the jungle the beach crews were in a frenzy. Supply units continued unloading ammunition, food, medical supplies, bulldozers, power shovels, amphibian tractors and the like. The Seabees began hacking away at the jungle, to build supply and evacuation roads, and shoveling truckloads of sand, to fill in swamp holes along the routes. Telephone wires were strung from headquarters to the front and laterally along the lines. The Seabees tore into the beach down by the cape, where the airfield would be.

After a hard day pushing through the jungle and swamp, we dug in again and set up the defenses for another restless night. The man who could get an uninterupted hour's sleep had steadier nerves than I. If artillery wasn't firing somewhere, Washing Machine Charlie was droning overhead, and not merely to drop his

load. Charlie would circle forever while our anti-aircraft crews, who seemed determined to get him, blazed away. Hell, the A.A. guns were more dangerous than Charlie. The nose cones were about the size of coffee cups, made of solid brass and copper. You could hear them thunking down into the jungle sometimes. One of those could kill you just as dead as Charlie. After almost expending his fuel, Charlie dropped his bombs and droned away. He was always a success because he kept us awake night after night.

Boogie was a tough place to live. The insects, the leeches, the fire ants and that gritty, soupy swamp made life miserable. Many men had to be evacuated from skin ulcers and skin diseases and some of the diseases from prior islands began to take their toll. Mu mu and malaria were bad. The mu mu made your groins, testicles and underarms swell so bad you just couldn't move or walk. Leeches would get all over you, and if you pulled them off, the head remained under the skin and ulcers resulted. I found the best way to remove them was to place the open end of a bottle of mosquito dope over them. They would slither off into the bottle. The fire ants were something else. They hollowed out the limbs of bushes, and when they swarmed over you after you had walked through the brush, they felt for all the world like someone was gouging a lit cigarette into

your flesh.

The gritty mud worked up your pant legs and through the cloth and rubbed your crotch to hamburger. Many guys, especially those who were circumcised, got ulcers of the penis and in some cases were evacuated. Some of the grit was volcanic pumice and also made the water unsafe to drink.

On top of all this, we had trouble with supplies because of the impassable jungle and swamp and were on starvation diets sometimes. The Seabees and beach units were busy behind us, chopping and bulldozing supply routes through the tangle, filling mucky pockets with sand and logs, draining swampy areas. This was very slow the first few days. Working as hard as we were, it wasn't long until some of the men began to crap out from malnutrition.

Most of these hardships didn't seem to affect me very much. I stayed disgustingly healthy and felt good and strong. For one thing, learning from the people of the other islands to eat various jungle plants provided a good supplement to my diet. I always felt at home in the jungle and had no fear of it. I shuddered at the thought of those troops in Africa and Europe with all that open territory to contend with. Here in the jungle I could operate in

close proximity to the enemy without fear of detection. My boyhood along the St. Mary's River had paid off. Especially the war games old Mel Roop played with me. Good old Mel. I wish he'd known how much he helped me to cope with the jungles of the South Pacific.

Being a weapons platoon leader and having a flock of good N. C. O. s to take over, I caught frequent patrol duty, almost daily. There were two kinds of patrols, combat and reconnaissance. Combat patrols are when you go looking for the enemy to attack them. Recon patrol is to locate them, determine their strength, sketch the terrain and bring any other information that will be of use to your unit.

First thing in the morning, I likely would be sent on a traverse recon patrol, which meant going ahead of the lines 1,500 yards into unknown territory, right or left 1,500 yards, and then back to the lines, noting details of terrain. When you got back and reported, your unit would be ready to move, and of course you moved with them. Then, after the day's objective had been taken, it was usually another patrol before dark. By the time you got back and set up your defenses for the night, it had been a pretty big day. Then you spent the night trying to sleep, with Washing Machine Charlie overhead, and standing your turn at watch. Despite all this, I preferred patrol over any other job. There I didn't answer to anyone until reporting back.

On recon patrol you are under orders not to engage in combat, except in self-defense. Remain unseen if possible. Of course, this wasn't always possible. The Japanese had patrols out, too. Sometimes you emerged from the bushes and--bingo--face-to-face with a Japanese! Then it was whoever got his rifle up first. This happened several times to my point men. Sometimes both sides would fire a few shots and they'd melt away in the jungle, and other times there would be a pretty hot mini-battle before disengaging. Snipers were a nuisance, but we didn't run into many, and when we did, we located them without serious casualties. I was very lucky on patrol--I never lost a man. We did have a few minor wounds. I remember a kid from Maine got shot through the foot.

I've always hated perfume and I think the Japanese bathed in lilac water. I could always smell where they had been or when they were close. Some of the guys began calling me "Birddog." To this day the smell of lilacs makes me nauseous.

There was an active volcano in the interior that smoked all the time, Mount Bagana, and I used it as a guide on patrol. We were never lost. And I always took Murawski, Corporal Batt, and Arabasz out there with me. We were red-ass marines.

Well, it was pretty quiet the first few days in, with only a few incidents. Getting supplies to us from the beach was the main problem, until the Seabees could cut routes through the jungle. We sent a party back to the beach one day to carry up some C-rations from the dump. They spotted a badly-wounded Japanese in a spider hole, one of those we'd passed over the first day. He was almost too weak to move, but struggled to get a grenade out of his shirt. He was promptly sent to his ancestors. Never was able to impress the importance of prisoners on the men. There was too much hate in Love Company.

Sometimes, after staring into the night jungle for hours to catch the first movement of the enemy, your eyes play tricks on you. The jungle glows with chunks of phosphorous, and a leaf moving back and forth in front of it can look like anything you want to imagine. One night some kid saw something he thought was a Japanese crawling through the bush. He fired a whole belt through his machine gun. It caught on and guys on both sides of him began firing. Someone finally got the fiasco stopped. The next morning we could find nothing but a little wild boar, shot to shreds. We called it the "Battle of the Boar."

I was in the company C. P. that morning and answered the field telephone. It was John Monks, from H. Q. back on the beach. He said, "Hey, Marbaugh, what the hell happened up there? I thought I heard a shot!" That broke me up.

One morning, after spending the night in a water-filled hole, I laid my rifle up on a pile of brush to come out of the hole and--zing!--a bullet hit my rifle and splattered. A little piece went through my cheek and busted one of my teeth. It was quite a blow and I stayed in the hole till I recovered from the shock. Every time I would reach for my rifle, that damn sniper fired another round. Finally, he was spotted and someone shot him. He was wired in a coconut tree and fell out and hung by one leg. I think everyone who came past fired a bullet into that poor sniper, until he was brought down and buried.

We had an excellent corpsman who dressed my wound, and I didn't go to the sick bay. It healed fine. After the incident, I sat talking to some of my men while smoking a cigarette. I noticed they were all sitting there, bug-eyed and green. Finally one of them said, "My god, Lieutenant, the smoke is coming out your cheek!" After that, until it healed shut, I'd do it deliberately when talking to someone.

On November 6, we were returning from patrol and when we were nearing the lines, my point man signaled--noise in the bush ahead. We took cover.

It was General Cauldwell, his aide and two colonels.

"For god's sake, General," I whispered, "what are you doing 300 yards in front of the lines?"

"Well, we didn't know we were in front of the lines," he whispered back. "We were visiting the Second Battalion C. P. and I guess we took the wrong direction when we were going over to the Third Battalion. We don't have a compass."

"Sir," I said, "wouldn't this group be a juicy plum for a Jap patrol?" He just grinned. I said, "Sir, we're going to the lines and we'll take you to the Third Battalion. I always have a compass."

That was as close as I ever came to reading off a general. I'll never forget the look on Kovacs' face when I reported in from patrol with a general, two colonels and an aide tagging along.

Speed had not been with us for the landing, because he had to remain behind with Division H. Q. to supervise the movement of the second eschelon of troops and supplies to Boogie. For us, that had

been like going into the championship game without your coach, the man who had guided you all the way. It was an uneasy feeling, but in his farewell speech Speed had assured us that he'd be right there with us in the thick of battle, when we needed him most. And here he was. He had landed that morning. Up and down the lines the word spread--"Speed's here!" That picked us up better than a canteen cup of coffee.

The next morning I took out a traverse patrol about 1,000 yards north, west across the Koromokina River, and then back toward the Ninth Marine lines. While we were out there, we heard shooting south of us, in the direction of the beach.

As we moved toward the Ninth lines, we suddenly heard chopping noises in the jungle. We crept up to a partially-cleared space.

There were about thirty Japanese building fortifications.

They had no security out. When you have thirty or so hand-picked men behind you, the temptation to attack sometimes can be overpowering. We could have surrounded and annihilated them easily. But I had my orders, so we sketched the place and gave them a wide berth, continuing on our way.

We ran into more of them. Four destroyers had made a night run from Rabaul and landed hundreds of troops, from the Fifty-third and Fifty-fourth Japanese Infantry. They had come in on disguised barges that had been mistaken for an American salvage detail, until it was too late. They were swarming through the jungle on the left flank of the Ninth Marines, between the Laruma River and the Koromokina. We didn't know all of this was coming off and pulled back to consider.

"They're always saying they'll probably come from the northeast," I whispered to Murawski.

"Yeah," he whispered back. "The line probably runs from the road." We thought a few moments.

"So let's move west another 1,500 and then drop south to the beach and take the beach back to lines," I whispered.

"Right, sounds good."

The distant battle sounds were escalating. After probing several places and finding still more of them, we pulled back north into the jungle, out of artillery range, and squatted.

We had only one ration each, but I had a condom full of coffee, one of flour and some sugar in my pack. You'd be surprised how much coffee you can get in a condom. We used a C-ration can for a griddle over a canned heat flame, and I baked dozens of dollar-sized, very thin pancakes. We made coffee in a helmet. I took a lot of kidding because I couldn't get the cakes to raise. They were thin as paper. For years after, when I'd chance to meet a member of that patrol, the first thing they'd ask was if I had any pancakes.

As they landed just after dawn, the initial Japanese troops immediately dashed for the Ninth Marine lines, intending to bust through the perimeter and pour their later arrivals through the gap. They got stonewalled by the Ninth and quickly backed up into the lagoon west of the Koromokina to reorganize and await reinforcements.

Others deployed to the Laruma River, where a platoon of Company K, Ninth Marines, was returning from night patrol. They briefly engaged shortly after sunup--some Japanese were killed--and then the marines withdrew into the jungle and laid low.

Back at the Ninth's lines, the rest of Company K was sent out into the lagoon to counterattack the enemy troops converging

there. Since the Ninth had an outpost between the Koromokina and Laruma, in the area where the Japanese were swarming from the beach through the jungle to the lagoon, our artillery batteries could only stand by. About 500 yards out, K Company was pinned down, and enemy soldiers were sliding around them on both sides.

By midday headquarters was sending two more companies out, B and C, from none other than the First Battalion, Third, who had shifted over to the left flank for reserve a few days before. They were supposed to get time to recuperate from the battle at Cape Torokina, but here they were, a week later, caught up in another major action. The two companies advanced on a broad front, and shortly the left flank met terrific Japanese machine gun fire. The Japanese were already dug in and, with the jungle so thick, they sometimes popped up only a few yards away.

Sergeant Herbert Thomas and his squad were trudging through a hail of machine gun fire, wiping out two crews with rifles and grenades. A third machine gun was blasting away and was tougher to get at. Preceding a charge on this emplacement, Thomas hurled a grenade, but it caught on some overhead vines and rebounded right back into the marines. Thomas immediately threw himself on the grenade and stifled the explosion. At the sight of his grim death, his

men went berserk, charged, and killed the machine gun crew and nearby defenders.

The platoon of Company B on the far left flank of the advance, nearest the beach, met the heaviest opposition. Captain Gordon Warner, the company commander, was with them. Between this platoon and the platoon to their right was a slight gap, filled by only a dozen men, led by Lieutenant Joe Nolan. Behind them was the Company B reserve platoon, with 60mm mortars from the battalion Weapons Company. Warner sent a messenger to the reserves and mortars with orders to move over and join his fight.

Somehow, word of this didn't get up to Lieutenant Nolan and they continued on. Meanwhile, the platoon to Nolan's right and Company C, on the far right flank of the advance, got bogged down in deep swamp. So, there went Nolan and his small contingent, obliviously marching headlong into the Japanese, with nobody on either flank or behind.

They killed some snipers, moved on, and stumbled onto a Japanese force digging foxholes and cutting trees. Both sides began shooting. Nolan thought that if they could take those foxholes, they could hold off the enemy reinforcements streaming from the

beach, and the reserve platoon would soon arrive to help. He charged and killed the Japanese in the first hole, and others were shot down rushing to their weapons, but the Japanese in the rear foxholes, on higher ground, pinned the Americans down.

Lieutenant Herron took four men to the left to outflank them, while Nolan and the others covered. Herron's manuever distracted the Japanese and Nolan's men scrambled into the forward holes, but Herron was hit in the heart. Then the Japanese charged the marine foxholes, bayonets fixed. Nolan stopped one only three feet from his foxhole. The Japanese retreated.

Some of the Japanese were sneaking off to the right, into the swamp, so Nolan left his foxhole and ran to Gunnery Sergeant Duncan, who was too far over there to hear a shout. On the way, Nolan got hit in a shoulder. He collapsed to the ground at Duncan's foxhole, warning him about the right flank. Another marine came up and pumped morphine into his arm.

Again the Japanese charged and Duncan and the men held. When things quieted down, Nolan, stiff arm and all, got back to work. Then word came from Captain Warner to withdraw. A squad from Company C showed up and helped in the fighting

withdrawal. Twelve Third Marines had killed fifty Japanese and for three hours had plugged a critical gap in the perimeter.

During all this, Warner and B Company were trying to uproot the stubborn Japanese who had gotten around the left flank of K Company. Warner was up and down the line, instructing the men, flanking distracted enemy machine gunners and blowing them up with grenades, and sort of conducting a one-man battle. At one point, he sneaked up beside the Japanese line and, having pulled plenty of time in the orient, ordered a banzai charge in perfect Japanese. They charged and thirty or so were slaughtered.

Japanese reserves were pouring into their lines, fresh from landing barges farther up the coast. Finally, tank lighters evacuated the stranded Company K outpost and the artillery battery was brought in. Since there were no artillery lines strung up yet, the forward artillery observer, Lieutenant Ben Reed, shouted the adjustments back to someone who hollered them to a field phone, who called them to Captain Tom Jolly at the battalion C. P., who relayed them to the fire control center. They threw the shells in fast and thick, as close as fifty yards from B Company's lines, and enemy reinforcement of the sector ceased.

They didn't know that some marines were still in the artillery concentration zone. Before the tank lighters had arrived, the outpost radio had failed, so the commander had sent six guys back toward the Ninth Marine lines with directions for bombing the incoming enemy. On the way back, shells began falling right in front of the party and they got split up. Four of them moved to the beach, where they came face-to-face with Japanese soldiers just off the barges. They killed five and raced along the beach to our lines and safety.

Their two buddies remained in the artillery zone in foxholes. Suddenly they realized the explosions were moving toward them instead of toward the Company B battle. Only their artillery expertise saved them, for they figured out which battery was firing and knew the pattern of that battery. When shells landed just ahead of them, they knew the next two rounds would be a little closer and they scrambled forward. Moments later the foxholes were shellacked. They ran to the beach and made it back.

The field hospital, Company E of the Third Medical Battalion, was in serious difficulty, with wounded pouring in and the doctors working under heavy sniper fire and mortar fragments in lead-torn tents. One doctor was shot in the shoulder while operating. Only

two marines and seven Seabees manned the thin defense outside the hospital tents. The two marines boldly advanced into the sniper area and were killed. Finally, a reserve platoon arrived and took over the defenses.

Just before dark two tanks made it to the Company B lines. However, they had no radios, so Captain Warner stood beside one and shouted directions through the steel to the crew inside. It worked and a Japanese machine gun crew was obliterated. While trying to communicate to the second tank crew, Warner was blasted in a knee. They got him back to the hospital but he lost the leg. The efforts of Warner and his company had, by the end of the day, pushed the enemy back several hundred yards from Company K's original position.

This enemy force was now trapped between the marine lines and the artillery concentration zone. The marines had them where they wanted them--standing up for the knockout punch the next morning.

The Japanese weren't the only ones squatting out there that night. A Company B platoon had been cut off and squatted in the swamp. They withstood a fanatical banzai charge that night, killing

twenty-seven Japanese, with not a single wound among the marines. A Company C platoon had plodded all day through the worst swamp in a futile attempt to locate Company K, who had moved, and they ended up 1,000 yards beyond everybody and on the opposite flank, near the beach. Then there was that Company K patrol up by the Laruma River. They had pulled back into the jungle and squatted. And finally, there were me and my boys, squatting out there, eating skinny pancakes. If a flying saucer flew by that night, they must have decided they were over a boy scout camp.

With daybreak, November 8, we anxiously listened for signs that would tell us what to do. Down near the beach, the stranded Company C platoon, led by Lieutenant Harvey, cleaned the swamp mud out of their weapons with gasoline taken from an abandoned Japanese barge. They knew they had to get out of the artillery concentration zone P.D.Q. Risking sniper fire, one of Harvey's men waded out into the bay and desperately signaled a low-flying fighter with his tee shirt. The fighter notified the ships out in the bay, and soon a tank lighter sped to the shore and evacuated them, only minutes before the area was torn up by artillery shells.

We listened to the hellacious artillery bombardment. They pounded an area 500 by 300 yards with 180 shells in five minutes.

Then machine guns raked the trees, everyone threw a grenade and the Twenty-first Marines, First Battalion, passed through the Company B and C lines and attacked. They came upon silence, a few shell-shocked survivors, and grotesque mutilations. The battle was over.

When it looked as if we were no longer cut off from the lines, we headed back, stopping to search some dead Japanese for maps, diaries and souvenirs. I wasn't much interested in souvenirs but my men were. When I heard that the Japanese carried a silk flag handkerchief with the Rising Sun on it, signed by all the girls in their farewell party in Japan, and that they were worth $100 each at the beach, I became interested. They were light and didn't take up much room in your pack. They all carried them in their first aid kits. We picked up scores of them.

When we got back to L Company, the word was already out that we were missing in action. Word travels in the Corps and many of my friends in other places heard this. I had many a surprise reunion later.

The marines had lost 17 killed and 30 wounded in the battle. The Japanese had landed 475 men, and a day later 377 of them were

dead. Prisoners revealed that their mission was to land, remain undetected, organize, and engage our left flank in a prolonged fight, hoping to draw our reserves from the right flank, where the big one was going to jump off. They made some serious mistakes in executing those orders, from top to bottom. Japan had tens of thousands of troops on the island. You don't engage a battalion of U. S. marines with only 475 men. That point was made at Guadalcanal. You don't remain undetected by landing 600 yards away, or by chopping and chattering in the jungle like it's Sunday at the state park. You're not organizing and engaging in a prolonged fight when the first squad that hits the sand charges blindly into the enemy lines. I'm glad I was with the outfit I was with.

Attention shifted to the Piva River, the northeast sector, mighty fast. From the day we landed, the Japanese had been active over there with attacks by combat patrols and such. The Raider roadblock on the Piva Trail suffered a big attack on November 5 and they'd held. Then, when the battle was raging in the Koromokina lagoon, Japanese infantry made an all-out effort to roll over the roadblock and penetrate Cape Torokina, the prize ground of the beachhead. A heavy barrage of mortars forced the Japanese to retreat back up the trail and they dug in for the night near Piva

Village.

The next morning, November 8, they lobbed mortars over on the roadblock for four hours and then their infantry attacked again. Again the Second Raiders hung on and in the afternoon they counter-attacked. However, this was a crack Japanese outfit, units from their Twenty-third Infantry Regiment, and they held their ground, the Piva Village area.

That night Colonel Edward Craig, commander of the Ninth Marines, planned a big assault for the next day. Early on November 9, the Twelfth Marines, our artillery regiment, laid down a ninety-minute artillery preparation. Then Companies F and L of the Third Raider Battalion moved out along the trail. Only a few yards out they ran smack into heavy fire from Japanese rifles, light machine guns and mortars. Anticipating the artillery preparation, the enemy had crept up close to the roadblock in the dark and waited silently, both avoiding the bombardment and meeting the marine attack head-on at the jump-off. The Twenty-third Infantry were sharp jungle fighters.

The fight was viscious that morning. Both the marines and Japanese tried to outflank both flanks, collided, and settled down

into a frontal assault. At one point, P.F.C.'s Henry Gurke and Donald Probst, Company M, Third Raider Battalion, were in a foxhole, receiving a torrent of bullets and grenades. Two marines next to them were killed. Gurke told Probst that if a grenade fell into their foxhole, he would take it, because Probst's B.A.R. had superior firepower compared to Gurke's rifle and could better continue the fight. Suddenly, a grenade landed right in the hole. Gurke smothered it and died. His companion survived the battle.

The next morning, November 10, was the 168th anniversary of the founding of the Marine Corps. They celebrated with fireworks on Piva Trail, first an artillery shelling, then an air strike by a dozen torpedo bombers. Then Colonel Craig sent two battalions of the Ninth Marines through the front lines to attack. They met no opposition--the Twenty-first Japanese Infantry had bugged out from beneath the bombings, to fight another day. The Ninth Marines occupied Piva Village and set up astride the Numa Numa Trail above it. Between November 5 and November 10, we lost 19 killed and 32 wounded in the Piva action, while over 550 Japanese men died. Tojo simply wasn't sending enough soldiers to get the job done, the same mistake he made on Guadalcanal. Instead, Japan was keeping their defenses concentrated at the various garrisons and airfields

around the island. That was fine with us. If we held onto Emperess Augusta Bay and got the airfield constructed, those bases and mighty Rabaul were in big trouble.

The Twenty-third Infantry, foiled in their attempt to overrun Cape Torokina, prepared to obstruct further expansion of our beachhead. At Piva Village the Piva River forked, the west branch running north, parallel to the Numa Numa Trail, and the east branch going northeast. The Twenty-third began building strong, concealed emplacements in the hills east of the Piva east branch and, we soon learned, along the Numa Numa Trail around its junction with the East-West Trail. Plus, they undoubtedly were getting reinforcements and supplies over the trails from the Mosigetta-Mawareka garrisons at the southeast end of the bay. They had about 11,000 troops down there, posing a constant threat to us.

The perimeter was 1,900 yards inland on November 9. About this time the powers-that-be were cooking up a new project for us. Some 2,500 yards north of the perimeter, in the center sector, was a stretch of solid, level ground that would be ideal for a bomber strip and another fighter strip. That, plus the enemy build-up in the northeast, brought new orders to the Third Marines, a new objective--to shift our lines to the northeast, and fast, as fast as

the supply routes could keep up. The left flank of the beachhead was turned over to the Army, units of the Thirty-seventh Infantry Division, who began arriving on November 8.

As the Army boys came to our lines to relieve us, the ancient barroom rivalry was rekindled.

"Hey, the man's job in this sector must be done. Here comes the Army."

"Ah, you marines are O.K., but do you ever take a bath?"

"Say, after we wipe out all those Japs up there, will you bring us a few beers?"

"Sure, leatherneck, but that's the limit. Don't you never touch my sister."

The push northeast was on and patrol duty got aggressive. It was necessary to detect all enemy activity in the proposed bomber strip area, to nip it in the bud and avoid a costly struggle for that land.

We ran into some Japanese patrols up there. One of our patrols got pinned down while probing a hill. To get them off, we set up two

60mm mortar platoons to lay down a barrage. One of these was mine. I had three guys who could feed the shells into the tube with both hands. It always gave me the creeps, because I was afraid they'd get a shell poised over the tube before the other one came out, but it never happened.

I got one of the gun sights to get the range and just stayed there when we started the barrage. Those dudes got forty shells in the air before the first hit the ground. The patrol withdrew easily. When it was all over I discovered my eardrum was busted again. I had forgotten to stuff it with cotton and had kept my eye right on the sight with my ear right by the muzzle all during the firing.

Once on patrol about a thousand yards from our lines, we ran smack into a Japanese emplacement. It surprised us but no one was hurt. I was the third man in the column and, along with the first two men, got pinned in front of the emplacement. There was a slight hump in the earth and we were safe as long as we stayed flat. The mud and water was about four inches deep on both sides of the hump. The Japanese tossed grenades out the aperture but couldn't get them over the hump. They just went poof! in the mud and water. Finally they got one over and the kid on my right shoved his rifle down on it and crawfished backwards. I had my face turned that way and

got a face full of mud, sticks and debris. I couldn't see and acted like a damn baby. I thought I was blind. After I got the crap cleared away, I was all right except for a pretty good hole under my right eye. I sent two guys back to our company and they brought back help and a flame thrower and got us loose.

The corpsman cleaned up my face and put two stitches in my cheek. It healed but was never right. Later, in the States, I was in a hospital and a doctor took a stick out of it about the size of a match head. Thought I'd be a scar-face forever, but it healed good.

We operated on patrol a lot with Hardtack Hendershaw's patrol, keeping in touch via "milk bottle" radios. Some C. P. men said they were so sick of monitoring, "Hardtack to Panama" and "Panama to Hardtack" that they would almost volunteer for patrol duty themselves to stop it.

I guess the Japanese did their own monitoring and eavesdropping. One of the tricks they would pull was to secure an officer's name and then call for him to do things, like report someplace, anything to get him to stand up and show himself. Then they could knock off an officer. I had a chilly feeling one evening when a voice from the jungle to my right said, "Panama, report to the C. P. Panama, report to the C. P." I didn't move, for I had a field telephone in my foxhole

and knew it was a ruse.

They would try anything to get into our lines and inflict a few casualties even at the cost of their own lives. One night in an adjacent sector there came a call from in front of the lines--

"Hello, I am Lieutenant Joe Smith. I am bringing in an American patrol."

The watch knew no Yank would speak like that and alerted all hands. Then they called back--

"Okay, Joe, old buddy, come right on in."

"Joe" and his "patrol" were wiped out.

Another night some Japanese crawled up close to our lines and began hollering insults in English. While we were trying to get a fix on them to plaster them with mortars and machine guns, marines started yelling back. A Japanese shouted, "You die, marine, blood for the Emperor!"

A marine yelled back, "Fuck the Emperor!"

If foreigners know any English word it's that one. A Japanese replied, "Fuck Roosevelt!"

"Fuck Tojo!"

"Fuck MacArthur!"

They went down the line of notables on both sides and finally there was a long silence from the Japanese. They'd run out of names. Then came a triumphant shout--

"Fuck Babe Ruth!"

One night I had a hell of a scare that I've heard happened to other guys in the Pacific. I was sleeping on my stomach with my pancho spread beneath me, alone in a foxhole. I had my knife stuck in the ground on one side and my pistol within easy reach. I felt something nudge my arm and all I could think of was a Japanese was trying to get my pistol. I counted three, seized my knife and plunged it through my pancho. I got a huge coconut crab.

"Pop" Warnick, in battalion H.Q., had a false upper plate. It was his habit at night to place it in a canteen cup of water. One morning he awoke to find a crab had chewed it to bits. At breakfast I noticed him breaking hardtack into his coffee. I asked, "What in the world are you doing that for, Pop?"

"So I can eaf the damn fings," he said.

I saw my first war dogs on Boogie. They were Dobermans and we had one and his handler attached to our battalion. Those dogs would point and growl to show where the enemy was long before there was any way to find out. At night they would warn of an enemy approach and they were never wrong. They would have no part of anyone except their trainer. The handler once told me, "They're naturally mean and we make them meaner."

One dog-loving colonel from H.Q. came by one day and was making over the dog. The trainer said, "Colonel, don't try to touch that dog."

The colonel replied, "Oh, I've raised Dobermans for a long time. I can make up with any of them." He extended his arm and in a flash he had no dungaree jacket sleeve. The white-faced colonel moved on and we all gave a wider berth to "Dirk" the Doberman after that. Later I had two patrols with Dirk and his handler but we ran into Japanese only once and they all took off.

When you have Wee Willie Wilson you don't need dogs. I don't know who took care of his rifle platoon, for he always seemed to be out hunting on his own. I ran into him once on patrol as he was on his way in. He had a bloody foot and I offered to help him in. He said, "I made it out and I'll make it in."

A native reported to us one day that he knew a spot where a Japanese patrol passed every morning at six o'clock. I got permission to have him take us to the spot.

We trudged out there and it was a narrow pass that entered a valley, between two fairly-close hills. A perfect place for an ambush.

We returned to the lines and Captain Kovacs said I could set up an ambush if I wanted. Wee Willie was in the area and I asked him if he wanted to go along. Of course he snapped at the chance.

I didn't trust the native. He was a shifty-eyed varmit. He came from Piva Village and, although some of them fought the Japanese with their spears, alongside the marines, the loyalty of the Melanesians on Bougainville wasn't certain. So, we set up the ambush two hours earlier than we led him to think. I got on a 30 cal. and issued firm orders that no one was to fire until I did.

At about five a. m., eleven Japanese came through the pass and started setting up an ambush for us. That damn Melanesian was playing both ends agains the middle. We had given him tobacco. I suppose the Japanese had given him something, too.

I waited till the Japanese gathered for a conference and cut loose with the machine gun. They were sitting ducks.

When it was over I said to Willie, "Good job, Willie, we got them all."

"We hell," said Willie. "You goddamned hog, I never got a round off." It was the same with everyone else. I never had a feeling like that before and hope I never have another one.

My boys really liked the three 30 caliber aircraft machine guns that Watson had "procurred" on Guadalcanal. They were lighter than the regular 30 calibers. They used them until they ran out of the metal belt clips that they required and they gave them a fitting burial in the Bougainville mud.

I had a little machine gunner named Richardson. He was a fiery little guy and was always hot to go. One time as the company was moving forward, Richardson's gun was set up on a suspicious trail leading into our route of advance. Down the trail came a "machine gunner's dream," a column of enemy on patrol, one behind the other. Richardson fairly drooled. He waited until they were all exposed and squeezed the trigger. The gun fired one shot and jammed. They all escaped into the bush. Now I thought I'd heard

all the profanity in the world but Richardson taught me some new stuff that day. It was never safe to mention the incident around him ever after.

Booby traps were a problem everywhere in the Pacific. The Japanese even booby-trapped their own dead. They would pull the pin on a grenade, place it so the body held the handle down and--boom! You got it when you went to give the guy a decent burial. Sometimes they used other ingenious devices.

One kid in our company found a beautiful pearl-handled pistol lying right out in the open where someone had killed some enemy. He tied a long string to it for he was suspicious of it. He got in a convenient hole, started pulling the pistol to him and the hole he was in blew up. Things like this took the souvenir fever right out of me. When we inspected the prize he was after, it was only one-half of a pistol handle.

Wires were stretched across trails or just out in the jungle where a patrol was likely to go. These sometimes were spaced so the point man wouldn't get the blast, but the explosion would come back in the main body of troops. Never build a cooking fire in the same place the Japanese did. Chances are your breakfast will blow in your face from a shell buried beneath the ashes.

There wasn't much talking on the lines but I can still hear some of the low whispering among my men, when it seemed there were no Japanese out there--

"Jesus Christ, what a stinkin' mess. How in hell did I end up so far from Flatbush?"

"I don't know about you but I'd go anywhere and do anything to keep a thing like this from happening at home."

"Shit, this won't settle anything but I guess you gotta settle a problem when it comes up and the Japs are a goddamn problem."

"No shit."

"Well, it'll be over some day. I say, 'The Golden Gate by '48!'"

"Right now I'll settle for a young whore by '44."

"By God, if I ever have a son, I hope he never has to go through something like this."

"If you ever have a son he'll be a whore-hopper or a queer, with an old man like you."

"What's your middle name, Joe?"

"Allen."

"Well, fuck you, Allen."

"O. K., saddle up--we're movin' out!"

We slowly plodded through the muck and brush, shifting toward the junction of the Numa Numa and East-West trails. Meanwhile, the Seabees had plowed supply and evacuation roads through that swamp and jungle that you wouldn't believe possible and were making great progress on the airstrip at Cape Torokina. One company had a road practically keeping up with hacking out an amphibian tractor trail to connect us with the Second Battalion, on our right. When that was completed, we would have a lateral trail across our beachhead.

I never realized there was so much talent in the world until I became acquainted with the Seabees. I once saw a sign at a Seabee camp that read, "The possible we do immediately--the impossible takes a little longer." That about sums up the Seabees. They could fix anything from a zipper on your pants to the biggest airfield in the Pacific. If they didn't have the material they made it or dredged it out of the ocean or jungle. What impressed me most was their willingness. Take any problem to them and they had an expert

somewhere in the group to solve it. They thrived on challenge. They had some enterprisers, too. No matter where you were, there was a seabee selling watch bands, bracelots, or rings, made from downed Japanese planes, for five or ten dollars a throw.

One morning a seabee with a bulldozer, who was clearing the amphibious tractor trail behind our lines, asked me for some escort support to watch for snipers. As my men were bushed, two of my sergeants and I performed the duty. During a break we were talking about the chow shortage and he said that if we sent someone to his camp, 1,000 yards to the rear, we could get three cases of D-rations from his tent. Now D-rations are chocolate bars, so I put three others on the escort detail and the two sergeants and I made a beeline for that Seabee camp.

A seabee showed us to the tent and then said, "Hey, would you guys like some hot chow?" He was a cook.

"Man, would we!"

"You bet your ass we would!"

He led us to the galley, set up in an amphibious tractor, and dished up a serving of hot dehydrated potatoes and sauerkraut for each of us. We dove into it.

"Man, I've never tasted anything better," I said, and the sergeants agreed. Our stomachs were so shriveled that when we were finished we felt as if we'd gorged on a three-course meal.

As we went back to the front, some Army troops from the Thirty-seventh Division were moving along the trail. Suddenly, one of them about fifty yards away shouted, "Hey, Marbaugh!" and walked over to us. He was a produce truck driver from St. Marys, Ohio, who used to deliver to Spitler's grocery in Willshire when I worked there.

I had a week's growth of beard and had my face smeared with mud from patrol duty. "How in hell did you know me?" I asked.

"Hell, there's only one man in the world who walks like that," he replied.

Trouble brewed along the Piva River as we advanced and patrolled northeast. The Ninth Marines, holding the Piva Village area, were subjected to mortar and machine gun harassment from the Japanese Twenty-third Infantry. Meanwhile, everybody's patrols kept running into the Twenty-third's patrols and outposts, which

were scattered throughout the northeast corner.

General Turnage decided to plant a strong outpost up by the junction of the Numa Numa and East-West trails, to disrupt any enemy attempt to settle down in force in the proposed bomber strip area. Remember, Japanese troops could reach our beachhead by marching over these trails from the opposite coast. Turnage assigned the Second Battalion, Twenty-first Regiment, to establish the outpost. They had landed on November 11 as part of the second eschelon of troops.

The Battle of the Coconut Grove was about to begin.

Company E of the Twenty-first Marines jumped off at eight a.m. on November 13, proceeding up the Numa Numa in advance of the rest of the battalion.

Things go wrong in war--it can happen to anybody. First, supply problems and late arrivals slowed the departure of the remainder of the battalion, and so Company E marched out on a limb. Furthermore, there had been no artillery preparation before their departure, a serious omission, because the Twenty-third

Japanese Infantry were experts at concealing their defenses. And they were up there--in a large coconut grove, a couple hundred yards south of the trail junction, waiting in spider holes and hidden pillboxes and in the trees.

Company E walked right into the ambush, got hit hard and pinned down. A runner hurried back down the trail to Colonel Eustace Smoak and his battalion, 1,000 yards behind. The battalion raced up the trail, to a point about 200 yards from Company E, where Colonel Smoak sent Company G ahead and ordered Major Glen Fissel to take the artillery forward observation party up and call back the necessary directions.

Company E was being ripped to shreds and another runner was sent back. Smoak sent the reserve, Company F, to the lines. After Company G pulled up on the left flank of Company E, the battered Company E began to withdraw, expecting Company F to show up any minute.

However, Company F somehow crossed the river, outflanked the Japanese and everybody and ended up on the north side of the entire action. They panicked and their captain had a time pulling them back together. With Company E pulling back, there was now

a dangerous gap in the battle line. So, Smoak had to order the remnants of Company E back to the front. Poor Colonel Smoak lost all communication with Company F, the artillery, and the regimental C. P. During all this Major Fissel was killed--he was found the next day in the grove.

The next morning eighteen marine torpedo bombers bombed and strafed the Japanese positions. Around noon the Twelfth Marines' artillery pounded the area. However, the crafty Japanese Twenty-third evacuated their positions during the air and artillery strikes, hustled back, and then poured lead into the attacking Twenty-first Marines.

More chaos broke out. Some of our tanks accidentally fired into the marines and ran over some of them. Captain Sidney Altman leaped up on the lead tank and managed to set the crew inside straight. Colonel Smoak personally raced up to the front and got things back on keel.

The attack proceeded and they handily dispersed the Japanese, estimated at company strength. By evening they occupied the coconut grove and the trail junction. About forty Japanese had been killed. The Twenty-first Marines, Second Battalion, had thirty-nine wounded and five officers and fifteen soldiers killed.

The Battle of Coconut Grove paved the way to complete the shift northeast. We immediately got orders to cross the front of our Second Battalion and advance 1,500 yards, and fast. We would move forward in "Contact Imminent" formation. Tojo's Twenty-third were out there in force somewhere and the Third Marines were going to clash dog-eat-dog with them, sooner or later, if not tomorrow. You could feel the anticipation grip the ranks--here we go!

We were all so fatigued that we could hardly go. We had been grunting through intensive jungle training for fifteen months, with only occasional breaks. We'd rammed deep inside enemy territory onto an isolated beach surrounded by enemy garrisons, then rammed on through dense tropical forest, waist-deep swamp, mosquitoes, leeches, daily downpours, fire ants, and all without a hot meal.

Colonel King called an officers' meeting in his C.P. We were so pooped we were almost in a silly stage.

"Gentlemans," said King, "they is 10,000 of them ~~fanatical~~ FANTICAL little bastards between us and our objective." To Major Wade Jackson, the Weapons Company commander, he said, "Jack,

you'll have to keep up with the infantry, and if you cain't do it, we'll just have to sacrament you."

We were all so tired and silly that we couldn't wait to get out of there and let loose with a belly laugh. The speech made the Book of Kingisms and became kind of a byword. When someone lagged behind, we would say, "Well, we'll just have to sacrament you."

We moved out early on November 15 and the next day, after an exhausting trek, took our place on Inland Defense Line Dog. We hadn't seen a Japanese, and since most of the men hadn't been on patrols, where some of us had seen action, they were hungry for combat, weary but hungry.

We set up defenses about a half mile southwest of the Numa Numa and East-West Trail junction, on the site of the proposed new fighter strip. We tied in with the Twenty-first Marines, Second Battalion, on our right. Their lines ran to the trail and south of them were our First Battalion lines, facing the river east. On our left was our Second Battalion. To their left the Army held the western half of the perimeter, down to the Koromokina. The Seabees were connecting their lateral road to the Numa Numa Trail,

making a miraculous supply and evacuation route clear across the front of the beachhead and south to Cape Torokina.

As we were digging in, word came to the lines that good old Speed Cauldwell had moved into the Third Regiment C. P., right behind us. He'd told us he'd be there when the going got rough, and there he was.

After bringing up supplies, an amphibian tractor was taking out casualties, men crapping out from mu mu, malaria, etc. I was helping carry a stretcher over to it and there lay Bristow on a stretcher, wounded and either unconscious or asleep. He looked bad. I asked the attending doctor what his chances were. The doc just looked at me and shook his head. I'd lost the best buddy I ever had.

Then I was sitting in a foxhole, with a million things on my mind, when a letter was handed to me. My grandmother had passed away. Grandma had raised me and I loved that old lady more than anything in the world. I read the letter, folded it and buried it in the Bougainville mud. I repressed the grief and never mentioned it to any of my friends. I was too busy staying alive and keeping my men alive.