NOTE TO THE READER

The following is an account by my father, Charles Norman Manhoff, of his experiences as a Marine in World War II. The name of the book, Magne's War, comes from a childhood nickname. Pronounced "Mag-nee", the title was bestowed on him by a friend one afternoon shortly after they had been studying Middle Ages European history and its most prominent king, Charlemagne. Since my father was "Charlie" to his friends and his family, it was probably only natural that he would get the regal, if oddly pronounced, nickname of "Charlie-Magne" and eventually, just "Magne."

My understanding of my father's important, albeit small, role in history didn't spring up fully formed. Growing up, at first I knew only that my Dad was something called a "Marine" and had fought in a war called "World War II". Naturally, as small boys will, I had a fascination with all things martial and would prod my father for stories of the war. The places he spoke of – "New Britain", "Peleliu", "Bloody Nose Ridge", and "Okinawa" –meant very little at first. Nor did the people he talked about – a close buddy named Russ Keyes, some officer he liked a lot named "Chesty" and another he disliked a lot named "Rupertus." But the stories, sometimes sad and sometimes surprisingly funny, were always fascinating.

As I grew, I became an avid reader of military history, particularly World War II since it had such a direct connection with my family. I realized that many of the places and names that I heard from my father's stories were also ones that had played crucial roles in the Pacific campaign and in Marine Corps history. I read about Lt. General (then Colonel) Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, the most decorated Marine in the Corps' history and the ultimate "Marine's Marine". I read about the strange and sad career of Major General William Rupertus – the writer of the "Rifleman's Creed" (the one that begins "*This is my rifle. There are many like it, but this one is mine.*") repeated to this day by new Marine recruits but also the commander of the needless (something that, in fairness, was out of Rupertus's control) and needlessly bloody (something very much in his control) battle of Peleliu.

The full story of that period in my father's life took years to assemble. Random conversations would reveal more and more of the story. One day, in my teens I think, I said something along the lines of, "Dad, didn't you say that you were in Chesty Puller's regiment in Peleliu?" Imagine my surprise when I got the reply, "In his regiment? Well, actually, I was his bodyguard and runner during the battle." Of course, this led to some more questions about General Puller's character and I think that was the time that I learned about the "pineapple juice" story. (In fact, in the first draft of the book, my father left that particular story out and I had to ask him to include it.)

Conversations like the one above over thirty years finally lead to a somewhat delayed epiphany. Gradually, knitting together his stories and the histories of the Pacific battles, I came to understand that my father had been witness to, and very much a part of, some very interesting points in American history. Finally, I told Dad that he needed to write this stuff down. Thankfully, he honored this request and the result is the book that you now hold.

Russ Keyes, who you will meet in this book, was a regimental scout with my father during the war and a dear friend after it until his death in 2005. A tri-state wrestling champion, Russ was well-liked in the scout platoon but considered something of a dumb cluck. Of course, after the war, "dumb ol' Russ" pioneered the concept of time-share boat slip rentals and made many millions of dollars. When I met him, well into his 50's by then, he was still the sweet, charming man that my father had befriended so many years before. You would have never have guessed that he was a self-made millionaire by his demeanor except for his habit of buying vintage Mercedes cars (that he would keep for a year and then sell at a profit). When I graduated from high school, he sent me a beautiful engraved Parker pen set that I have to this day.

Russ is gone now, as are too many of the men and women who served during that war. Yet he, and my father, are what I know of those veterans. "The Greatest Generation" has been said so often that it almost has become cliché, yet I know that it is true. Boys before the war and made into men during it, they came home, married, had families, and sought success in the civilian world by applying the lessons they had learned in Europe, and across the many islands of the Pacific. They didn't whine or complain about how horrible their experiences had been; they faced their struggles and overcame them here as they did there. They created, through both struggles, a standard of living that has not been matched by any civilized society in history. And we owe them our thanks.

I would be tempted to say the Greatest Generation was followed by the ungrateful ones. The Vietnam War Memorial was dedicated to much fanfare a mere nine years after our troops left the battlefield. A beautiful memorial and one that was fairly earned by those who fought in that particular hell. Still, one can't help but notice that the WWII vets, with 10 times the casualties of Vietnam, had to wait almost 50 years before they received similar tribute (after "only" four attempts to introduce the bill in Congress by Marcy Kaptur from Ohio). Of course, some still didn't like the break-neck pace that Congress set in establishing the memorial– Wikipedia, noting the controversy, includes this howler of a sentence, "Most irksome to the critics was the expedited approval process, which is normally quite lengthy." Of course, the "expedited" process was only approved by Congress because, by the time the memorial was under consideration, WWII vets were dying off so fast of old age they were concerned that there would be no vets left at the dedication!

Nor did the design suit some people. Thomas Keane of the Boston Herald said, among other failings, that the memorial was "vainglorious" and "demanding of attention." Vainglorious and demanding of attention…hmm. Well, one must defer to the experts. Mr. Keane, born in 1956, lies in the epicenter of the generation that defined those two terms in ways my father and Russ would never have imagined. Well, some of the generation at least – there were many Marines, sailors and soldiers that fought their war just as bravely.

Indeed, the Marines and others in the current military endure in the same spirit as the Old Breed in World War II. Reading blogs of the rank and file in Iraq and Afghanistan, I can still hear the same tenor and tone that I hear in my father's story. To my mind, the modern American military in many ways surpasses even those of the "greatest" name – a tough, dedicated group of soldiers and Marines that perform heroically and, despite relentless reports to the contrary by a jaundiced press, humanely in situations more subtle and frustrating than the yes/no, on/off binary world of WWII. In Peleliu, if the men wore green, they were friends and if they didn't, you shot to kill. In Fallujah and Kandahar, the battlefield has many more considerations and the modern soldier must combine the best skills of soldier, cop, judge advocate and diplomat – often in the same 30 minute span.

Surpasses in many ways….except in the areas of courage, tenacity and spirit. There the modern soldier or Marine must settle for equality with the Old(er) Breed.

While undoubtedly the formative experience in his life – at 85, my Dad still considers himself a Marine, not an ex-Marine – Dad neither bragged about his role in the war nor refused to talk about it. Rather he related his stories in a rather matter-of-fact fashion and this same tone can be heard in the book. Whether he is talking about sharing the newspaper with Tyrone Power in an unusual location, relating how he reacted to a banzai charge (running like a headless turkey), listening on Peleliu while Puller fruitlessly raged to his superiors about the slaughter of his Marines on Bloody Nose Ridge, or recounting his furious battle with a mouse on Pavuvu (Dad won), the tone is straight-forward.

I should add here as well that Dad never harbored any bitterness, then or afterwards, towards the Japanese themselves. In the early 70's, we had a wonderful trip to the rebuilt and revived Japan and later, when I asked Dad to allow me to go to Japan to study for a year in college, he said that sounded like a very good idea.

To my admittedly prejudiced opinion, the stories have the ring of truth…nowhere in the story does my father tell of volunteering for heroic charges or other such nonsense. Front-line grunts want to keep the valuable bits attached to their bodies if at all possible. In "Citizen Soldiers", Stephen Ambrose relates the general feeling of front-line troops in Europe when told that they were halting so the Soviets could take Berlin. Predicting (accurately) the hell that battle would be, it boiled down to "They're welcome to it." The

reaction of any honest Marine who had been through the Pacific campaign on learning that they did not have to invade Japan was unrestrained relief. Still, nobody attached to Chesty Puller's CP was ever really "behind" the front lines and no Marine scout on patrol in unknown and sniper-laden territory could conceivably be called anything other than courageous. They did the dangerous jobs when they had to and kept their heads down otherwise.

Yet, they were heroes then and they are heroes to me still. My father would never apply the term to himself but that is what he is and I am glad that he has shared this story. It needs to be told, and heard, and understood by a new generation. If I could pick one phrase to describe the book, I would reply to Mr. Keane:

"Not demanding of attention…but deserving of it"

Thank you, Dad. You will always be my hero. Semper Fi.

Christopher Manhoff

October 2010

Magne's War

By

C.N. Manhoff

PROLOGUE

When my father was born in Dubuque, Iowa on March 21, 1886 there were 41 states in the Union, and when my mother was born July 12, 1899 in Tula, Mississippi (near Oxford) there were still only 45 states. At least, when I was born in Chicago at about 11:30 on the evening of December 23, 1924, all of the first 48 states had come into the fold and that was how many stars there were in the flag. They made a neat 8 by 6 pattern in the blue field and I have always thought they made a more proper appearance for a national banner than the staggered rows of today's flag. Calvin Coolidge was president, although I didn't know that then. I understand he was a rather stodgy man.

I was a boy. They named me Charles Norman Manhoff after my father, so of course for years my mother referred to me as "little Charles". I never took offense at that - - at least they never called me "Junior" like the son of my father's business partner, who was called Junior even after he became six feet tall and weighed 230 pounds.

Mother was a southern belle, Mabel Ellzey Coxe Manhoff, the daughter of the town's only doctor who also was the owner of the town's only sawmill. She went to school in Oxford and knew William Faulkner (also born in 1899), but said she was above him socially and that he wasn't much, then. If you wonder about the "Coxe" in her name, Mabel at the age of 18 ran off from Blue Mountain College for Women and married a dashing World War I fighter pilot, but it didn't last. Mother never explained why. There used to be a golf bag in our attic at the farm with the name Mabel E. Coxe on it - - as a young boy it puzzled me but I never thought to ask about it until I was in high school.

On June 5, 1927 my sister Barbara was born, and she was the last addition to the Manhoff clan.

THE EARLY YEARS

We lived in Chicago until I was four, but the year my sister was born my father bought a farm 10 miles north of Traverse City, Michigan, where he was general manager and part owner of a furniture factory, and that was where I really grew up. My father was in partnership with Frank Johnson (father of the "Junior" mentioned above). They manufactured mostly fiber furniture, the kind you used to see on the verandahs and in the sunrooms of those marvelous old summer homes in places like Newport and Bar Harbor and Martha's Vineyard - - some of them still have that kind of furniture left over from the old days. Makes me think of FDR and wrinkled seersucker suits and little boys racing 11-foot catboats in the bay.

My father bought the farm because what he really wanted to be was a farmer - - not a dirt farmer, but an orchard man. He started with 500 cherry trees planted in 1927, added more each year, and by the time World War II was over the orchard had grown to 13,000 trees and my father had retired from the furniture business and was a full time Orchard Man. There was a lot of living for him between 1927 and 1945, but this is my story and I will have to tell his another time.

There was a lot of living for me in those years, too.

Christmas, 1942

The wind was stiff and freezing off Lake Michigan when my train pulled into Penn Station. That year, my parents and Barbara were spending the winter in Chicago and I was home for the holidays from my first (and only) semester at the University of Michigan.

It had been a trying time for the kid from Traverse City. The U of M had "only" about 18,000 students then, but the place seemed gigantic to me and also it didn't seem to care whether I was there or not. The student body was exactly 50% larger than my entire hometown. I shared an apartment with a nice, blond Canadian named Duncan Scott (he looked like a very young Danny Kaye), who didn't seem quite as overwhelmed as I was, so I had at least one friend who knew me.

Duncan and I went to the Freshman Mixer the school put on during Registration Week, which drew about 5,000 goggle-eyed newbies milling around trying to dance with each other when they could hear the band over the roar. I was determined not to hang back. Then someone said, "That's Mickey Johnson!" in an awed tone that implied everyone there knew who she was. I looked and was struck speechless, instantly in love that would never die, and when she saw me staring she smiled! The two girls she was talking with laughed, probably at my expression. Scared silly, but not hanging back, I walked over and asked if she would dance with me. She laughed, and held up her arms…

W-e-l-l-l, that's when I began to learn about Real Life in the Big Time. As I reached for her I felt a tap on my shoulder and turned to see who was interrupting my dream, but there was nobody there. I turned back to see Mickey twirling off with an imperially-slim, tanned guy, three inches taller than me, who moved like a cat and who nodded pleasantly to me as they moved away. Dunc walked over grinning and said, "That was Tom Kuzma." Tom Kuzma was Michigan's first-string tailback in 1942, second-string All-American. Freshman Mixer's are not for freshmen- -they are for the express purpose of letting the upperclassmen get a look at the new crop. Anyway, that was the last time I ever spoke to freshman Mickey Johnson- -she moved in a different world than mine.

My world was hard and brutal. Particularly Analytic Geometry and Basic Chemistry. My chemistry lectures were in a place that looked like a Greek theater, rising row upon row and holding 300 dumbfounded boys and girls who thought they already had taken chemistry in high school. We covered my entire semester of high school chemistry the first week and then got down to Chemistry Reality. Nobody ever asked the lecturing professor a question. We grimly took notes until paralyzed with writer's cramp and trudged off when the bell rang hoping we would survive the two weekly chem labs. Occasionally, we did.

Analytical Geometry is still a painful memory and I choose not to talk about it.

Transition

The trauma of adjusting to the rigors just described, combined with the escalating drama of the war, eventually proved too much. The 1st Marine Division with a little help from the Army had secured Guadalcanal, and the 2nd Marine Division had made their costly assault at Tarawa. I was approaching my 18th birthday with nothing to prevent the draft board from classifying me 1-A. The idea of getting drafted and sent to someplace like Fort Chaffee, Arkansas to peel potatoes put me off, so in late November I went to the Navy recruiting office and asked if they wanted me to be a Navy flyer. They seemed happy about that idea until the Navy doctor looked up my nose and said, "You've got a deviated septum (result of having a 220-pound tackle fall on my face during football practice- - helmets didn't have face masks in those days) - - bodes ill when you are at 20,000'. Get an EENT to fix it over the Christmas holidays and see me next spring."

You can imagine that didn't appeal much. If I didn't flunk out in disgrace by the end of my first semester the draft board would be sure to nail me before I could get back to that nice Navy doctor. At best, my academic record wasn't going to prompt the board to give me an immediate deferment. Also, Dunc had just gone off in a flaming fit of patriotism and joined the Canadian Air Force, so I was without a roommate and support system.

The rest, as they say, is history. The second day in Chicago on Christmas break I stalked into the Marine Corps recruiting office and put my name down on this long sheet of white paper with about 75 other names. The nice Navy doctor there probed me in all available orifices including my nose and said, "You have a deviated septum- -boxing?"

"No, football."

"H-m-m, interesting. Next!"

It didn't take long after that. They told us we could all spend the holidays at home before getting on the train. Christmas was a blur that year with the anticipation of the Big Adventure. My mother and dad hadn't said much when I told them I was going to volunteer before I had to sign up for the draft. Mother only asked, "Are you sure?" My father simply said, "Try for the artillery, it's safer." Sister Barbara didn't really say anything about it, but she did have a lot of questions about what college was like. Bless them in their wisdom - - nothing would have deterred me at that point, and I'm sure they could see that, but I know my mother and father were aching. They didn't show it and I remember the holidays being fun and bright even though the goodbyes at the station suddenly were a bit pensive and sad, as though each of us left something unsaid that we didn't quite know how to express. More about that later.

It was January 2, 1943 when I boarded the Santa Fe Railroad's troop special, bound for boot camp at the Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego. Normally, recruits from my region would have gone to Parris Island, South Carolina, but there was a flu epidemic in bloom down there so it was off to Southern California- -a happy alternative, I thought.

The train ride itself was a bit of an adventure as we traveled southwest along Highway 66, already becoming a legend as America's Road- -Joplin, St. Louis, Oklahoma City, Amarillo, Flagstaff, Barstow, San Bernardino, and finally after three days, Los Angeles. I believe Highway 66 used much of the rail right-of-way, because when you travel segments of the "old 66" today the railroad is right there beside one almost all the time.

The three days on the train is a bit of a blur because it was coach all the way and I'm not sure I ever did go to sleep. I must have done so, but my memory is of more-or-less continuous penny ante poker interspersed with occasional chances to get off and stretch our legs when we stopped at a small station or water tower. No getting off at the big stops like St. Louis or OK City because the MP's traveling with us thought we might be getting homesick. Most of us had never been "out West" and we enjoyed the scenery. I have a fairly clear memory of the miles and miles of butte and mesa country in New Mexico, but I don't believe the train stopped at Albuquerque. I believe it did stop at that little station just south of Santa Fe where some pretty Harvey girls brought sandwiches aboard. It was either there or in Flagstaff.

When we reached Los Angeles in the early morning of our fourth day, we were loaded into dark green buses marked "USMC Recruit Depot" and pointed toward San Diego.

The Crucible

Boot Camp, birth mother of all Marines. An experience like no other on earth. There are all sorts of descriptions of Marine boot camp available and I am not going to drag you

through all the gory detail. I will spend a few paragraphs trying to distill the feeling of being a new Marine recruit, which may in the process convey a sense of why it's done the way it's done. So-o-o . . .

We dismounted from the buses and were told to fall in, single file. A sergeant in a forward-tilted campaign hat (the kind that Smokey Bear wears) yelled at the first man in line to put his feet on the yellow footprints painted on the concrete leading into a long, cream-colored warehouse, with everyone else to follow in his footsteps.

Before we started out, this sergeant looked at us coldly and said in a clear, loud voice, "You will follow the man in front of you until we come out the other end of this building, and you will not talk to anyone except a uniformed Marine, and then only if you are spoken to first by said uniformed Marine. You will listen carefully to whatever he says and will immediately comply with any of his instructions without asking him to repeat himself. Field dungarees do count as a uniform. You will go only where the yellow footprints lead you. Fo'hahd, Harch!"

Well, we did exactly as the sergeant said. In a very short time we were outfitted with new green dungarees, field boots (boondockers), socks, green underwear, helmet liners, cartridge belt, canteen and mess gear, and various other odds and ends, but no rifle. That would come later. Staggering a little under the load, we followed the yellow footprints out the end of the building, to be segmented into groups of about 40. My group was turned over to a hard-faced three-striper. He had a corporal assistant with a quiet smile- -of anticipation, I think. Forty years later when I visited the San Diego Recruit Depot on a reunion, the yellow footprints were still there, still in use.

The three-striper was Sergeant Haggerty, our DI (drill instructor) and his kindly helper was Assistant DI Corporal Mostel who looked not at all like his Jewish name. Both wore campaign hats. Mostel was slim and looked to weigh about 155, with smooth, tanned skin and a blondish crew cut. He could trot briskly for two miles through soft beach sand without breaking a sweat, all the time calling out the peculiar Marine cadence count and sharply berating laggards.

I've never been totally sure he wasn't a droid, manufactured to be Torture Master for Haggerty, who had been handpicked (by God, I think) to shape our formless protoplasm into beings that didn't totally disgust the rest of the Corps.

A brief word on DI's and their campaign hats. Only DI's, Rifle Range instructors, and a few other specially-qualified instructor types are entitled to wear the distinctive campaign hats that mark them as people that are to be listened to carefully at all times. The principles, techniques, and procedures they convey to recruits are the stuff that turns civilians into Marines. The stuff that gives an individual Marine the will and the method to

accomplish a mission, and which also gives him a reasonable chance to stay alive in the process. DI's in boot camp are the closest thing to an earthbound god that most humans will ever encounter. They are always right and never questioned. And one learns along the way that it isn't bluff and bluster- -they really are as good as the system suggests they are.

Haggerty gave us a short "orientation" speech that clearly defined our world for the next three months, and quickly disabused us that we were Marines. We were Recruits, a disgusting life-form that might evolve into something better if we did everything that he and Mostel required, did it instantly without any questions, heard and remembered everything they told us despite the burden of being both ignorant and stupid, and never, ever complained about anything that happened to us. We were to address both as "Sir" in a loud, clear tone, until Graduation Day- -after that, it would never be permitted again. After boot camp, "Sir" is used only in addressing male officers.

Corporal Mostel administered most of the grindingly physical activities, under the watchful supervision of Haggerty. Most of us assumed that Haggerty, being all of 25 years, wasn't quite up to holding his own against the 20-year old Mostel. That is, until the time that Haggerty took us on a three-mile night punishment run because somebody had smuggled some Milky Way bars into the platoon huts. Mostel was off on liberty that night. Haggerty about killed us on that run, and he didn't break a sweat, either.

The first six weeks of boot camp in 1943 were devoted to an incredible regimen of calisthenics, close order drill, Quonset hut housekeeping, field hygiene (for instance, specific instructions on keeping our underwear clean using the same scrub brushes we used to scrub the head with, and after noon chowtime we stood in formation and brushed our teeth- -dry; also, how to keep from getting gonorrhea and syphilis, and other unglamorous stuff. Pity the poor boot that didn't get the brown spot out of the seat of his shorts during laundry drill! You may think I'm being deliberately gross, but the Corps takes this kind of thing very seriously, and the DI's do get the message across. Contemplate the reasons why.

The first Big Day in boot camp was about halfway through the program, the day each boot drew his personal M-1 rifle. The DI's gave the day a buildup- -this was a Marine's raison d'etre, the only tool indispensable to his mission, and they started to infuse us with the Religion of the Rifle. With a straight face, the DI's taught that the M-1 was a Marine's truest friend, totally trustworthy if he treated it as he would a lover, kept it clean and oiled, and learned to use it with skill. If a boot accidentally dropped his rifle, he slept with it. Every Marine, private to Commandant, has qualified with the rifle, and continues to do so through his career.

The Corps has always emphasized aimed rifle fire (as opposed to massed assault fire from the hip, for example) as the foundation of effective infantry operations, and spends much more time on the rifle range during basic training than do the other services. A solid month on the range was the centerpiece of boot camp, and tension built from the day we bussed the 20 miles or so from the Recruit Depot to the range at Camp Mathews, until Record Day a month later.

Early on the first morning at Camp Mathews we were divided into two-man "buddy" teams and issued thick pads we sewed onto our dungaree jackets- -one on each elbow and one on the shooting shoulder. Rapid fire with a high-powered rifle in the prone position is hard on one's elbows, and of course the shoulder pad is to soften recoil.

But for three weeks all we did was "snap-in" to the firing positions (Standing, Kneeling, Sitting, and Prone), and squeeze the trigger, with our buddy slamming the rifle bolt handle back on each shot to simulate recoil and re-cock the rifle. Sounds like a boring three weeks, but there was a lot more to learn while snapping in- -proper use of the leather sling which locks the piece to your shoulder so it and your body is one integrated unit, setting sights for range, blackening front sights with a wooden match, getting the correct sight picture quickly after recoil, smooth trigger squeeze after letting half your breath out and holding it, and so on. The range instructors watched us like hawks. Nobody was allowed to do it wrong. Those of us who were familiar with firearms quickly forgot what we thought we knew and learned to do it the Marine Corps way.

The fourth week we were issued live ammunition and started firing at real targets. And Record Day loomed. A total of 68 rounds would be fired, a bullseye counting as five points, for a possible score of 340. We would fire from the offhand, prone, kneeling, and sitting positions, at ranges of 100, 300, and 500 yards (not all positions at each range.) There would be rapid fire from the 300 yard range- -an 8-round clip, reload and fire eight more, all in 60 seconds. Qualification as a Rifle Marksman required a score of 260, Sharpshooter 292, Expert Rifleman 306. Failing to qualify meant one's life was a dismal failure, no matter what happened after Record Day.

Twelve platoons took turns firing for record that Saturday- -I was so tight I sat flipping a nickel all of the dead time while I was waiting my turn. When I got back to the 500-yard line for eight rounds of slow fire in the prone position I needed at least 32 out of a possible 40 to make Expert. After I fired three consecutive bulls, a Gunnery Sergeant with binoculars came over and spotted my shots for me. "Bullseye at 4 o'clock, 2 inches in. Look down at the ground in front of you for a few seconds. Take your time," he said. Or, "Bullseye at 6 o'clock, low. Make your squeeze pressure continuous, steady." He was calm and spoke quietly. It really helped to settle me down and finish the business at hand.

I did get one shot just out of the bull ring, not more than about an inch, for a score of 39, making my overall score 313. The Gunny put his binoculars down, smiled and said, "Son, you can fire on my team anytime. You've just shown you can take out a Jap on your first shot, five football fields away, seven times out of eight. The eighth time you'll have to reload and fire once more." I was stunned- -I had not made that precise correlation; it had just been me against all those paper targets. But of course, that was why we all were out at Camp Mathews in the first place.

If I had to pick one moment when I ceased being a recruit and became a Marine, that moment would be it.

It turned out that my score was highest in the platoon, fourth highest of all the platoons that day, although the top shooter hit 326, the best score for the year up to that point. But I was high as a kite and flying, flying. I owned the world. Such was the impact of Marine Corps psychology on an 18-year male- -I thought had achieved the only truly important goal in life.

We returned to San Diego on Sunday for the last week of boot camp. For the first time in more than two months no DI was hassling us to do this, do that, or yelling in our ears because we didn't do it right. It was almost eerily quiet in the platoon hut as we stowed our gear.

I decided I had to go to the head before noon chow. The head was a long, narrow building painted the inevitable cream color on the outside, and as one entered there was an unobstructed view of 25 toilets (no pansy dividers between them, of course) along one side, facing 25 wash basins on the other. There was only one other boot there, sitting on a john about halfway down the row. Amazingly, he had a Sunday paper spread around his feet, so I went over and sat down on the next stool and asked if I could see the sports section, which he wasn't reading. He smiled and handed it to me, and I realized I was sitting next to Tyrone Power. We knew he was in boot camp in one of the other platoons, but I hadn't seen him before.

He asked how I had done at Mathews and I swelled up a bit and said I had fired 313. He said, "That's terrific! I only managed Sharpshooter, but there'll be another chance when I get into a line outfit." We didn't exchange names. I learned later that he went into pilot's training, was commissioned, and spent his time flying for MATS (Military Air Transport Service). I think the Corps didn't want to put him in the infantry, and so provided an alternative with better odds. For no good reason other than the context of that brief conversation in the head, I would guess he didn't pull strings.

My only other encounter with celebrity in boot camp happened later that day. I drew runner duty at the Visitor's Center (since it was Sunday of the last week, graduating boots were allowed to have family visitors). Being a runner meant waiting in the Center until sent off to the hut area to retrieve a boot whose visitor had arrived. My number came up and the sergeant said, "Manhoff, go down to Platoon 432 on the double and tell Private Price his wife is here." Standing next to his desk was a raving, auburn-haired beauty with an absolutely brilliant smile pointed straight at me. She looked familiar, but I had run (yes, we actually ran) half of the 300 yards to the hut area before I realized I was going after Maureen O'Hara's husband. She <u>was</u> a smasher.

Because I had the platoon's highest score at Mathews I drew the honor of guidon bearer as the platoon passed in review on Graduation Saturday. The guidon bearer is the man in the right front rank of the platoon as it marches in column three abreast. The guidon is a small pennant on a 6-foot staff, so the guidon bearer does not carry a rifle. All men in the platoon's right file "guide" on the guidon, keeping a perfect fore and aft alignment. Everyone else in the platoon guides on the man to his immediate right. On command, the guidon is dipped in salute as the platoon passes the reviewing stand, and the rest of the platoon gives the rifle salute, eyes right. It was the first time I had saluted a general and had the salute returned.

It was an exciting day. The day before, I had been called into the DI's office and told that my general aptitude exam scores were high enough that I had been recommended for the new Enlisted Japanese Language School that had just started up at Camp Elliott, only about 15 miles from San Diego; Haggerty asked if I was I interested. He said the scuttlebutt was that successful graduates would be recommended for the Army's advanced course at Camp Savage in Minnesota, which meant a commission, but that it was just scuttlebutt. He also said the scuttlebutt was that we would be assigned to the 3rd Marine Amphibious Corps headquarters in Honolulu, which seemed like a nice place to spend the war doing something useful without being shot at. Of course, I was interested, so he put the papers through.

<u>Nihongo wakarimasu ka?</u>

The question mark in that title is redundant; the "ka" makes it a question. Japanese Language School at Elliott was a very civilized change from boot camp—sort of like going back to college, except more intense. But it was a big change from the Recruit Depot. This time we were in real barracks (painted cream color, of course), and we could go to the movies or the PX or the Slop Chute (enlisted beer hall) after hours.

The first two weeks were devoted largely to everyday conversational Japanese. From then on, after breakfast to 5 0'clock, we were permitted to speak only in Japanese to each

other. It's amazing how fast that builds one's vocabulary, when you don't know how to ask things like, "Who swiped my shaving kit?" or, "Who knows what's on at the base theater tonight?"

Commandant of the school was a Captain Paul Dull, who was thin and cadaverous, not at all what a Marine captain usually looks like. He lived in Japan for a number of years and before being swept up by the Marine Corps was teaching Oriental History and Japanese at an eastern university. We were told he had insisted on going through an abbreviated boot camp. About two weeks, I think. Not so our other commissioned teacher, a Captain Jewett. He had been an import/export businessman in Tokyo many years, coming back to the U.S. only a few weeks before Pearl Harbor. He was a very distinguished-looking man with a mustache and salt and pepper gray hair, probably about 50 years old. We also had a Sergeant Ming, a naturalized Chinese-American who had picked up a lot of Japanese in the Hong Kong merchant marine sailing in and out of Japan.

The emphasis was academic, but we didn't escape the physical stuff. Calisthenics, rifle inspection, and close order drill for an hour every morning. We must have sounded loony to the other troops at Elliott with Ming singing out the cadence, "Ichi, Ni, San, Shi, Hidari, Migi, Hidari! Also, every other week we had an overnight training hike of 20 miles or more out into the foothills east of Elliott, with full pack and weapons equipment. Dull and Ming always went along on these rather arduous jaunts. Not so Captain Jewett.

The school was originally scheduled for three months only, but that lengthened out to six months, then eight, with no explanation forthcoming. I think the Corps was deciding not to go through with the original scheme for advanced schooling for the best students, and figuring out alternatives, but that is just a guess. Even Captain Dull claimed he didn't know what was going on, but it made for a lot of good weekend liberty.

Most weekends (unless the training hike was scheduled for Friday/Saturday) we were turned loose along with 350,000 other service men in California, and most of us headed for Los Angeles. If we managed to get away from camp by noon on Friday, which was rare, we usually could get a bus ride into LA, which was sheer luxury. Mostly we had to hitch hike, but the motorists and truck drivers and cops were patriotic so it wasn't too bad. We headed for places like the Paladium, a huge dance hall in Hollywood, where there always were a lot of girls, and a lot of competition. Or we gathered in various bars where there were always girls, and a lot of competition. One of the Jap School favorites was a place called Jerry's Joynt only a block from Union Station, that inexplicably hadn't been discovered by the hordes of swabbies and dogfaces roaming around town. It was there that I was introduced to a drink called "The McGurk". I think it was mostly rum and Coke, but there was something extra in it that made it ve-r-r-r-y smo-o-o-o-th. It caused a number of raucous and merry times.

One weekend I did get away early and caught a Trailways bus into LA. As I was leaving the bus station a smallish, slim fellow in a white V-neck tennis sweater walked up and asked if I would be interested in representing the Marine Corps that evening at Earl Carroll's, a night club in Hollywood that was quite famous. He said he was one of the PR people for Earl Carroll. Every Friday and Saturday night the club recruited one representative from each of the services and gave them a free night on the club- -dinner, drinks, showgirls as company during dinner, publicity that appeared in the Sunday newspaper. I knew about it, but was suspicious when he said we could go by his apartment for a drink before we went to the club, since it was only 5 o'clock, but I went along with it since he didn't look very dangerous.

The minute we got into his apartment it was obvious he was what he said he was- -his office was covered with autographed pictures of showgirls, Earl Carroll, and half the starlets in Hollywood. He said, "By the way, Ann Miller and some of her friends are having a pool party for about 20 servicemen next week. Saturday. Are you interested?" Never a spoilsport I said I definitely was, so he wrote down her address and phone number on the back of his card, which I carefully stowed in my wallet.

It turned out my suspicion was justified, because he was interested in more than just having a drink, which he led into by telling me that he was really a dancer and would I like him to show me a couple of routines that would enhance my dance floor prowess. The guy really could dance and he did show me some useful stuff, but it wasn't long before he started to probe around, and I had to tell him that it just wasn't my scene and that I appreciated his hospitality, thanking him for his Earl Carroll offer, but that I thought I would move along.

Well, he was a gentleman. He didn't apologize, but he said the offer was legitimate and that he was sad but that we would go on to the club if I still wanted to. So we did. It was a fine evening- -lobster, champagne, showgirls sitting on our laps (a soldier, a sailor, and a Coast Guardsman, besides myself) for pictures, and a big time floor show. And I had an invitation to the Ann Miller party the following weekend.

But tragedy struck. I left my pants and wallet on my bunk while I took a shower Sunday night after getting back to Elliott, and some slimeball stole the wallet. So I couldn't go to the party that weekend, and I can't introduce you to Ann Miller. Couldn't anyway, she died last year [in 2004].

There were a number of rowdy and occasionally naughty weekends in LA, which I won't detail, but I was beginning to get the idea that war wasn't all that bad. At least, not in California.

One of our Japanese Language class was a former London Embassy guard, a Sergeant

Dunlop, who had been part of a show drill team while stationed there. When Captain Dull found out about this he developed the idea of having a Jap School drill team, because the original curriculum had been satisfied and they were extemporizing "advanced studies" to fill the time. Even so, there was time available, so for the last three months of the extended school we had two hours of close order drill each day under the tutelage of Dunlop. And we became very good. We performed such routines as the Silent Marching Manual of Arms, the Queen Anne Salute, various complex marching routines where files took off at oblique angles, reversed, passed through each other, reversed again to come back together in perfect alignment, all done silently by precise counting of the cadence. There were a number of other fancy marching manuals with rifles whose names I have forgotten. Dull's idea was that we would compete in the joint Army-Navy West Coast close order drill competition scheduled for early November that year. He thought it would be a great joke if the Individual Dress Platoon competition was won by a group of Japanese Language students rather than by some elite outfit of "serious" soldiers. And it also meant we would be issued Dress Blues, which there had been no need for up this time.

It all came to naught because of the war, however. In late October we were told that my Jap School class along with several hundred others at Elliott would be assigned to a replacement battalion scheduled to ship out early in November. I was promoted to Corporal, but there was no indication of further glories in the academic world of the Corps. I've always thought we would have done well in the drill competition.

Replacement Battalion Blues

Want to know what's sad for an 18-year old kid who hasn't been home for a year? He's all muscled and tan and eager to show off, it's November (1943) and he's due for a week's leave at Christmas with a good chance of an airlift to Chicago when the word comes that all leave is canceled and he will ship out in three days. And that is exactly what happened.

I shipped out on a converted Dutch freighter (sailing alone - - no escort) toward the other side of the Pacific Ocean with 900 other guys, none of us knowing where we were going except we suspected there weren't going to be any girls there. A bummer if you have just spent a year of weekends in southern California as a hero in Marine greens. And it is the biggest ocean- -days and days of chasing sunsets without even a seagull around. We played poker and told lies about our liberty exploits in LA.

We were the 32nd Marine Replacement Battalion heading southwest. Bunks (canvas laced to 1-inch iron pipe frames) stacked four high with two-foot aisles. Packs, weapons, and kapok lifejackets lashed to the ends of the bunks, duffel bags stowed in the ship's

hold. That's how you get 900 guys on a 10,000-ton freighter.

About six days out, early in the morning, we were sailing slowly through a quiet sea, completely enveloped in a very dense fog. Abruptly, the ship sailed out of the fog bank into bright sunlight, a soft breeze, with clear blue sky above us. There was an emerald-green island not more than two miles dead ahead. It dawned on me that we were staring at Hawaii, with Honolulu and Diamond Head on our starboard bow. We had sailed out of the same kind of mile-high fog bank and clouds the Japanese pilots had used to cover their approach two years earlier.

I have never really recovered from the impact of that incredibly beautiful sight, the magical feel and scent of gentle winter trade winds, and to this day I still keep going back. However, this time we had a one-day stop at Pearl Harbor to bunker fuel and take on supplies - - food, water, and a disturbing number of crates marked "M2 Ball Cartridges, 30-06". Naturally, nobody was allowed to go into Honolulu and have a good time.

Back at sea, the days were spent mostly standing in rotating chow lines. One hour in the morning for calisthenics, followed by weapons cleaning and inspection. Afternoons had about one hour available for poker on deck and another round of calisthenics - - no getting soft on your South Pacific cruise, mate. Mandatory saltwater shower before Taps, using saltwater soap- - about like rubbing yourself with a short piece of wet balsa wood, with as much cleaning power. But believe me, the hold of that ship would have been uninhabitable otherwise. And washing one's field dungarees (also mandatory) in saltwater is a kick - - makes them stiff and they begin to smell like the ocean. Not bad, actually.

I had done a lot of small boat sailing when I was in high school and had never been seasick, but I was green twice on this voyage - - once in the California ground swells and once during a heavy 3-day blow somewhere south of the Hawaiian Islands. However, over the next two and a half years I grew a pretty good set of sea legs and fell into a lifelong love affair with the blue water ocean.

But that is away from the plot line. Where were we going? What outfit would we be assigned to when we got there? The scuttlebutt was all over the ship that we would join the Third Division or elements of it somewhere; then we heard we would be garrison troops on Guadalcanal, which made no sense at all. The scuttlebutt was circular- - someone would speculate that we might go to the Second Division in New Zealand, and the next afternoon the story came back around that the straight scoop was - - we were all going to New Zealand, for sure.

The morning of the 23rd day a long, green landmass with some low mountains appeared, and the ship docked at a port that looked like it had been lifted out of a Joseph Conrad novel. Hot, steamy, some low frame buildings with the French tricolor floating from a

flagstaff on one of them, a substantial town behind them, and low, green mountains behind the town. We were in Noumea, New Caledonia.

They trucked us 15 miles out of town to a tent camp beside a slow river that looked exactly like coffee latte. I don't remember much about this place except I found out one can wash one's clothes in a muddy river and they come out looking clean and not the least bit muddy. Our days were pretty boring except for calisthenics and a conditioning hike every other day. We learned that New Caledonia was one of the places the Marine Corps brought their replacement battalions for jungle conditioning, and that the usual stay was 1-2 months, but that we would be here only a short time. No reason given.

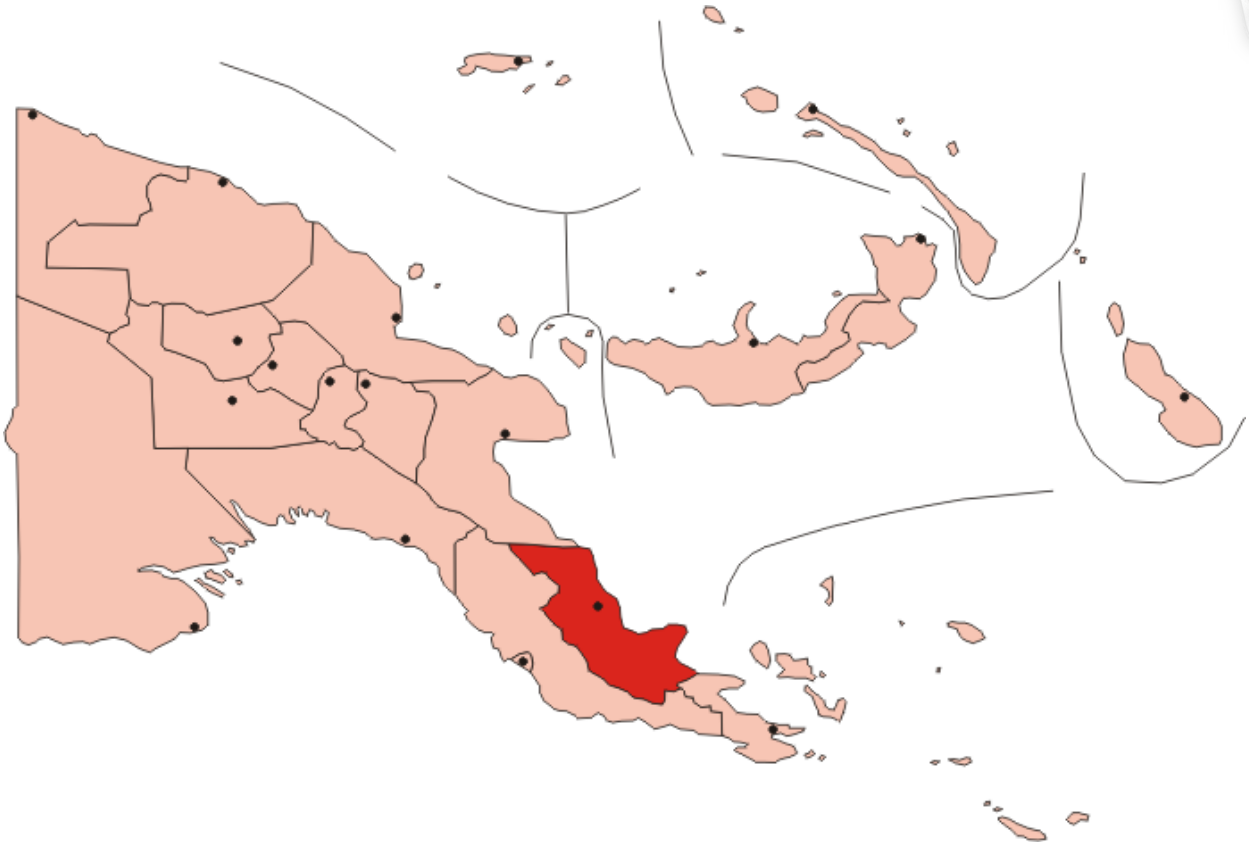
We did get into town once or twice during the two weeks we were here, but there wasn't really anything to do, everyone spoke only French and I don't remember them being very friendly. There was a large, pink stucco house on the edge of town that always had a line of at least 20 sailors, American and French, waiting to get in the door. The Pink House was famous all over the Southwest Pacific, I learned. I didn't go there.

A little before Christmas another ship sailed away with us, and we learned that we all were going to join the 1st Marine Division, but they didn't tell us where, just that we were moving to a staging area. They did serve us a pretty decent Christmas dinner as we approached Milne Bay, at the eastern tip of Papua New Guinea. By this time, by whatever clandestine routes this kind of information emerges, rumor had it that the 1st had landed the day after Christmas at Cape Gloucester on the southwest end of New Britain. New Britain is a big banana-shaped island lying north of Papua New Guinea. There was an important Jap airfield on Cape Gloucester, and a major Jap naval base at Rabaul on the northern end of the island.

It was finally clear why we had a short stay in New Caledonia- - we were to replace casualties and people rotating to the States following the Cape Gloucester operation.

We put into Milne Bay on a day that was hot, hot, hot - - humidity 99%. Everybody below the rank of sergeant was broken out on work parties to load artillery ammunition and, believe it, a mountain of pineapple juice cases. Closest I've ever been to heat exhaustion. I drank so much pineapple juice I turned myself against the stuff for 20 years. I still don't really like it much.

That done, we embarked for Oro Bay for a week of "jungle conditioning". I can't find this miserable little spot in our atlas, but it is on the north coast of New Guinea somewhere between Milne Bay and Buna, I think. [Ed. Note: The red area in the picture below is Oro Province. Oro Bay is the large indentation in the red area, to the SE of the black dot, which represents Popondetta, the provincial capital. In 1943, Oro Bay, also known as Dyke Ackland Bay, was the site of a U.S. advanced base.]



It was the least enjoyable week of my life up to that time.

We bivouacked a mile from the beach in a clearing cut out of acres of kunai grass that flanked the rain forest. Kunai grass resembles sword grass, is about ten feet tall with serrated edges on narrow, stiff blades, and is literally impenetrable except to the foot-long rats (not counting the tail) that make their home there. We were warned to keep our pants legs tucked into our socks, and our sleeve cuffs and jacket collars buttoned at all times, because the rats carried ticks that give one bush typhus, better known as black water fever. This colorful description derives from destroyed red blood cells that turn one's urine black. Mortality rate in those days was about 50%, if you were young, strong, and healthy. I don't think it has been improved much even today. If you saw the movie Out of Africa, that was what Finch Hatten's friend died from.

All night we listened to scritchy, little feet of foraging rats running up the anchor ropes and the canopies of our rotten, old pyramidal tents. Nobody kept pogy bait (candy bars) in their packs, but occasionally you would hear someone swearing because his boondockers

had been chewed.

Working out of this lovely environment, each day we had a 5-6 mile conditioning hike up the various foot trails leading into the jungle-covered foothills. No breeze, 90+ degrees and humidity. Despite our still-buttoned collars and cuffs, when we got back to camp we had to strip down and use lighted cigarettes to deal with tree leeches that had dropped on us and sneaked past the barricades. Sometimes we would see them drop on the guy ahead of us and could brush them off, but usually 2 or 3 would get by. They were 1-2 inches long, but they didn't hurt when they burrowed in. We put sulfa powder on the holes where they had backed out because of the cigarette treatment. One never pulls them out because it usually leaves the head in and infection is certain.

New Guinea has the biggest creepy-crawlies in the world. There were 8-inch centipedes, big fat millipedes that loved to crawl over a bare arm or leg while one was asleep leaving a red trail that burned for 2 or 3 days, 4-inch black scorpions, and multi-colored snakes that shared the kunai grass with the rats. Pythons shared the trees with the leeches and we were told to stay away from stream banks because of the 15-foot crocodiles, although I never saw either until later, on New Britain.

Thinking back, I suspect this Oro Bay stop was not so much to condition our bodies, but to condition our minds, in a non-combat setting, to the world we would soon be living in. We really were in pretty good shape and had gone to classes about jungle conditions, but psychologically we were still in the streets and bars of Los Angeles, or the relative comfort of shipboard life. In a foxhole in the middle of the night, if a big centipede crawls up your leg it may be imprudent to scream, so the Marine Corps in its occasional wisdom was getting us used to "de conditions dat prevailed."

While we were at Oro Bay we were issued an item called "jungle hammocks" which were really quite well-conceived and made us think for awhile that they would solve the problem of dealing with rain and some of the uglies crawling about. A waterproof fabric roof with insect netting attached all around, the netting itself attached to a hammock. Access was by way of a zipper in the netting. Find two trees 6-8 inches in diameter and the right distance apart to hang the hammock, fasten the hammock roof to the same trees and one would have a snug bed off the ground, which would keep off the rain if there was no appreciable wind, and the millipedes, etc. would have no way of getting at one. We spent quite a bit of time finding trees the right distance apart on non-windy days, and they seemed to work unless one rolled over in one's sleep and trapped oneself in this ridiculous sort of shroud, but even right side up the mice and an occasional rat would go scuttling across the roof just a foot above one's face, which was worse than having them scuttle across a tent roof six feet over one's head. Gradually, everyone reverted to the old cot-in-the-tent system. Oh, well. It was a well-conceived idea.

The next stop was going to be The Real Thing. We anticipated this with some nervousness but also great anticipation. What was it going to be like, really?

Cape Gloucester, New Britain

Strangely, I have had some trouble getting myself to start this section of my chronicle, a vague sort of reluctance to go back to that time and place. Not that I am squeamish or burdened with the affectation of some cooks and bakers and other rear area personnel that, "It was too depressing to talk about," because of embarrassment that they really hadn't seen much of the shooting war.

No, my procrastination has been due to something else. I remember feeling, as we stood in the chow line the morning we were going to make landfall on New Britain, a faint, reflective sadness. I missed my mother and father, summer on the cherry farm, some of the girls I had dated, other things. I first believed that I must be homesick, of all things, which amazed me because I hadn't ever been homesick and there wasn't any reason for that stuff to fall on me just then. That conclusion wasn't quite right, but the feeling went away as soon as we loaded up our gear, started down the cargo nets, and climbed into the landing craft. I thought no more about it then.

Anyway, as I began to recall events to write them down, a faint echo of that mood fell on me and I put off the recalling and turned to something current that "needed doing." Silly.

Approaching the island it looked much like Oro Bay; there was a low, tree-covered shoreline with mountains on the distant horizon. There were quite a few ships anchored offshore - - a hospital ship with the giveaway huge red cross, freighters, a couple of troop transports, three or four destroyers, even a heavy cruiser. Our arrival was roughly a month after the landing (December 26) and there was no significant fighting going on, although we weren't too sure of that until we came ashore. There was still the occasional straggler/sniper, we had heard.

The day before reaching Cape Gloucester we had had a briefing that described a short, vicious campaign that essentially was over in about two weeks. It was fought in absolutely miserable conditions of almost constant heavy rain. Rifles had to be cleaned two, three, or four times a day, dungarees and boondockers were constantly soggy and quickly became mildewed and smelly. Frontline Marines slept in foxholes always half-filled with water. Jungle ulcers were common - - nasty, oozing sores that healed very slowly (remember the Corps' persistent emphasis on personal hygiene in boot camp). The best thing that could be said was that it hadn't been quite as hot as usual, and casualties were relatively light compared to Guadalcanal and the 2nd Division experience at Tarawa.

I think we all were a little surprised Cape Gloucester was so quiet except for the 6x6 trucks that were constantly roaring around on the beach, picking up supplies and then roaring off to their various outfits. Seabees and their ubiquitous bulldozers were reorganizing the beach terrain and we could hear them working on the nearby airfield that was one of the campaign's main objectives. Occasionally, a P-40 that had been on patrol would also roar over our heads as it made its final approach to the airfield.

I haven't checked the history books or the Marine Corps monographs on the Cape Gloucester campaign (I may do that, should do that before I finish this memoir), and my memory of that period is strictly that of a raw replacement who only was aware of what was going on in his immediate vicinity. I definitely had not developed a sense of my tiny role in the strategic picture. Nevertheless, I was aware that CinCPac (Commander-in-Chief, Pacific) had decided that it was not necessary to reduce New Britain on the ground, which would have required a lot more than one infantry division.

The Jap's biggest naval base outside the home islands was at Rabaul at the northeast end of the island, about 270 miles from Cape Gloucester, and it was extremely important to neutralize it. The plan was to isolate it with land-based and naval air power, saving us grunts for island-hopping northward. This was why the key objective had been to take the airfield at Cape Gloucester, then set up a perimeter around it and secure the ground operation. As it turned out, this plan worked out rather well, and it saved an enormous lot of slogging through jungle-covered mountains.

Anyway, we clambered down the cargo nets into LCVP's (stands for Landing Craft Vehicle/Personnel) and putt-putted ashore. We all had learned that morning which units of the division we were joining and an NCO was assigned in each group to keep things straight. The transfer was pretty efficient. Within a half hour of hitting the beach we were in trucks headed for our new homes away from home.

My new home was to be the R-2 Section, H & S Company, 1st Marines. For landlubbers that probably requires translation. "1st Marines" means the 1st Regiment, not the 1st Marine Division. The 1st Marine Division (then) had three infantry regiments, each totaling about 3500 men - - they were the 1st, 5th, and 7th Marines. The Division also had an artillery regiment, the 10th Marines, and several supporting units such as a tank battalion, an engineer company, a reconnaissance company, and other specialized units which together made up the 1st Marine Division, Reinforced. In total, about 23,000 people.

I was in the Intelligence Section (R-2) of the 1st Marines Headquarters and Service Company. H&S Company had three other principal sections: Administration/Personnel (R-1), Operations (R-3), and Supply (R-4). The regiment's Executive Officer, usually a Lieutenant Colonel, was R-5, and the Commanding Officer, a full Colonel, was R-6. All of

this was standard organization and terminology in those days for both Marine Corps and Army infantry outfits. Some of the Army divisions had four infantry regiments, but they were smaller than Marine regiments and there were other structural variations.

I'm going to bore you with a little more organizational stuff just so you won't think we all went into battle like a bunch of drunken Indians when the Colonel yelled, "Charge!"

From the Division on down organization was triangular, based on the concept that normally two units would be engaged and the third would be held as a reserve or as a maneuver element. The regiment had three battalions, whose basic combat units were three rifle companies, each numbering 225 men and officers. Each company had three rifle platoons of 43 men, and each platoon had three squads of 13 men. I'm describing only combat elements, ignoring staff officers and NCO's, and support people such as communications personnel, special weapons, etc.

The MC has always stressed pushing command down as low as possible, so that when the unexpected happens (and it always does), units will think for themselves and not have to rely on "canned" orders. This was one distinct advantage we had over the Japanese, who tended to become confused if the situation did not fit the orders they had.

The squad is the basic combat unit of the MC, consisting (then) of a sergeant and three fire teams, each of which had a BAR man and three rifleman, one of whom was (or was supposed to be) a corporal as the team leader. The BAR (Browning Automatic Rifle) was capable of full automatic .30 caliber fire at 450 rounds per minute, and was an accurate, reliable weapon. Its chief disadvantage was weight, which I recall as more than 15 pounds without its 20-round magazine.

The advent of the M16 rifle, which is also capable of full automatic fire and is much lighter, has changed the squad organization somewhat but not its role as the basic fire and maneuver unit in the Marine Corps.

Hope your eyes aren't rolling in your head. Let's move on.

THE REAL THING

NEW FAMILY, NEW HOME

A few days after I joined the 1st Marines a significant event occurred- - the regiment was assigned a new R-6, a man whose name even I knew. Lt. Col. Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller

had been relieved of his battalion command in the 7th Marines, was promoted to full Colonel and installed as CO of the 1st Marines. Even in early 1943, Chesty Puller had become an icon for the Corps, the quintessential Marine, three Navy Crosses with two more yet to come, wounded in combat more than once, aggressive, outspoken, sometimes brash, a brilliant tactical planner, fearless and intensely dedicated to destroying the enemy. He fought in Haiti and Nicaragua, typical Marine "police actions", in the 1920's. He was a captain in the "Horse Marines" in China just before WWII, earning part of his reputation by running off a force of Japanese infantry from the International Settlement in Shanghai, without a shot being fired, even though his people were outnumbered.

Lewis B. Puller as a Major General, ca. 1953. (Rank of Colonel in WW2). Note the top left ribbon (blue/white/blue) with four stars indicating five Navy crosses, the most in Marine Corps history. On top of the Navy Crosses, Puller had some 50-odd other decorations, again the most in Corps history.

He led, up close and personal, and he had a reputation for keeping his command post "too close" to his combat elements. On Cape Gloucester he had taken personal command of two platoons that had become disorganized when both lost their lieutenants, quickly leading them to victory over an equally disorganized band of Japanese. I believe this was

the basis for the Navy Cross awarded for his performance on New Britain, but I'm not sure.

He didn't really look the part- -only 5 feet eight inches tall, I would guess he weighed about 150 pounds. Sometimes described as barrel-chested, to me he looked more chicken-breasted. But he had a voice like a bullhorn (I'm convinced he could have addressed the entire regiment without a PA system) and a command presence that belied his appearance. He knew exactly why he was there and what he was supposed to do- -and something in his manner conveyed to the people who served under him that they had better get to the same place mentally.

Not that he was a bully, but he did have his detractors- -some of his fellow officers simply resented the notoriety he had earned. Among the enlisted in the regiment there were a few who actually called him a butcher because casualties in his units tended to be higher than in some others (I will deal with this subject later on, in the Peleliu account), but I never heard anyone who had served directly under him utter a critical word, which includes myself, or who wouldn't follow him wherever he thought we should go. More on that, too, a bit later.

But back to the events of the day. Moving inland from the beach a mile or so and crossing a pontoon bridge over a fair-sized river, the trucks dumped us off at the H&S Company's bivouac area, which was the 1st Marines regimental command post. Every military unit from platoon on up has a command post, and the term will be used so much that from here on I will refer to the CP, and you will know what I mean. We fell in and junior officers from the various sections called out names assigned to their sections- -some to the Communications platoon, some to the Supply section, a few to Heavy Weapons, and so on. I was one of three that went to R-2. The other two were Leo Bouchard from Milford, Massachusetts, and Les Bishop from somewhere in Illinois. We had seen each other on the ship, but none of us knew at the time how we would be assigned.

The officer who collected us was 2nd Lieutenant Jim Chandler, accompanied by the R-2 Section Chief, Gunnery Sergeant Roberts. It turned out that Lt. Chandler had joined the division just before New Britain; Roberts was a Guadalcanal veteran.

Roberts took us down to the tent area where the R-2 people were located, introduced us around, and assigned us to empty sacks in a couple of the tents. While we were stowing our gear Captain George P. Hunt, the R-2, came by and welcomed us. I believe Hunt had been a company commander under Puller in the 7th Marines, but I'm not sure. You will hear more about him later. He told us that all of the replacements would muster the following morning for review by Col. Puller. The next day after our powdered eggs and dehydrated hash browns (the mess situation had improved after the main operation was

secured), the 35 or 40 new hands were lined up in front of Puller's tent and he came out wearing a skivvy shirt, dungaree pants, and no head cover.

I think we all expected some kind of pep talk, but that didn't happen. Puller stopped in front of each man and talked quietly for a minute or so. When he got to me he asked my name, what section I was in, and what I did for my keep. I said, "Corporal Charles Manhoff, R-2 Section, Japanese interrogator, SIR! (Just the way they had taught us in boot camp). He looked at me for a few seconds, smiled and said, "Son, you're a regimental reconnaissance scout who speaks some Japanese. The Japanese could be useful later." I had the feeling he didn't really believe that last bit. Anyway, that is the way I spent the rest of WWII, as a regimental scout who incidentally spoke some Japanese.

Let me describe what an infantry regiment's R-2 section in those days was, and what they did (I would guess it is much the same in today's Corps, with some new wrinkles and much more technology). The 1st Marines' R-2 section had three officers and 21 enlisted. The enlisted component was made up of a Section Head (Gunnery or Platoon Sergeant), a Chief Scout (Platoon Sergeant), 15 Scouts (PFC through Sergeant) and four office personnel. If my memory is correct, a Sgt. George Katrinis was Chief scout at that time.

The ranks in parentheses are "Table of Organization" ranks- -almost none of us throughout the war actually held the T/O ranks because the Marine Corps was too busy to do the paper work most of the time. (I left Okinawa in August, 1945, to go to Officer Candidate School along with only three others from the 1st MarDiv, which suggests I was reasonably well thought of. There were only 29 other OCS candidates from the entire Pacific in our group. I had been Chief Scout, 1st Marines through the entire Okinawan campaign with the rank of Corporal, <u>acting</u> Platoon Sergeant, even though the promotion papers had been submitted five months earlier. Excuse me for getting this ancient gripe off my chest)

Anyway, R-2 was the military intelligence officer on the regimental commander's staff, responsible for keeping the CO abreast of all enemy dispositions, intentions, and capabilities as these things affected the regiment's mission. One of our officers (Chandler) specialized in the interpretation of aerial photographs and map reading, among a number of other things. Lt. Craemer was responsible for training the Scout Section in ground reconnaissance technique, hand-to-hand combat, weapons instruction, and several other operational activities, although it was Roberts and several others who were the actual instructors.

The Regimental Scouts were responsible for maintaining physical contact and observation of the enemy during combat operations out to 3500 yards in front of the regiment's position, according to the book, but this distance was nominal and there was a lot of

variation in the real world. "Maintaining contact", in simple terms, meant being aware of where the enemy was, what he was doing or planning to do, how many he was, what weapons he had, etc. Mainly, this was accomplished with varying degrees of success by manning observation posts on or near the regiment's forward positions and/or by active patrolling, as necessary. We also were charged with physical security of the regimental CP most of the time, since we were the only H&S personnel subjected to more or less continuous training in combat skills and weaponry.

Notwithstanding the foregoing sentence, we were considered non-expendable and were expected to avoid engagement if possible, since our mission was to gather information, not fight the ground war. This distinguishes reconnaissance scouts from combat scouts. Combat scouts are people put into point positions of moving units for the specific purpose of forcing the enemy to reveal himself, frequently by drawing his fire, so they regularly expect to engage. This tends to be considerably more dangerous than reconnaissance that, ideally at least, involves sneaking out, looking around, and sneaking back. The combat training was tacit acknowledgement that some situations could be less than ideal.

Since any engagement that we might get into would be essentially defensive, nine of the 15 scouts were armed with Thompson submachine guns, either the M1 model or, if we were lucky, the old 1928A1 of the Capone days. The latter had a cyclic rate of fire of 450 rounds per minute, versus 750 rpm for the M1, and could be held on target much more accurately. I tried the Thompson for a while but felt I was much more competent with the M1 Rifle and opted to return to that weapon. I had a very strong preference for being able to pick off a hostile at 300+ yards, never intending to let one get as close as 30 yards where the Thompson starts to excel.

Fun Times on Cape Gloucester

For the first couple of days there didn't seem to be much going on except cleanup after the fighting had stopped. Some of the R-2 personnel were out scrounging new socks and skivvy shorts, usually from some supply sergeant they knew in one of the battalions. Puller was a stickler for getting supplies and equipment down to the line companies first, so "Ski" (I don't remember his actual name, but it was Polish), the H&S supply sergeant, was always the last to get stuff in. They did issue me a watch with a luminous dial.

I was a little wide-eyed mingling with these old hands that had won the battles of Guadalcanal and New Britain and I wanted to hear some "real" war stories, but also not wanting to seem wet behind the ears I mostly listened. Sometimes a discussion about an aspect of the recent action would crop up, usually centering on what some individual had

done or not done, or some funny thing that had happened. Most of the old hands were low key about much of the fighting but would talk about it matter-of-factly for the benefit of a new hand if asked. I learned much more about the "real stuff" during later training sessions that had to deal with specifics.

Much more often the talk would be about some girlie conquest during the glory days in Melbourne after the division was relieved at Guadalcanal and sent to Australia for rehabilitation. The Aussies had welcomed them with open arms (literally, in the case of many of the women) as the saviors of Australia by stopping the Japanese advance southward. Not a man I talked with didn't have a misty expression on his face when talking about the nine months in Melbourne, and all were looking forward to going back fairly soon, since the city of Melbourne had officially invited the division to return. Even I started to get excited.

Party Time on Cape Gloucester, Part 1

One of the more interesting characteristics of that particular CP was that a nightly "crocodile watch" was necessary because of the nearby river. There had been an incident a week before when one of the cooks had walked out of his tent into the company street and encountered an adult crocodile pushing over a garbage container near the mess tent. Naturally, he gave a very animated scream, ran back into his tent, and within 10 seconds he and a couple more were firing their weapons at the beast, which rapidly retreated to the riverbank and disappeared. The story was, "…that (s)ucker had to be 15 feet long!!"

Puller did not want people randomly firing their weapons inside the perimeter in the middle of the night, so a crocodile sentry was posted at the end of the company street nearest the river. There were four-hour watches from sundown to sunrise. The sentry was armed with an M1, but the post was away from the main tent area. As I was a newcomer and therefore an easy target for the regimental sergeant major, I drew the 12-4 watch the third night after joining the regiment. I really sort of looked forward to it and secretly hoped I might see a croc.

However, there was a distraction that evening. With nothing serious going on, a few of the old hands had commandeered a case of pineapple juice and some yeast from the mess sergeant a day or two before we came ashore, putting this stuff in a couple of jerricans and letting it sit in the sun to ferment, and it was now deemed ready for consumption. The party started about 2030 (8:30 p.m.), and since it was only two tents away and I was a new hand, I was invited. They strained the rather thick, yellow ooze through dish towels a couple of times and pronounced it aged and mellow. This was one form of the generic poison called Jungle Juice. For a more refined product, fruit juice was combined with sick bay alcohol, but that was usually tough to acquire. We had music, even - guitar and

trombone. At that stage in my life I would try anything that someone else did, as long as they didn't keel over on the spot, but I was determined to be prudent because I had that midnight watch coming up.

I limited myself to only two canteen cups of that Pineapple Punch during the rather noisy evening, but it seemed to get as far as my stomach and then refused to budge. When Henderson sent me off at 2345 hours to relieve the Croc Watch my stomach felt like it had a small bowling ball in it, but I was pretty chipper and not at all sleepy. The croc sentry was not expected to actually stand the watch, and the man I relieved had constructed a sort of easy chair with Elephant Ear leaves leaned up against a big tree. I took this rustic throne over and found it pretty comfortable. Every 15-20 minutes I got up, walked the ten yards to the river's edge and looked for floating "logs" but never saw anything. After a couple of hours as I leaned back against the tree I realized I was seeing pinpoints of light in the tree canopy, which was at least 140 feet above me, and I realized that I must be looking at some kind of fireflies. There were literally hundreds of them, but the remarkable thing was that they all seemed to be blinking on and off together, like those Christmas tree lights that can do that. I pondered this a bit, wondering if the jungle juice was getting to me, but decided that it was the fireflies and not I.

The last hour and a half of that watch was one of the low points in my life as I progressively developed one of the worst hangovers I had ever experienced, pulsating with a gargantuan headache and with the bowling ball in my stomach refusing to go any farther. I was making unintelligible groaning noises when my relief showed up, but managed to stagger back to my tent, falling into my sack without taking my boondockers off, and wondering if I would live to sunup.

I wasn't much better for a couple of hours the next morning, but gradually recovering, I tried to tell the story of the amazing fireflies in the tree. This was met with loud guffaws and rude accusations that I was a green replacement who couldn't handle his jungle juice.

I never did drink that stuff again, but forty years later, reading in Science magazine or some such publication, there was a feature article describing the remarkable synchronized fireflies of Melanesia. There even was a picture showing them flashing in the night. Scientists had no idea how they communicated to achieve the precise on-off tempo of their little lanterns. But the article came too late- -the party was over. In case you question my long-ago sobriety, try "Fireflies" in google.com.

Party Time on Cape Gloucester, Part 2

It was about this time that Capt. Hunt disappeared. Puller installed him as a company commander in the 3rd Battalion, and a new officer, Capt. Horton, replaced him as the R-2.

Up to this point the war still seemed far away. Even though I was right where it all had happened, the P-40 fighters kept coming in off patrol, and the destroyers and cruisers were still offshore, I had not heard a shot fired or seen anything to distinguish this from the training sessions at Oro Bay. The jungle looked about the same.

That changed. On the day after my No-Crocodile Watch, Katrinis or Roberts called me out before breakfast and said Captain Horton wanted to see us. We trudged over and the Captain explained that Division was uneasy that there had been no sign of the Japs in the Cape Gloucester area for several days. Air reconnaissance had spotted stragglers about 50 miles east on mountainous jungle trails, presumably in an effort to reach Rabaul, but Division wanted confirmation that no counterattack was being organized. The 1st and 7th Marines each were to send out platoon-sized combat patrols along two different routes, either to contact, or to the extent of a 3-day march from the Cape Gloucester perimeter. The 5th Marines were to send out a much larger force to see if they could catch up with General Hori Matsuda, the Japanese commander in the Cape Gloucester action, and his entourage.

Horton told me I was to draw four days C-rations, extra ammunition, and report immediately to the 'K' Company lieutenant who would lead the regiment's patrol out the next morning. My mission was to be available to the lieutenant for questioning any prisoners we might acquire, and to pick up any meaningful documents. With my hair standing slightly on end I did so, spending the night with the line troops.

We moved out early the next morning. The platoon was reinforced with a light machine gun section (two .30 caliber MG's), and two very dark Melanesian scouts who came from a village 10 miles up the river. Their front teeth were filed to points and stained red from chewing betel nut. If you ran into them on a dark night it would have been pretty unnerving, but despite their ferocious smiles they were a congenial pair who disliked the Japanese intensely and were very happy the USMC had arrived. Altogether, the patrol numbered about 50, two-thirds of whom, including Lt. Maples, were veterans of two jungle campaigns. They were pretty cool and it still felt like a fancy training assignment. I wasn't worried. Maples told me to stick by him like glue, I suppose because he didn't trust a green hand not to screw something up.

The plan was to move up the river in rubber boats equipped with small outboards the first day, stow the boats at our Melanesian guides' riverside village, and move out on foot the second day, led by our native scouts, to the main east-west trail that anybody trying to get to Rabaul would logically use. We were to report by radio between noon and 1300 each day- -if we did not on the second day (radio range in the jungle was dicey), an L-19

artillery observation plane would show up for short-range communication. Since we were to turn around on the 3rd day, no airdrop of supplies or ammo was anticipated.

With the point boat leading the main group of six by about 200 yards, things went about as forecast and we saw nothing hostile except a number of crocodiles sunning on the riverbank and a couple of low islands in mid-river. A couple of the crocs were huge- -at least 18 feet long and 4 feet through the middle- -but most were no more than 8-12 feet. The food supply must have been good because we saw at least 40 during the day. It was steamy hot, but not many of us let our outboard feet dangle in the water.

That evening we bivouacked at the edge of the village with our security out, although the headman told us the last Japanese had passed by three days earlier, had demanded food, and then moved on. He said some of them looked sick- -only a few carried "long sticks" (rifles). That's pidgin English, which most of the New Britain natives spoke. My pidgin never amounted to much, but even that is long gone. It would sound something like this: "Jap man go long boat this place no gine, him carry some short knife, no many long sticks." Translated, the "Japs went by canoes with no engines (gine) from here, (most) with bayonets but few rifles. (One thing that generally was not known by the general public and even some military types was that the Japanese Army equipped only front line units with rifles or other firearms. Rear area and support units, except for officers, usually carried only bayonets and, sometimes, hand grenades.

The next morning we moved out early and Lt. Maples pushed his point men and the rest of us hard. By midday we made the main east-west trail and started seeing debris that the Japanese had left behind: pieces of wood and paper from ration boxes, a canvas jungle boot, empty backpacks, even a couple of broken-down bicycles. As the density of this jetsam grew, the point moved more carefully and this slowed our progress, everyone listening hard, no talking. Even so, by the end of the afternoon we had made another 11-12 miles from our morning starting point. Still no contact. We stopped, the lieutenant put out Cossack (2-man) listening posts fore and aft, standing 2-hour watches, and we hunkered down for the long, long night. If you want to know what is the longest night possible on earth, try sitting out in the middle of a jungle at sundown, no talking except in whispers, no fires, no smoking, no clinking of helmets or other gear. I did manage to sleep some, waking up every hour or two, but it took forever before the rosy-fingered dawn crept through the rain forest canopy.

The word was passed down the line to wake up, eat a D-bar (I'll tell you about C-rations later), and get ready to move out. It was then that we smelled it- -smoke. Maples ordered total silence down the line, motioned to his platoon sergeant and me to follow, and started down the trail. This part of the trail was virgin- -high canopy above us and very little undergrowth so it was fairly open between the big trees. There was a slight rise ahead of

us and the trail appeared to drop away. We had begun to hear talking, some laughter, metal clinking. We moved off the trail a few yards and approached the rise on our stomachs. As we crested, the ground dropped away into a shallow bowl about 50 yards across.

And there they were, 40 or so Japs, sitting around talking, making tea if you can believe it. I was electrified, my hair on end I'm sure- -these guys were real, not some actors in a war movie. But I collected myself and watched Lt. Maples, who was looking right and left. The nearest were no more than 30 yards away, chatting as if they were on a picnic. There was no sign of any security posted. Smoke from the two small fires hung in the still morning air, slowly drifting in our direction, carrying an underlying scent that I remember thinking smelled faintly like an outhouse, no less.

Maples motioned and we slid backwards, the sergeant taking off to bring up the rest of the platoon. I had only heard a couple of whispered words to him from Maples, but within five minutes two squads had silently moved up to the right and left of us, with the third fanned out about 10 yards to the rear. A couple of hand signals and our whole line moved to the crest of the rise in a running crouch, (me sticking with the lieutenant as I had been told to do), fell into the prone position, and when Maples fired a shot from his carbine, 21 M-1 rifles and 4 BAR's erupted all at once. It was a grisly, pathetic turkey shoot that couldn't have taken more than 30-40 seconds before every one down in the hollow was either dead or about to be. There were only half a dozen or so Arisaka rifles among them, but I don't believe a single shot was returned. One Jap managed to throw a small grenade, but it was short. We had no casualties.

Yes, I fired my M-1. Pure, reflex mostly, the ground-in result of months of training and mental conditioning. I didn't hesitate to ponder the ethics, although I did later. If there was any subconscious motivation it was an urge to stop any of those people from getting hold of a rifle and shooting back. I know I hit five of them, maybe six, but my bullet was the first one only twice, I think.

With the rest of us covering, two fire teams carefully moved down and turned over bodies looking for anyone who still might react, but there was no one. Maples had a couple of his people help me look through pockets and knapsacks for any documents, diaries, or anything else that might hold some useful information. There were no officers in this group and we didn't find much, but it was a very unpleasant job because of the blood, entrails, and other "debris" that made it clear why I had noticed the outhouse smell- - a number of the Japs obviously were suffering from dysentery and their pants were a mess.

It was one aspect of military intelligence I hadn't anticipated. What was it that Sherman said?

Wrap Up and Withdrawal

Lt. Maples thought we had accomplished our mission and didn't waste any time mounting us up for the return to the Division perimeter. We were 20+ miles out in front of friendly territory and we had made a lot of racket. There was no assurance that there weren't more coming up behind us or even others coming back to find out what the ruckus was about, and they might be more capable than the ones we had encountered. We moved out smartly with security fore and aft, making it back late the following day.

The only event on the return trip was a funny episode about halfway back to the little river village. Things had been going along quietly when suddenly there was yelling and a commotion a hundred yards ahead where our native scouts were leading the patrol. When we caught up, our two locals were leaping about and were hacking away with machetes at something on the ground. It turned out to be a 13-foot python that had dropped out of a tree on one of them. They were delighted, grinning their horrendous grins. With some help from us they got the whole thing, in pieces, back to the village where it was promptly skinned for dinner. We paid the two boys off and moved on in our rubber dinghies, since the sun was still high.

I reported everything I had seen to Capt. Horton, with Roberts present, and turned over the few papers I had picked up, all of which he accepted without much comment. When I finished he smiled and said, "Well done, Manhoff. We'll see if we can't find you a more productive assignment next time." I realized this was a gentle joke and said, "Thank you, Sir."

There is a cornball old adage, voiced by all branches, to the effect that war is made up of long stretches of sheer boredom interspersed with occasional short periods of abject terror. Like all corny sayings, there are real elements of truth behind the words, but I had learned, or figured out, some things on this outing- -

Best of all, I learned I could react to the "short periods" without freezing, or otherwise making a fool of myself, or doing something that could endanger others. Enormously reassuring.

In the moment, I had no delaying instant of moral indecision in firing a high-powered rifle at a man who had no weapon in his hands just then. Make of it what you will, but this also was weirdly reassuring, even at the time when I didn't consciously understand it. (Borrowing from experience yet to come I would say firmly that combat is not a moral, Marquis of Queensbury arena. The rules are different and survival is a virtue. Had I hesitated the man might have picked up a rifle and put a bullet in my or a friend's forehead- -which would have done nothing for the country or the folks back home.)

The Japs, usually very disciplined when operating under orders or within book doctrine, were lousy when outside of these confines. Lt. Maples told me they were very poor on security discipline in situations like the one we had met. They simply had not been trained in how to behave when in retreat, because the assumption was that they would never be in retreat.

Lt. Maples had never intended to try to collect any prisoners, lacking specific orders to do so. (Reflecting on this later, with some accumulated experience, I would have made the same decision. Twenty miles out in front of any support it would have been too dangerous, measured against small potential gain.)

Hand signals are good. In Boot Camp they seemed a little silly and theatrical. Not true.

The 7th Marines patrol had an experience much like ours. Two days out they found a ragtag bunch of stragglers, half of them sick, but they didn't catch them by surprise. There was a brief firefight, one US wounded, and about 75 dead Japanese. Again, there were no prisoners. The 5th Marines force, nearly a battalion in strength, were out for two weeks and found Gen. Matsuda's headquarters people about 50 miles up the trail to Rabaul, but no general. He had abandoned a couple of hundred troops, most of them too sick to be a threat. I believe the 5th did bring prisoners back, but I never saw any of them.

Of the roughly 70,000 Japanese that were trying to get northeast to Rabaul, maybe 10% survived (my guess, not the Marine Corps'), with the rest dying from starvation or dysentery or crocodiles or whatever. Not a very glorious way to die for the Emperor.

A-Boating We Will Go

A few days after the river patrol there was one more adventure waiting for me. Roughly 100 miles east of Cape Gloucester on the island's north coast is Cape Talasea, where the Japs had a subordinate naval supply base that was in some tatters because of air and naval action, but it was a likely way-station for retreating Japanese troops and Division wanted to know if it deserved reduction by ground troops. If so, Puller had been told it would be his responsibility.

Once more, a patrol was constituted to visit Talasea, but this time it was to be a reconnaissance patrol: six of us from the R-2 section, led by a Guadalcanal veteran named Perkins. It would be transported on two PT boats (same kind Jack Kennedy made famous). If feasible, we would go ashore about a half-mile south of the base and move in to get a close look. I was going along because there might be a Jap available for conversation. It sounded like a fun time in Jap Land, particularly because it was all to happen at night. My hair was standing on end again, but of course I didn't let it show.

We were issued the Navy version of motorcycle belts and told we would be most comfortable if we could maintain a prone position as we all loaded on one boat. The second boat was for insurance and enhanced covering fire with the flexible mount .50 calibers, if needed. This cute little flotilla departed just at sunset for the 3 ½-hour cruise up the coast. The boats' torpedoes had been unloaded to lighten the hulls for more speed and to reduce the chance of explosion in the event we took some fire. PT boats had monster engines and could do close to 40 knots, but the plan was to run at about 30, slowing for the last five miles in the interest of silence. There was only a light chop but it was still the bumpiest ride I have ever had at sea.

About 2200 hours the engines quieted and we swung eastward to pick up the shoreline- -no lights of any kind showed either on us or ashore as the boats ghosted along. There was only a new moon, which Capt. Horton thought would work to our advantage. Horton was a good officer, but I don't think he had ever been on a night patrol where one could hardly see one's hand in front of one's face while trying to negotiate a mangrove swamp without making any noise. There were no night goggles in those days.

Luck was with us. As we just started to make out the outlines of a broken down jetty and a beached barge ahead, the mangrove petered out and became a narrow sand beach. Still no lights or sound ahead. While the two PT's stood off about 200 yards we rolled into two rubber boats and paddled quietly into the beach and started to work along a line of palmetto scrub along the backside of the beach. Perkins had two point men lead and stop after 30 yards, while the rest of us were fanned out prone on the beach for cover. When we saw them stop, we moved single file along the palmetto scrub until we caught up, then the whole process was repeated. It only took about 15 minutes of this to reach the rattan fence marking the edge of the encampment- -from what we could see, there was nothing standing that would prompt the word "base".

There still was no sign of life as we carefully moved into the complex, but there was a lot of debris. The B-25's 100 lb. bombs and the P-40 strafing runs had done a pretty complete job of tearing up nipa and bamboo buildings, and secondary fires had caused a lot more damage. Once more the war gods had smiled on a green reconnaissance scout. The Japanese, unable to support this base because of air and naval interdiction, had abandoned it and there was nobody around to shoot at us, but it had been a good practice routine. We mounted up and went home; there would be no need for further ground action.

AAR (After Action Report)

I could go on the Net or to the library and compile a bunch of facts and statistics about the New Britain campaign, but I'm telling this story from my personal viewpoint and what I

saw. I don't intend to make it a general history of the Pacific war, although I will provide enough background later to keep things in context.

A grunt Marine doesn't see or hear much beyond the few hundred yards to the right and left that are within his ken, and he doesn't understand a lot of what is going on in the Big Picture. In my case, after I got past the "Gee Whiz! Did you see that?" stage the world around me expanded because I was around senior officers and headquarters activity that helped me understand events, but I will continue to keep the chronicle on a personal plane and not bore you with Charlie's Explanation of WWII. Actually, I have about exhausted my recollection of significant happenings on New Britain, partly because it was new and kaleidoscopic, and partly because it was 59 years ago. I think my recollections of later events may be more comprehensive.

Head 'em Up, Move 'em Out!!

By now it was well into March, 1944. The regiment continued to clean up and reorganize itself, some additional replacements arrived and were integrated into the outfit, but all combat elements of the division were really in poor shape. The same conditions that had made such a mess of the retreating Japanese had been inflicted on the 1st MarDiv for over two months. Despite the old faithful Atabrine, there were a fair number of malaria cases, probably due mostly to people neglecting to take their daily pill in the mess of combat and the terrible weather during the campaign. Atabrine was a little yellow pill that, taken daily, was a quite effective malaria suppressant/prophylactic. It turned one's skin yellow, as in a severe case of jaundice. Once, when our ship was anchored at Oro Bay, I had dropped one pill (half the size of an aspirin) over the side and watched it diffuse a bright, yellow-green stain over a circle at least 15 feet across. I suspect it might even have kept sharks away.

There were other diseases around, also, the most prevalent being the ubiquitous jungle ulcers, along with dysentery, some cases of dengue fever, and even a few cases of elephantiasis and bush typhus. But mostly it was general debilitation from weeks of living in almost constant rain, poor food, and plain, old mental and physical exhaustion from the stress of combat. The prospect of recuperating for several months in civilized, hospitable Melbourne in the company of pretty girls was overpoweringly brilliant in the minds of 23,000 pooped-out jarheads. It was with much anticipation that H&S Company, together with the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, boarded one of the old President freighters (I think it was the McKinley, but I'm not sure) in early April. Much of the rest of the Division boarded other vessels, and off we sailed, bound for Heaven.

"ISLAND BEYOND BELIEF"

That title is plagiarized from a chapter in one of the better books written about the Old Breed in WWII. It derives from the shock of hearing after only four days at sea the ship's PA system blare out, "All hands! Now hear this! We will anchor tomorrow morning at the island of Pavuvu, where all Marine personnel will disembark. That is all!"

There was dumbfounded silence all over the ship- -where in hell was Pavuvu, and why were we getting off there? During the night the word was passed around by the officers that Pavuvu was to be the 1st Division's rest area- -the Division was not returning to Melbourne. Pavuvu was the largest island in the Russells, an insignificant group of small islands 60-70 miles northwest of Guadalcanal, which had been the site of a Lever Bros. coconut plantation before the war. An adjacent small island, Banika, held a full-scale Navy supply depot and hospital.

This news was the heaviest blow to a Marine unit's morale that I have ever seen, before or since, but as we sailed into the turquoise waters of Macquitti Bay the next morning it didn't look too bad- -soft tropical breezes, white sand beaches, neat rows of coconut trees, a typical South Sea island. But first impressions were deceiving. Behind the pretty beach and the orderly rows of coconut trees the terrain was a nightmare. It was a coral-founded island full of bottomless sinkholes, dense jungle, and swamps with quicksand, virtually impassable on foot, and totally impassable for machines. We were also to find that it was home to one of the largest colonies of land crabs in the Pacific- -ugly, reddish creatures that migrated at night, hiding in Marine field boots when daylight came, and stinking to high heaven when dead- -as well as an endless parade of hungry mice and rats the size of Chihuahuas.

But the worst single aspect of Pavuvu for the Division was that there were no roads, no infrastructure, no developed camp areas to handle 23,000 men. So the debilitated jarheads of the 1st MarDiv had to build it all, with a small amount of help from the Seabees. For the first two months and beyond there were endless work parties to clean up, lay coral subgrades for roads so trucks and other vehicles could move, dig (or blast) latrines, build mess halls, wood floors for pyramidal tents, coral walkways within the bivouac areas, etc. It was hard, furnace-hot, heavy labor. For a long time the food was pretty bad, too, with almost no fresh stuff being brought in despite the presence of the established naval base on nearby Banika. I have read that an official Marine Corps publication stated with remarkable frankness, "The incidence of sickness shot upward, while morale plummeted to the lowest point it ever reached during the Pacific service of this elite outfit."

It also was a poor place for most training operations because the terrain was so impossible beyond the plantation itself. As a ludicrous example, the Division garbage dump was located in a swampy depression at the edge of the plantation area- -we rather enjoyed training new replacements in patrol technique by showing them how to sneak up, observe, and then murder some of the numerous rats domiciled there (with submachine gun fire, preferably). We had to get clearance from Division, of course, to prevent some unsuspecting garbage truck driver from being scared out of his wits. How about that for sophisticated, high-tech methodology? The line companies had an even harder time because of the limited space available for fire and movement operations (some of them even used the garbage dump venue for training flamethrower teams).

Much more has been written about the horrors of Pavuvu by various authors, most of whom never lived there, gleaning their information from others. I'm not going to repeat all that stuff here because a lot of it is exaggeration. Despite the foregoing paragraphs, it wasn't too bad most of the time. We had movies, volleyball nets were up, once even a USO show (including the untiring, faithful Bob Hope, Jerry Colonna, Frances Langford troupe), and various units developed their own entertainment groups; some of which were surprisingly talented. We had a regimental library that had quite a range of soft cover books. I think much of the griping stems from buried grudges that the Division was not allowed to go back to Melbourne to shack up with the Aussie girls. I realize that is a bit crude, but it is probably accurate. Certainly the scarcity of creature distractions served to keep the Division focused and mean, which in the end may have helped save lives.

A funny by-product of the Pavuvu experience grew out of an idea the regimental surgeon had after we had been on the island a month or so. After he had treated one man for an infected foreskin, he put out the word that he and one of the other doctors would perform circumcisions for anyone who stepped forward, in the interest of jungle hygiene. Ten days of light duty accompanied the offer, enhancing its appeal. There were quite a few volunteers. Since there were no women on the island at that point there was no modesty issue, and for several weeks there was the occasional sight of a Marine walking about the company area with his bandaged appendage hanging out of his fly, which substantially reduced the pain and irritation factor.

Another funny thing happened, this time to me, after we had been on the island about three weeks. Because the R-2 office tent had some sensitive material (mostly Navy communications manuals, and some maps and after-action reports, not really Eyes-Only stuff) stored in a couple of locked filing cabinets, we drew one-man armed guard duty on four-hour watches from 1800 to 0600 hours. All enlisted except for the Section Chief and the Chief Scout stood watch, so we had it only about once a week, and it wasn't very onerous because all we had to do was sit in a camp chair for four hours. The first time I drew this duty was on the 2200-0200 watch. Nobody about, so dozing was expected and

virtually unavoidable.

Knowing that the ever-present mice were about, I had propped my feet up on a cross-leg canvas campstool so they couldn't skitter across my feet. I wasn't quite asleep when about midnight, through slitted eyes, I saw a small, gray form flip over the edge of the stool and into my pant leg. Electrified, I rose vertically out of the chair uttering totally inhuman animal growls and snarls (I never knew I could make sounds like that), slapping my leg and managing to trap the beastie just below my hipbone, frantically trying to disentangle myself from my Thompson submachine gun without blowing my leg off, scrabbling at my trouser belt and fly buttons until I finally got my pants down so I could toss him out. I had totally squeezed the life out of the little sucker and he lay on the floor unmoving, with me still growling and snarling. I have no idea how he managed to get on top of that stool, but I never again failed to tuck my pants legs into my socks before I dozed off. I was lucky- -there was no one around to hear the ridiculous noises I had made, or I would have been razzed unmercifully. It doesn't take much to revert one to the primeval state.

By July, conditions on the island had improved a bit and we learned the Division's next objective was going to be in the Palau Islands, specifically a small island about the size of Pavuvu called Peleliu where the Japs had built an airfield. None of us had ever heard of the place. Also in July, the arrival of almost 5,000 replacements from the States meant that many of the Guadalcanal and New Britain veterans could be rotated home. This didn't do much for the morale of those of us left behind, but a subtle change began to work through the Division, probably best described by a document in the Marine Corps Historical Center archives:

"The new men, fresh from the amenities of Stateside life, were poorly conditioned for the wretched life into which they had been so rudely pitched (Author's note: They hadn't been "lucky" enough to be conditioned on New Caledonia and Oro Bay, as my replacement battalion had.) Yet, despite all the discouragement and hardships, such was the spirit and resiliency of this veteran combat outfit, passed on by the old-timers to the infusion of new blood, that morale rebounded progressively as the prospect of going into action again became more imminent."

Let me stop for a moment and say that it has been slow and murky at times to pull up the memories of nearly 60 years ago, but that paragraph rang a bell for me. The advent of replacements on Pavuvu changed my world. Some of the old hands I had looked up to were gone, and all at once I was one of the "old hands". Even some of the training responsibilities were delegated to me, and I was given some problem-solving patrol assignments, just as if I knew what I was doing. All in all, it was a good time in spite of the hardships. Increased emphasis on hand-to-hand combat covered us with multiple welts

and bruises even though “strikes” were pulled and our Ka-Bars were wielded in their leather sheaths. A botched map reading exercise (at night) drew serious criticism by me, and criticism of me by Lt. Chandler. Training activities that had been mostly a sweaty chore ceased to be abstract- -occasionally you could see the open questions in the eyes of the new men…”What’s it going to be like? Will I really be able to do this?”

A Marine historian, Robert Leckie, who had been a machine gunner on Guadalcanal, later wrote a good book called *Strong Men Armed* in which he described the rejuvenation phase on Pavuvu thusly, “The great thing is abroad again. The fighting spirit is unfurling like a banner on the winds of pride, and all that remains is to draw up the plan of battle.”

Prelude: The Road to Hell

So far I have kept this account on a personal basis, my reactions and experiences in a small part of the drama unfolding in the Pacific, but the next episode was so convoluted and tortured in its genesis, and so tragic, horrific, and simultaneously glorious in its execution and outcome, that some wider background is needed to understand a campaign that never should have happened at all. Much of what follows in this section I did not know about at the time, some of it not until years later as I read other people's accounts of the Division's WWII history.

The road to Japan for US forces had been a point of vigorous and not very friendly contention between Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur. I don't intend to develop this subject in detail, but the main difference was that MacArthur wanted to retake the Philippines on the way, which Nimitz thought was unnecessary. In an historic meeting with President Roosevelt in Honolulu in July, 1944 (remember, we were integrating the replacements at this time on Pavuvu, and had been told we were going to Peleliu) they fought it out and for reasons not entirely military, FDR backed MacArthur's plan, called Operation Stalemate, which would include invasions of Mindanao, and then Leyte immediately following capture of Peleliu. The die was cast, D-Day for Peleliu was to be September 15, but the story doesn't quite end there, as you will see.

The strategic purpose of the Palau operation was to secure General Macarthur's eastern flank in support of the planned U. S. Army invasion of Leyte in October, 1944, part of his pompous "I shall return" declaration, and now the next step after Mindanao in the island-hopping approach to Japan. The main assault in the Palaus was the 1st MarDiv responsibility; which would land on Peleliu. Major General William H. Rupertus (who had been CO of the Division on New Britain) would continue in command, with Brig. Gen. Oliver P. Smith as his Assistant Division Commander (ADC). In support, the Army's untested 81st Infantry Division would take the small, nearby island of Angaur and then stand by in reserve.

As Leckie said, all that remained was to draw up the plan of battle, but therein lay a strange story. There never has been a satisfactory explanation, but under orders that only could have originated with Lt. Gen. Archie Vandegrift, Commandant of the Marine Corps, Rupertus flew to Washington when the Division left New Britain. That alone wouldn't have been strange if he had returned to Pavuvu quickly to participate in planning for the Peleliu operation, but he did not. He did not rejoin the Division for almost six weeks, in late June, and by that time his staff under Gen. Smith had developed the entire battle plan without input from the Division's commanding general. Rupertus was given a briefing and he rubber-stamped the plan without altering it, and without giving an explanation for his long absence.

On Guadalcanal the Division had been under the command of Vandegrift, with then Brig. Gen. Rupertus as his ADC. The success on Guadalcanal resulted in Vandegrift's promotion to Commandant of the Corps, and at his recommendation Rupertus was promoted to Major General and given command of the Division. The two officers had known each other for many years and the perception by peers and subordinates was that Vandegrift held Rupertus in higher esteem than almost anyone else did. Rupertus was a strange duck, at least in his later years. He was aloof, often sullen and uncommunicative to his staff, and he had a reputation for "letting the other guy do the dirty stuff." When he returned to Pavuvu in late June he informed Gen. Smith that he was setting up a personal command post and mess separate from the ADC and the rest of the staff, asking that Smith provide him with a few junior staff members to keep him apprised of what was going on in the Division! He had treated General Lemuel Shepherd, his ADC on New Britain in the same way. In the words of a retired brigadier general interviewed after the war, "It was a helluva way to run either a railroad or a Marine division, especially one getting ready for an assault landing." There are dozens of other stories about Rupertus, but this is enough to provide a sense of the man. Through luck or providence I later was an observer of actions, or inactions, by him that I believe cost many lives.

An interesting sidebar is that both Smith and Shepherd retired as four-star generals, the latter as Commandant of the Corps. Rupertus receded from view after Peleliu under a cloud.

The Plot thickens…

It was late July, and preparations for the Peleliu invasion continued apace, but some of it bordered on the ludicrous. There was so little usable terrain on the island that platoon or company fire-and-maneuver exercises often had to be conducted in the unit's bivouac areas—it was pretty funny watching fire teams using bounding overwatch down through the tents on a company street. Infantry combined arms drills with tanks and halftracks were a joke, with the tracked vehicles frequently bogging down in quicksand or coral sinkholes. Despite the difficulties, morale continued to rise- -we were doing what we were out there to do instead of pick and shovel work.

In the background, however, some things were going on that we at the grunt level weren't aware of. Communications between CinCPac (Commander-in-Chief, Pacific) and the Division were slow and rife with continued misunderstandings, and the logistical buildup was in trouble. Part of this confusion was because the invasions of Guam, Saipan, and Tinian were in full swing and held the primary attention of headquarters in Hawaii. Most of the physical problems were finally worked out through brute determination, but a serious

lack of accurate intelligence on Peleliu's terrain and the enemy's strength and capability continued right up to D-Day, and this was tragic. Also, there was concern about the competency of the Army's 81st Division that had been training (?) in Hawaii for two years, but had never fired a shot at anyone. The feeling was that they knew a lot about the beaches of Waikiki and the bars on Honolulu's Hotel Street, but maybe not much about how to pass through the lines in relief of a frontline regiment. Their primary assignment to seize the small island of Angaur 7 miles south of Peleliu was not expected to be difficult, but their reserve role in support of the Division was much more in question.

By late August we were as ready as we would ever be. General Rupertus called most of the Division's officers together and told them it was going to be a fast operation- -three days, maybe only two. I was in the R-2 office tent when Colonel Puller, along with his staff, returned from Division with a face that belied the message Captain Horton passed on to us about the General's optimism. Puller didn't say anything, just went on into his tent. It was the first sign we had had that some of our officers were not all that confident about the operation, but of course none of them said anything negative to us.

The Shadow of the Man Who Leads Us…

It was about this time that there was a telling incident to illuminate the character of Maj. Gen. Rupertus, CO of the 23,500 men of the 1stMarDiv, Reinforced. Somewhere in that July-August period, I believe it was August, I was called to the R-2 tent and Horton said, "Corporal, the R-1 has been asked to provide a six-man work party from H&S Company down at the Division dock this afternoon. They didn't say what the job was. Take the six scouts with the least time in the Section and report to Staff Sergeant Wilkins at the G-1 office after noon chow." I was getting a bit spoiled, not having pulled a work party assignment for some time, but it was "Aye, aye, Sir."

When the seven of us arrived at the Division dock we found an identical work party from the 7th Marines there, along with a small mountain of wooden boxes. The boxes all carried the Seagram's logo and a stenciled sign that said "Compliments of the Employees of General Motors." Each held 12 bottles of Kentucky bourbon. We were issued 4"x4" packages of sandpaper and instructed to sand off the words on each individual bottle cap, which read "For Enlisted Use Only". We dutifully did our job for the rest of the afternoon, but by the time we arrived back at regiment the word had already spread all over the Division by tom-tom and grapevine.

Apparently, Rupertus had decreed that the Division couldn't afford to have the breakdown of discipline that would result from having that much whisky in the hands of enlisted men, and that it would be distributed equitably among the various officer's messes. We learned later that one third of the windfall was retained by the two Division officer's messes

(remember, Rupertus had his own mess, separate from the rest of the Division staff).

The evening of the following day, Lt. Chandler came by with a sea bag holding six bottles, the entire R-2 section allotment commandeered from the officer's mess. He said, as he handed the bag over to Perkins, "This is a clandestine visit, not authorized by the higher powers. I wasn't here, and if any of you guys are dumb enough to leak news of contraband goods, or if anyone shows up out of his gourd, we'll say you stole it and the lot of you will be digging coral for latrines for a month. That's straight from me, Horton, and the Colonel. I don't want to hear any response because I'm not here." With that, he turned and walked out.

I'm sure this happened in other units around the Division, but I never heard anything from anybody, ever. It was amazing.

Somehow, though, the word did leak out about this episode some months later and was picked up by a Time correspondent in Pearl Harbor. An article appeared that told the story without naming names (we heard). I never saw the article and can't even verify if it actually happened, but it probably did in some form. There were hundreds of guys that returned to the States on rotation before and after the Peleliu operation that would have loved to spread such a juicy story.

But back to real life. In early September, 1944, the Division loaded out for the 2,100 mile trip to the Palaus. Captain Horton informed me that I was detached to Headquarters, 2nd Battalion, to act as a "ghoul" for the first few days, picking up documents from dead bodies or overrun positions that might be useful at Regimental or Division level. I was to stay with the front line companies in this role and report to him each day by radio. So I left the relative comfort of the R-2 section and sailed away on an LST (Landing Ship, Tank) with elements of an assault battalion, for I knew not what.

Meanwhile, Back at the Ranch…

During this period between New Britain and Peleliu, dramatic events were transpiring in the Central and Western Pacific which could have altered the 1st Division's destiny if they had been combined with adequate intelligence on the planned Peleliu operation.

In early 1944, the main Japanese naval complex in the Pacific was on Truk Island in the Carolines, 1200 miles east of the Palaus, where Admiral Mineichi Koga, Commander of the Japanese Combined Fleet, had his headquarters. The island was defended by over 400 fighters and bombers, more than a dozen large naval coastal guns, and a force of Imperial Marines. It was the Japanese equivalent of CinCPac at Pearl Harbor, a major obstacle to operations in the Central Pacific, and Admiral Nimitz wanted it neutralized.

In mid-February, Nimitz ordered Rear Admiral Marc Mitscher and his immensely powerful Task Force 58 to attack Truk, with the simple mission of destroying all enemy installations there. Mitscher had at his disposal twelve aircraft carriers with more than 600 aircraft, eight new fast battleships, and more than thirty cruisers and destroyers. In a two-day battle Mitscher accomplished all of this mission, and Koga was forced to move his headquarters immediately to Koror in the Palaus. Truk, for all practical purposes, no longer existed.

This was a major turning point in the Pacific war, but Mitscher was far from through. He pursued Koga to the Palaus, but did not bother attacking Koga's headquarters on Koror. He knew the main threat in the Palaus was located on Peleliu with its airfield, and in another two days of continuous attack duplicated his Truk victory, destroying the airstrip and communications installations on Peleliu and reducing the Japanese air capability to less than a dozen planes. Again, Koga decided to move his headquarters, this time to the large Philippine island of Mindanao. For the moment, with only about 3,000 naval and construction personnel ashore, Peleliu was neither an offensive or defensive factor. But that would change, and Allied intelligence would not keep up.

During the following months, Admiral "Bull" Halsey and the Third Fleet were wreaking havoc with the Japanese in the Central Philippines. By the time the pre-invasion air and naval bombardment of Peleliu began on September 12, Halsey had come to the conclusion that the entire Central Philippines, including Mindanao and Leyte, were "a hollow shell with weak defenses and skimpy facilities." Why not recommend to Admiral Nimitz that the remaining schedule of Operation Stalemate be scrapped with all naval elements, including the 1stMarDiv, to proceed directly to Leyte to support the Army's invasion of that key island several months ahead of MacArthur's schedule? This is exactly what he did in a carefully worded dispatch to CinCPac, just three days before we were to arrive off the beaches of Peleliu!

Nimitz knew that such a radical change in strategy had to be sorted out by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who were then in conference in Canada with their British counterparts. President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill were also on the scene, so it was the ultimate high-level conference. In his recommendation to the Joint Chiefs, Nimitz approved Halsey's plan except for canceling the Peleliu landing. To keep this topic short, the Joint Chiefs and MacArthur's headquarters (Dugout Doug himself was at sea on his way to Mindanao and unavailable) approved Nimitz' plan. After all, everyone knew that it "was only going to take two or three days," according to the commanding general of the 1st MarDiv. Such was the state of the Navy's and MacArthur's intelligence concerning Peleliu and the credibility of Gen. Rupertus, whose assessment of the invasion was supported by none of his senior officers.

It was D-day, minus one.

DAWN IN PARADISE

The first three waves on the landing were going to load directly into LVT's, (which stands for Landing Vehicle, Tracked), also known as amtracs. It was an open-top, lightly-armored floating tank that propelled itself through the water with its churning tracks. Some had a 37mm cannon in a turret mounted in front. They would be launched through the big clamshell doors on the front of the LST's, to go directly from the ship to the beach. Following waves on the troop transports would have to climb down cargo nets and load initially on Higgins boats (LCVP's), which could not negotiate the island's fringing reef, then transfer to amtracs at the reef edge for the last few hundred yards. LST's are slow, so we loaded out and departed three days ahead of the main convoy.

The weather on the way up from Pavuvu was mostly fine, and when it wasn't raining a lot of us found a place on deck to sleep at night. I was among strangers, but we traded stories about where we came from and what we wanted to do when we got back Stateside, and before long I was accepted as a natural part of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines. The Battalion intelligence officer (called S-2 at battalion level) was especially friendly, and said he was happy Regiment had sent someone down to do the grubby ghoul job, which meant he didn't have to assign one of his own. His section was three men under strength.

The evening of September 14 after chow I went up to the aft 40mm mount to watch for the green flash at sunset, but no luck. The sea was almost flat and as the night crept in, the marvelous luminescence in that part of the Pacific started to trail out in our wake as several hundred ships slowly steamed into ordered positions 20-some miles from Peleliu. As I watched the silent gathering, that same pensive nostalgia I had felt at New Britain began to wash over me.

During the day I had momentarily reflected a couple of times, with some surprise, that I felt some modest apprehension about the next day but I was not really fearful, and then my mind would jump somewhere else. This evening though, as I watched the glowing plankton I finally figured out what was going on in my head with this recurring, pensive sadness. I wasn't exactly afraid of the next day, but a sneaky, secret part of my mind was telling me that this could be the last sunset, and that I might not see my mother and father and sister again, and that all the beautiful girls I had not yet met, and all the beautiful places I had not yet seen might not ever be. My strongest emotion was an unfocused sadness. And this surprised me too, as I thought about it. Some men do accumulate apprehension, and fear, as they approach a D-Day, but as I watched the faces around me that evening I came to believe that far more felt something like I did.

But it was almost show time. We cleaned our weapons and hit the sack.

Reveille came at 5:30, but most of us were awake and on deck straining our eyes in the gloom trying to spot the island. While we slept, almost the entire convoy had moved from the rendezvous area to positions 2,000-5,000 yards off the beach. There were LST's and troop transports bunched up together, with command and control vessels closest in, and with battleships, cruisers, and destroyers between and behind. Farther out were the support vessels and destroyer picket lines. All were silent. Breakfast was steak and eggs, something the Division had learned from the Aussies, and the Navy went along with it this day. As we ate, the thunder started- -four battleships with 14" and 16" guns, a half dozen cruisers, and as many destroyers all opened up on the beach which had become visible in the weak morning light but very soon was totally obscured by smoke.

H-Hour was scheduled for 8:30. An hour before that we loaded up- -weapons, ammo belts, packs, two canteens of water- -mustering in our assigned LVT's. The huge clam shell doors groaned open and one by one with engines roaring we were disgorged into the open sea like a bunch of noisy turtles, to join others launching simultaneously. As we circled, waiting for the rest of the second wave to come up, we could see the first wave forming about 300 yards inboard, also circling. Some 200 yards to our left and slightly behind our cluster of LVT's, the battleship Mississippi sat quietly with all three turrets pointing shoreward. She was one of our old ones, with 14" main batteries, used only for naval gunfire support. I remember thinking it was appropriate for her to be nearby, since she was named for my mother's home state. That thought had barely formed when 150-foot sheets of bright orange flame erupted from two of her 3-gun turrets, and a half-second later there was the loudest blast I had ever heard along with a shock wave that snapped my open mouth shut as it lifted my helmet against the chinstrap. If we had debarked down cargo nets my chinstrap wouldn't have been fastened, but climbing into an amtrac it didn't seem necessary. I unhooked my chinstrap and looked shoreward with bells ringing inside my head. I was not about to have my teeth rattled like that again.

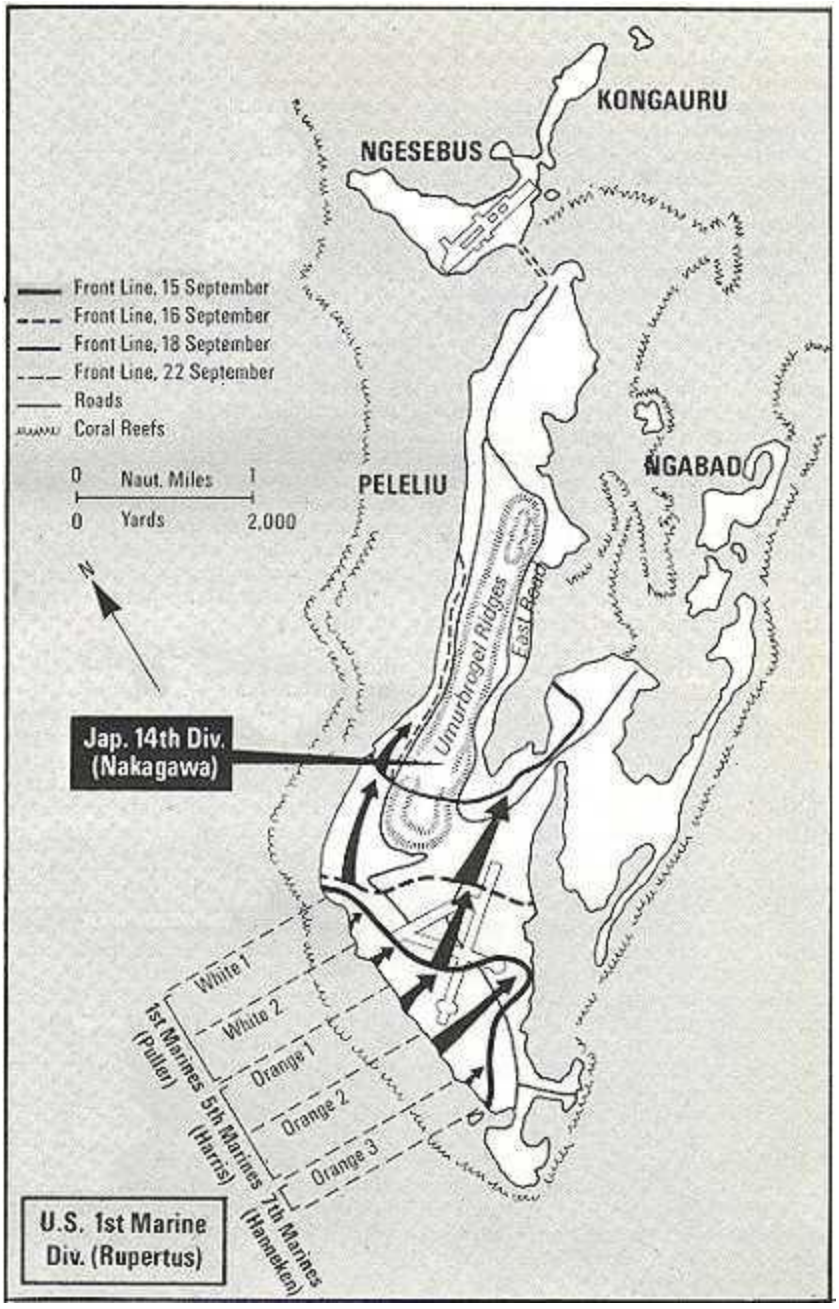
The invasion plan called for all three infantry regiments to land abreast along a 1.5-mile front (see the following maps), with the 1st Marines on the left (White Beaches 1 and 2), 5th Marines in the center (Orange Beaches 1 and 2), and one battalion of the 7th Marines on the right (Orange Beach 3), with two of its battalions acting as the division reserve. The 1st Marines were to move east for 1,000 yards, securing the northern end of the airfield, and then drive north to take the Umurbrogol Mountain complex. The 5th would drive east and secure the swampy eastern peninsula while the 7th would clean up the southern end of the island. The original plan assumed we would encounter only about 4,000 naval and labor battalion troops, and that all this could be accomplished in three to five days.

Ahead, the first wave was beginning to break out of their rendezvous circles and form into staggered lines parallel with the beach. That wave was made up of two 3rd battalion companies (White Beach 1) and two 2nd Battalion companies (White Beach 2). Puller, true to his style, was in one of those first wave amtracs with the 3rd Battalion. The 1st and 3rd Battalion reserve companies and 2nd Battalion headquarters, including Charlie Company, would ride in on the second wave. The 1st Battalion, initially, was in regimental reserve and would be following in Higgins boats. Half a mile to our right we could see the center of Col. Harris' 5th Marines forming, and to their right would be Col. Hanneken's 7th Marines.

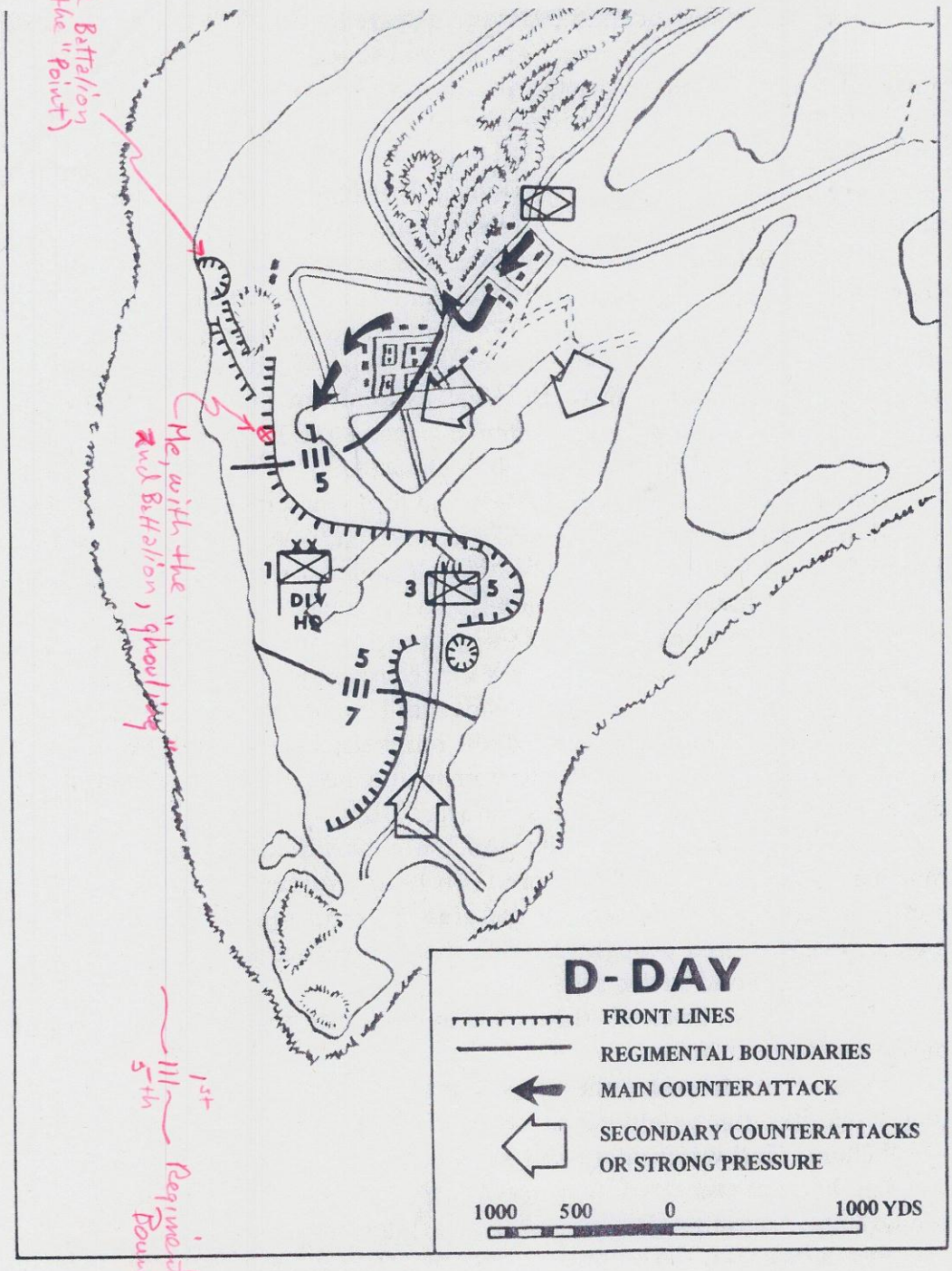
Three hundred yards ahead, the 2nd Battalion's first wave was formed and waiting, not very far off the reef edge, although it was hard to tell with our low vantage point in the water. The naval gunfire din was unabated and shells of various calibers shrieked not more than 30-40 feet above us. Combined with the roar of our engines it was impossible to communicate with the man next to one except with a shout. As our wave stretched out in lines parallel with the beach our engines throttled back to a near idle, and we could hear the explosions ashore. We were far enough out that I was still looking over the gunwale of the LVT, and at that point I saw no sign of any enemy fire.

And then there was a red star shell burst off to our left. Within 30 seconds all offshore fire ceased, and we could even hear the first wave's engines come to life as they headed for the beach. A moment later, our engines cranked up and we were in pursuit. It was at that point that I lowered my head below the gunwale and started to talk to God about what I had gotten myself into- -remember, I volunteered for this stuff, and at that point it seemed like one of the dumbest things I had ever done. People in my amtrac looked at each other with almost no expression on their faces. They were probably thinking similar thoughts.

But hope springs eternal and after a few minutes I thought, "Maybe we can get ashore without being shot at. Maybe the Japs aren't trying to defend the beach against that firestorm the Navy laid on them. Maybe…" Nobody seemed to be firing at us and with that self-induced optimism my curiosity got the better of me about the time we crossed the reef edge, and I peeked over the gunwale.


KONGAURU
NGESEBUS
Front Line, 15 September
Front Line, 16 September
Front Line, 18 September
Front Line, 22 September
Roads
Coral Reefs
0 Naut. Miles 1
0 Yards 2,000
N
PELELIU
NGABAD
Umurbrogol Ridges
East Road
Jap. 14th Div. (Nakagawa)
White 1
White 2
Orange 1
Orange 2
Orange 3
1st Marines (Puller)
5th Marines (Harris)
7th Marines (Hanneuken)
U.S. 1st Marine Div. (Rupertus)

Peleliu Island, pre-invasion, 1944 intelligence photo – Umurbrogols (Bloody Nose Ridge) run from the middle left of the picture to the top center.



You've heard that old saw about a scene being "seared into one's memory"? If I happen to live a hundred years that sight will never leave me, ever. It was incredibly worse than anything I had imagined. Maybe half of the first wave's amtracs had reached the shore and were backing off to return for another load, the rest were trying to weave through these to get their people off-loaded. Geysers of water fifty feet high were sprouting all around this melee of LVT's and were so thick they almost looked like some instant-growing, kooky-looking translucent trees in a forest. At any one moment there would be ten or fifteen standing in various stages of eruption and collapse, and this was going on as far as I could see to the right and left. In that first glance, I believe I saw at least eight amtracs that were either burning or were otherwise dead in the water. And I saw at least the same number of bodies floating near the shore. I couldn't see anything at all on the beach itself, which was sloping coral sand on our left and right, but which was a solid coral wave bench roughly three feet high directly to our front. There were 20 or 30 people huddled in the cover of this bench over a length of maybe 60 yards. All this I saw in the space of a five second glance over the gunwale. And our driver was doggedly pushing our vehicle into this mess. I pulled my head down and sat gritting my teeth, expecting at any moment that an artillery or mortar round would drop right into our laps.

My sense of time during the rest of that ride is not very reliable, but it probably was not more than four or five minutes before someone yelled, "Everybody out!" Those early amtracs had no rear ramp, so the only way to dismount was to go up and over the side. This was exciting because for the prior minute or two we had had machine gun fire pinging off our frontal armor. Up and over we went, dropping into three inches of water that lapped up against the coral ledge (I think it was high tide), and huddling there with the earlier arrivals, mostly headquarters types.

One of the first waves landing at Peleliu, September 1944. Not the burning amtrac in the far background.

Most of the line company people had moved in 100 yards or so. We could hear the M1's and the throaty cough of the BAR's exchanging their greetings with the Nambus and Arisakas a little farther inland, the latter's snappish rounds still cracking a few feet over our heads. Our LVT had backed up about 10 yards and was turning when it took an 81mm or 90mm mortar round directly over the driver's hatch. It never moved again. I felt a flash of anger because our driver and gunner had been stout fellows who never flinched carrying us through that barrage out on the reef, and they didn't deserve it. Instinctively, a Communications sergeant beside me and I started to move toward the amtrac to see if anyone had survived the blast, but the Communications officer yelled at us to stay down. A burst of Nambu fire rattling off the side of the vehicle at the same moment emphasized the wisdom of his order. My wrist stung and when I looked down there was a 3/8" sliver of shrapnel sticking out of a small gash. My big war wound. I can still show you the scar.

We were solidly pinned under that ledge for more than an hour waiting for the line

platoons to clear the machine gun positions ahead- -I learned later there were four nests with interlocking fire fields just in front of our battalion, and that there thirty or more behind the landing beaches altogether. After we had hunkered there for about 15 minutes, the battalion executive officer came down the line in a crouch telling everyone to lock and load. Fox Company was pulling back to reorganize because they had taken so many casualties, and battalion thought there might be a counterattack to try to kick us off the beach. It did not happen, however.

All this time the artillery and mortar fire was incessant. I could see a dozen amtracs burning or immobile from where I was, and I knew there would be more down the line. Those that had not been hit were forced to wait in place while wounded were loaded. All we could do behind our coral ledge was wait for the next round to drop, and for some of those wonderful, resolute rifle grunts to take out the machine guns in front of us. Looking to our left where Puller and the 3rd Battalion had landed we could see a few people lying prone on the beach (dead or alive?), but little else except smoke, burning amtracs and geysers of water. Had they had it easier than we? I did not know then that they were getting hit worse than any other unit on the entire Division front.

Why was it this bad? Who had screwed up? This was not the relative walkover we had been led to expect. It was obvious the Japs had anticipated the landing beaches and had zeroed in virtually every square yard for their mortars and artillery. What was startling and frightening was the sheer volume of fire. But by now our third wave had landed and the fresh rifle platoons had moved inland; their appearance very timely---they moved through the disorganized Fox Company, which had lost two platoon leaders, and gave the other 'F' Company officers a chance to rearrange things.

And then, after another half hour, the firestorm ceased. The Nambus were finally silenced by our heroic line troops, but also the mortar and artillery fire decreased to only an occasional single round. Why this happened almost simultaneously I have no idea, but it did. The four angels that most certainly were around me those first two hours must have arranged it. And believe me, nobody survived those early hours without angels because there was almost nothing one could do to protect oneself on that beach, nowhere to hide. And I had not yet seen a Japanese, either dead or alive.

The Comm sergeant and I grabbed a corpsman and went out to look in the amtrac, but it was hopeless. The driver's upper body and the gunner's lower half had been shredded and there was an incredible volume of blood around their compartment. The Battalion's headquarters company was moving out and I picked up my pack and followed. I still had bodies to search.

Author's note: I want to stop here for moment to comment on something I did not

anticipate when I started this memoir. In the foregoing paragraphs and in the New Britain section it is obvious that my personal view of the scene was hardly global. To build some perspective of the arena I was in I needed to include information from sources other than my own observations, and I have done a fair amount of reading to accomplish this. Much has been very useful, but quite a bit of personal observation by people who supposedly were "on the spot ", and who were quoted in good faith by authors who interviewed them, is not only suspect, it is obvious hogwash. This destroys the credibility of anything they say that might possibly be true, so their stories become useless as a reference point. As an example, the following is quoted directly from one of the best-researched sources on the Peleliu invasion (the author of the book is quoting a PFC Joseph Moskalczak who was a coal-breaker in a mine near Blakely, Pennsylvania before he enlisted in the Corps):

> "The work was dirty, hard, and sometimes dangerous," he told friends on his sixty-fourth birthday, "but it was like a Sunday-school picnic compared to Peleliu, where I've often thought I was probably the first Marine to land…."
>
> "This was my first and last time in an amtrac," Moskalczak said. "When it stopped on the beach, the rear ramp slammed down and I scampered out and ran to the left and jumped into a large shell hole about 50 yards inland. Then I looked to the right and saw no one. I looked to my left and saw a lone figure behind me on the dead run. He joined me in the hole and soon several other Marines were with us.
>
> "No one knew what to do next, so we just hugged the sides of the hole and waited for something to happen. About this time my sergeant, a BAR man named Frank Minkewicz, crawled into the hole. 'Let's go!' He yelled, and we ran up the sandy incline of the beach. Near the top we hit the deck, because I heard the crack of machine-gun bullets overhead
>
> "Reaching the top of the slope, we saw eight or nine Japs. They were pulling and pushing a large cannon, of the old-fashioned kind with wooden spokes and 3-foot wheels. A line formed on my right, but I still saw no one on the left. We opened up on the Japs and killed 'em all.
>
> "We went down to look at the enemy. 'Hey, this one is still breathing!" someone yelled. One man plunged a bayonet into his chest and couldn't pull it out. He fired his rifle and the recoil made the job easy."

I don't know what this man's real story was, but I'm sure he wasn't in one of the first three waves going into Peleliu. I could list a dozen things that make his story sound phony, but I'll stay with the most obvious:

1 The man never mentioned which assault unit he was in (unusual in itself, since it

was a matter of pride with all the rest of us), and although it is possible that it was his first and last time in an amtrac, that is unlikely because all of the assault units in the first three waves had two practice landings in their amtracs at Cape Esperance, Guadalcanal, before leaving for Peleliu.

2 To my knowledge, no one scampered out the rear ramp of an LVT at Peleliu because I don't think that new model was in service yet. The early models had no rear ramp and we had to go up and over the side to disembark, a drop of about six feet. If there were any second-generation amtracs in the landing I didn't see them.

3 It sounds as if no one was in the LVT with him- -he looked left and right and there was only a lone figure behind him. Where were all the other guys in the two squads an LVT normally carried?

4 There was no one in the first waves of the assault battalions who "didn't know what to do next" after hitting the beach. That's ridiculous!

5 "my sergeant, a BAR man…" No squad leader I ever saw carried a Browning Automatic Rifle. The weapon weighed at least 15 pounds loaded and, together with the ammunition pouches a BAR man had to carry, was much too heavy a load for the demanding role of a squad leader.

6 The cannon story also is ridiculous- -there were no "cannons" right on the beach where he and his buddies purportedly encountered one.

7 After "killing 'em all" they went down to look at the enemy! In the previous paragraph he had heard the "crack of machine gun bullets overhead." Not likely they would saunter down to "look" at the enemy. If it was actually "down" it wasn't a very likely spot to site a "cannon."

The man fabricated this whole story, and not very skillfully. It really surprised me how often I read exaggerations about personal experiences, sometimes by supposedly reputable people like William Manchester (yes, him too) and Eugene Sledge.

But the loss to me was that their testimony became suspect and unreliable, so I had to ignore much of it and look elsewhere. But now back to the main narrative….

We hadn't been on this beach long before we knew the pre-invasion intelligence was way off and Gen. Rupertus' optimism about a short, snappy campaign was a joke. The maps we had and the aerial photography we'd seen gave no appreciation of the rugged, mean terrain, but more serious was the extremely heavy resistance we were encountering and the stunning volume and accuracy of mortar and artillery fire. It was painfully obvious that

the naval gunfire preparation was woefully inadequate despite the Navy reporting that they had "run out of targets." Something was terribly wrong but at this point we didn't know what.

As the 2nd Battalion headquarters advanced off the beach I started to look for promising corpses. We were moving through a fairly low area that was swampy in places and had a lot of trees standing despite the naval gunfire. It was a strange experience- -the line company boys were moving fast toward the airfield once they cleared the line of machine gun positions and the headquarters people were working to catch up, so for about an hour or so I was pretty much alone, ranging to the right and left looking for Jap bodies. There were quite a few, and almost as many of our own that had been cut down as they cleared the Japs. In my head I wasn't surprised; this was what happened in an opposed beach landing, but I moved through the carnage in a sort of dumb haze. New Britain had done nothing to prepare me for this kind of war.

A hundred and fifty yards inland there was a blown up double machine gun position with four Jap bodies that were different than the ones I had seen up to that point. They had absorbed a grenade blast and were pretty torn up, but it was easy to see that these guys all verged on six feet tall. I had never seen any Japs on New Britain even approaching this size. Also, there were the remains of packs that were made of cowhide with the brown and white hair still on. These guys had been wearing ankle-high leather boots instead of the canvas and rubber jobs we were used to seeing. A little farther on there were two people who obviously had been snipers that had been shot out of a couple of tall trees- -the little fishbox board seats they had used were still up in the trees. One was probably five feet and eight inches and the other a little taller, and both had long hair and whiskers. Same uniform gear. These guys were from a different army than the one we knew. Again, there were no papers of any kind. This didn't surprise me because their weapons including bayonets and grenades had been stripped, too. Line company people are notorious scavengers. If you wanted to capture an inscribed Japanese flag that many of them carried in their helmets you had to get there first.

Not to keep you in unnecessary suspense, these outsize Japs were the first evidence I saw of the Army's principal intelligence breakdown in planning the Peleliu landing. Over the next few days we identified the 14th Division of Japan's Kwantung Army in Manchuria. This division was largely recruited from Ainus indigenous to the Japan's northern island of Hokkaido. The Ainu are a different strain from the typical Japanese, much taller and hairier. Instead of facing 4,000-6,000 naval troops and labor battalion personnel we were confronted by more than 10,000 men of one of Japan's elite infantry divisions. What was worse, we eventually found out that most of them had been there since the end of April. The Jap's had had five months to prepare an organized defense! But back to my story…

I had gotten way behind the main headquarters group because I was moving slowly, mindful of the possibility of booby traps and trip wires, and I was also watching the trees carefully because where there had been two snipers there probably were more. The longer I was at it the more I hated the job and I was determined to get out of it as soon as I could figure out a plausible way. The only company I had were a few wounded, walking or otherwise, being moved back to the beach by corpsmen and their helpers. I had had no significant success ghouling and I was much relieved when I finally broke out of the woodsy stuff after a few hundred yards and found the 2nd's CP in the process of setting up. It was all of 15 yards behind the Easy Company front line in some stunted trees and bushes within a grenade throw of the edge of the airfield, an open, flat expanse more than a half-mile across.

Whatever defenders there had been in this area that were still alive had retreated across the airfield and there was no firing going on in this sector at the time. There was a bunch of it going on five or six hundred yards to the left, however, including what sounded like artillery. That would be where Puller's headquarters and the 3rd Battalion should be located. There also was intermittent rifle and machine gun fire on our right. Strangely, we were not even drawing any mortar fire just then. I could see four bodies out on the airstrip 50 or 60 yards off, but I wasn't about to go out there in the open flat where even the Japs in Tokyo could probably see me.

I looked for the S-2 lieutenant (can't remember his name) and learned he had been sent off to find the regimental CP because there had been no radio communication from Puller since the landing. One of the medical corpsmen had brought word that the 3rd Battalion was in a lot of trouble on the extreme left of their position. He said Puller's CP was only about 200 yards inland near this 3rd Battalion hot spot, totally pinned down. The corpsman had learned this from a badly wounded Charlie Quinn that the corpsman had evacuated to the beach from the 2nd Battalion's sector. This shocked me brutally. I had seen a lot of Marines shot up that day, but Charlie Quinn was a friend, one of the older R-2 scouts who had been on the Talasea amphibious patrol on New Britain, and who had shown compassion for a green replacement on that jaunt, keeping me calmed down on the way up by telling funny stories on himself. I asked what Quinn was doing in our area, but the corpsman didn't know.

Having nothing else to do right then I thought it prudent to dig myself a hole because I was sure the mortars would be on us again. It was about 4:00 o'clock and hot, so I took off my ammunition belt and dungaree jacket, laid them on my pack and rifle not far from where Lt. Col. Honsowetz (2nd Bn. CO) was set up, and started digging. Several Comm Section people were digging nearby. I was down about two feet when my most ignominious episode in the Marine Corps got underway. All my attention was on this hole I was digging when someone yelled, "Here those little yellow bastards come!! Lock and Load! I

looked up, startled, and the first thing I saw was four or five Comm men running hell for leather toward the swampy underbrush behind us—then I looked left across the airfield and 350 yards out were half a dozen small tanks spread out in a line with what looked like 500 Japs also running hell for leather, straight at us across the wide open airstrip, firing as they came!

Naked instinct took over and I grabbed my rifle and ammo belt and took off after the Comm guys at about 100 mph, give or take a little. I had actually made the edge of the underbrush when a loud voice behind us rang out, "Hold it up, Dammit!" Months of training instantly took over and I stopped, turned around, laid my rifle in the crotch of a little baby tree and prepared to repel the enemy like a good, little robot. No bravery involved, totally unthinking. Rifle and machine gun bullets were cracking over our heads, which I noted without having much emotional response that I can remember.

After four or five seconds my pea-sized brain started functioning and the first thing that coursed through it was, "What a stupid thing for the Nips to be doing, charging in broad daylight at two dug-in Marine rifle companies, with a battalion of the 5th Marines on our right, across a flat, wide-open airfield where there was no cover at all. The second thought through was a flash of extreme embarrassment at having run like a green-assed turkey replacement in full view of the Battalion commander. (I actually don't think he even noticed.)

The third cerebral impulse through was a swelling rage at having made myself look like such a butt, and that induced the totally irrational reaction of running in a crouch the 25 yards back up to the Easy Company line and flopping down beside a BAR man who was calmly directing 3-shot bursts at the running Japs, now only a couple of hundred yards away. There was a heavy volume of fire coming from both the 2nd Battalion companies and the left side of the 5th Marines line was ripping away at them, also. The Jap infantry was dropping right and left. A couple of Sherman tanks had gotten into the action with their 75mm guns, knocking off the pathetic little Japanese tankettes which had only half-inch armor—a .50 caliber machine gun would penetrate their turrets.

The presence of that cool, collected BAR man calmed me down. The fury at myself shifted and focused forward. <u>This was</u> <u>my meat.</u> I was a High Expert with the M1 rifle, and <u>this was what it was for!</u> This was my chance to get even for the driver and gunner in our amtrac and all those dead Marines who had taken out the machine guns so I could get up here without being shot to pieces. Still in a fury, I began squeezing off careful rounds, most of which were hits. On New Britain I had fired without any real emotion; here I fired with angry intent and felt a vicious satisfaction when I saw a round go home. I went through two 8-round clips before I ran out of targets. This foolish charge by the Japs was finished except for a few stragglers on the right in front of the 5th Marines. The BAR man

smiled at me without saying anything and lit a cigarette.

I'm not telling this story to aggrandize myself, or with any pride. It wasn't bravery under fire. For a time I was simply a machine activated by training, but working with a cold fury that was outside myself, virtually unthinking, angry at myself and the Japs and I guess at the world for creating the mess around me. All those brave, gallant people who had cleared the way for me to get up to the 2nd Battalion CP that were now lying dead and torn to pieces behind me. I was sad and angry for all of us. That feeling would come again from time to time, but never again during the rest of the war can I remember firing my weapon with the vicious intent that struck me the afternoon of September 15, 1944. And I remember it now with embarrassment because much of my reaction that day was because I had run like a fool in front of God and the 2nd Battalion. Not a good reason to kill people even if it was what I was supposed to do in the circumstances. I am not proud of it, but that was the way it happened.

This episode was the only time during my three campaigns in the Pacific that I was part of an infantry defensive firefight, acting as a simple grunt rifleman.

Change of Assignment

There still was no radio communication between the 2nd Battalion and the regimental CP, and I had no way to report my total failure at the ghoul job to anyone. I figured I might find a better occupation if I went back to Regiment. I knew the 3rd Battalion's position could only be about 600 yards to the left, and from there I could find the Regimental CP, so I picked up my gear and without reporting to anyone took off down the trail to the beach. There was no mortar fire dropping in among the trees. This wasn't quite the kosher way of doing it but I knew nobody would miss me.

There are angels around some of us for no reason I have been able to discern. It was only about 300 yards back to the beach and when I got there a sergeant helping to unload mortar shells from an amtrac stared at me and asked, "Did you just come down that trail from the 2nd's area?" I said I had and he told me a sniper had hit one of two men from his squad carrying mortar ammo forward on that trail not twenty minutes before- -the other man had dropped his load and helped his buddy back to the beach. I had seen the dropped 60mm shells in their canvas carry-bags beside the trail. I had kept my eyes open of course, but had seen nothing and had not been fired upon.

Bearing right, I worked my way down the beach slowly. It must have been somewhere around four o'clock, but it seemed like the day had lasted at least 16 hours already.

There were all kinds of people offloading ammunition, Jerri cans, and other assorted gear

from amtracs cycling back and forth across the reef. Three waterproofed Sherman tanks were sloshing ashore half-submerged, spouting exhaust smoke from their funny rear-end stacks. Three guys in a rubber boat were leading them, poking the bottom with long poles to keep the tanks from dropping into an unseen sinkhole. The only combat noises I remember was sporadic rifle and machine gun fire popping away ahead and beyond a curve in the shoreline that I could not see past. It sounded like it might be about 500 or 600 yards off, which was about where the far end of the 3rd Battalion's line would have been. Since Puller had gone in with the 3rd, the regimental CP should be somewhere nearby.

I kept asking where the regimental CP was and after three or four tries got an answer from a lieutenant who pointed to a coral mound about 100 yards ahead and to my right. He said, "Behind that mound in a hollow about 75 yards inland. Crawl around that mound fast and keep your head down- -every time someone moves over there it brings in two or three mortar rounds."

Feeling a bit silly, that's exactly what I did. Actually, I didn't have to crawl very far. The ground began to slope down soon after getting past the mound and I could see dug-in people ahead. The location was sandy, apparently deep enough to dig a reasonable foxhole, because mostly I saw only people's heads amongst the ammunition boxes, packs, 10 in 1 ration boxes, and other paraphernalia. There was another large coral mound beyond which provided just enough cover to keep the location out of the direct line of sight of the Jap's mortar spotters and machine guns. I made my way down there and started looking for friendly faces.

I found Captain Horton sitting in a very large foxhole (big enough to hold two or three people for conference purposes) and told him about my lack of success in the ghoul assignment. He said not to worry, that I wasn't going back out, and to get busy and dig a hole fast because they had been getting mortar fire every hour or so and he thought they were about due. He pointed toward the perimeter in the general direction of the Japs and told me the scout section was dug in there about 40 yards ahead to screen the CP.

I told him about Charlie Quinn and his response was, "Damn! We didn't know why nobody had heard from him! We sent him over to the 2nd to find out how Honsowetz was doing because most of the H&S radio gear was in two amtracs that took direct hits out on the reef. But get up there and get busy on that hole!"

The sand was fairly easy digging. It took me maybe 20 minutes to get down about four feet, which was enough for a respectable foxhole, when the Swi-i-sh! B-r-r-a-c-k-k!! of the mortars started walking toward us from 50 yards to the left. I cowered in my hole with the fervent hope that there wouldn't be a near miss- -I didn't have much confidence in the

sand walls. Again, my angels were about. There must have been at least a dozen shells, but the nearest explosion was a good 20 yards away.

After it quieted down I found Lt. Chandler and the new Section Chief, Sgt. Larry Stubbings. They brought me up to date on what had happened "back at the ranch."

Speaking of which, I need to do the same for you readers. So far all you have heard is a sketchy account of what I could see from my limited ken, but when an entire Marine division storms ashore along a two-mile front in the face of massive enemy fire, a lot happens in a very short time. For anyone to understand the scale of events that first horrendous day and the impact on thousands of men in the 1st MarDiv, one man's story is simply not enough. I won't drag you through a detailed after-action report, but you at least need to know roughly what happened to my regiment. Again, I won't try to recount everything, but some of the outstanding events need chronicling again "for the record," and because my small part in this tragic high drama would mean nothing by itself. After all, I survived because of my encircling angels, not because I was worthy or clever. So many, many men in the 1st Marines better than I did not survive that first terrible day and the five days that followed.

Starting close to home, when we embarked that morning the Section Chief wasn't Stubbings, it was Sgt. George Katrinis, and Stubbings was Chief Scout. Within the first hour after coming ashore, Katrinis and Hal Forester, the combat correspondent attached to the R-2 section, had been severely wounded by a mortar shell and both were evacuated to the beach. A few minutes later, Perkins took a sniper's round high in the shoulder and, turning around to see where it came from, took another round through the front of his helmet. It just creased his skull and exited through the back of his helmet. Lucky, but he also was carted back to the beach for evacuation. Not so lucky was that while he was waiting for LVT transport to the hospital ship he took another sniper round in his buttock. Happily, both he and Katrinis survived, as well as Forester. All three eventually ended up in hospital Stateside. Not so for Charlie Quinn. We learned much later that Charlie had died in hospital, I think on Banika, sister island to Pavuvu.

The new Chief Scout was Harry Heyman, still a Corporal, which he would remain even though he was promoted to Section Chief the following year, a job that rated the three chevrons plus two rocker bars of a Gunnery Sergeant. A corporal he would remain right up to his eventual discharge at the end of the war. The desk jockeys back in Pearl Harbor got promotions on time, but not the poor grunts out where people were getting killed.

That first day the 5th Marines on our right, although they faced determined resistance, were able to reach their first day's objective, punching all the way across the southern end of the airfield in spite of the afternoon counterattack that centered on our 2nd Battalion.

Likewise, the 7th Marines on the Division's right managed to break the enemy line in the south. Casualties in both these regiments were significant but not crippling in any sense.

It was not so with us. The 1st Marines had landed the 2nd and 3rd Battalions abreast, the latter forming the extreme left end of the entire Division line around which the 1st Marines would pivot as the regiment turned north. The integrity of this wheeling maneuver depended on the 3rd Battalion being in secure control of their sector. From the very first it was apparent to Puller that such was not the case even though he had no radio contact with Lt. Col. Sabol until late in the afternoon when some replacement radio gear reached him. In fact, the 3rd was in deep trouble from the moment they came ashore in the face of a blazing artillery and mortar barrage that caused serious casualties before they were 100 yards off the beach, where they were immediately in a ferocious fire fight with a very large number of the dug-in enemy. In particular, K Company on the battalion left was in desperate trouble, which put the regiment, and possibly even the entire beachhead, in very serious jeopardy. It was all because of The Point.

Bloody Battle for The Point

Although I didn't know it then, as a geologist I can tell you that The Point was (is) an emergent pinnacle reef about 120 feet high and (as I remember it 59 years later) not much more than 100 yards or so across, located right at the waterline at the north end of White Beach 1 where the 3rd was going to land. We could see it rather vaguely on the mediocre high altitude aerial photos we had during the planning phase back on Pavuvu, and I remember Puller saying to the R-3 (Operations), "That could be fortified. We need to be sure Navy takes it out before we go ashore." I understood he made a specific request through Division to accomplish this. Well, the Navy didn't take it out. Long after the operation was over we learned that they dropped a half dozen 8-inch shells on it and moved on to other targets. Tragic error, because the Japanese had riddled it with concrete and steel machine gun emplacements, a 47mm antiboat emplacement, a 75mm infantry gun in a heavy bunker, and individual infantry spider holes. Most were oriented to rake the entire length of both the 1st Marines landing beaches, and almost all were intact and operating when K Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines landed with the mission of taking The Point.

You may remember from earlier in this chronicle that K Company's CO was Capt. George Hunt, our original R-2 on New Britain. For this reason his story in the Peleliu campaign has always been of particular interest to me. Hunt had been on the staff of Fortune magazine before the war, and after the war became Managing Editor of Life magazine. About 1947, Harper and Row published Coral Comes High, Hunt's memoir of K Company's terrible first two days on Peleliu. I didn't know about the book until sometime

in the 1960's, but since I knew the story more or less firsthand I had tried sporadically over the years to find a copy, without success. This year, I finally located a copy on the Net. Amazon.com had never heard of it, but Barnes and Noble listed eight copies, the most expensive ($193) a hardcover signed by the author. I didn't want one that badly and bought a soft cover reprint (1957) for $9.75. It is yellow with age but otherwise in very good condition.

Because I knew the man and some of his people (remember the combat patrol on New Britain?) and because I knew the events of those first two days- -in particular, the second day when I was back at Regiment and knew approximately what was going on in the 3rd Battalion, it was a particularly wrenching read. We could hear the firing and the grenade explosions where K Company was isolated- -it was only about 300 yards from the Regimental CP. This was a first-person account by an honest journalist without any of the exaggerations, embellishments, and occasional lies I encountered in some of the accounts concerning Peleliu.

So I will tell you a little about K Company, 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines on those first two days. I know this is supposed to be my memoir, but when I finish you will see why I need to divert for a moment. The 235 men of K Company were a capsule display of what awaited the 1st Marines in the worst battle, man for man, in the whole Pacific war. I hope I can do them justice.

Hunt's plan was to commit his 2nd and 3rd platoons, with the 1st platoon held in company reserve. The seaward side of The Point was a nearly vertical cliff and the two lead platoons had to land on the exposed shoreline north of the pinnacle, intending to swing right to attack the objective, but this meant that K Company would be isolated from the rest of the battalion to the south until they captured The Point.

Scrambling ashore in a rain of rifle, machine gun, and mortar fire, the two lead platoons made it to a large tank trap where they were pinned down, but nearly half of the men in that desperate dash were cut down before they could reach any kind of cover. One platoon leader was dead (Lt. Maples who had led the combat patrol on New Britain) and his platoon sergeant was badly wounded. Hunt, following with the 1st platoon, knew the company and its mission were in deep trouble. K Company's only chance to survive and take The Point was to commit his reserve immediately. While the Japanese were concentrating on the pinned-down 2nd and 3rd platoons, he ordered the 1st to work its way around the base of the reef and attack from the east side where they could get at the rear of the many gun emplacements.

Miraculously, the 1st platoon managed to do this without being spotted and went to work systematically with high explosive and phosphorus grenades, cutting down those

screaming Japs who made it out of their death traps. Burning white phosphorus sticks to clothing or bare flesh and many of the Japs were on fire as they bolted into the rifles of the waiting Marines. After dark, Hunt and the survivors of the other two platoons stormed to the top of The Point, setting up a defense perimeter. A captured Japanese machine gun strengthened the precarious position.

It had been a bloody, horrendous day. Upon reaching the tank trap after that first frantic charge up the beach, Hunt described it thus, "I saw a ghastly mixture of bandages, bloody and mutilated skin; Marines gritting their teeth resigned to their wounds;…men outstretched or twisted or grotesquely transfixed in the attitudes of death; men with their entrails exposed or huge chunks…ripped out of them."

What kind of men were these? At the end of that day Hunt had only 34 effectives under his command, with about an equal number of wounded, out of the 235 men who had gone in with him that morning. But K Company had taken The Point!

Their ordeal was not nearly over. It was touch and go whether they would be able to hold the position because the Japs had moved several hundred troops into the gap between K Company and the rest of the battalion. All the next day Captain Hunt and his tiny company, exhausted, with many wounded, beat back repeated counterattacks and by nightfall were short of ammunition, water, and medical supplies, still out of contact with 3rd Battalion although efforts had been made by Battalion to close the gap. At one point during the second night Hunt was holding The Point with eighteen men. Each of these remarkable Marines deserves individual recognition and I have their stories, but I must press on with my journal, pallid by comparison.

Just after dawn on the third morning a message was delivered to Hunt from Lt. Col. Sabol- -the rest of the 3rd Battalion had cleaned up the Japanese besieging The Point, with the help of three Sherman tanks. The message read, "I Company will take over your position at 0800 and continue the advance. You will go into reserve and get a rest."

As I Company moved through his "lines", Hunt had a last look around. He wrote later, "Along the shore Jap dead washed in with the tide and bled on the sand…in the countless gullies and shallow basins the Jap dead lay four deep…sprawled in ghastly attitudes with their faces frozen and lips curled in apish grins…Seeing this I could think of no more scathing and ironic symbol of their disastrous efforts to drive us from the Point…On the beach, in the woods, and on the coral rocks, we counted over 500 of them- -dead…."

To quote another source, "K Company paid an atrocious price to take and hold the Point.

Seventy-eight men remained alive although more than half were sorely wounded, the survivors of 235 Marines who had landed on White Beach One forty-eight hours earlier.

"The fortunate few who left Peleliu with Captain Hunt later complained bitterly when he was awarded the Navy Cross for his bravery and leadership. They thought, to a man, that he should have received the Medal of Honor."

What kind of men were these? Even having been with them on Peleliu, it is hard for me to comprehend the measure of their determination and devotion. They all should have been decorated. But it was a portent of things yet to come. It would get worse.

White Beach #1 and The Point, looking NW. (Photo © 2004 Patrick Finelli)

Meanwhile,……..

I want to record here that I always had hated my steel helmet. In boot camp I thought it

was sort of cute, but that view wore off quickly. I never wore it unless forced to by a superior rank, and sometimes not even then:

Pros:

1 Occasionally useful for washing socks or skivvies

2 One could sit on it if there was nothing else around to sit on, and one's knees were flexible.

Cons:

1 Unnecessary weight, and bulky to carry; there was no convenient way to carry it except on one's head

2 If you wore it for any length of time it made your neck ache

3 Hot air rises, and in the tropics that all collected in the top of your helmet, augmented by the sun beating down on bare metal unless you had a camouflage cover on it.

4 It only protected 4% of one's body surface, except that it was no protection at all against rifle or machine gun bullets, or anything larger. Golf clubs, maybe (but only if they were swung from the top downward)

5 Any hard item bumping against it produced an unacceptable noise if the enemy was rustling quietly about nearby, which they often were

6 One cannot hear in the damn things, which is also unacceptable if the enemy is rustling quietly about nearby, which they often were

I never understood why we were burdened with them. It must have been because there was a large steel helmet lobby in Washington, abetted by some fat, deskbound generals who thought they looked neat and military, and who had never been on a patrol or a forward observation post. Military tacticians are notoriously fighting the "last war" instead of the one at hand. Like Pickett charging into all that massed Union fire in the serried, close-ordered ranks that had made some sense during the Revolutionary war when it took three minutes to reload a musket. But even those Rebels didn't bother with helmets. You will never see a Special Ops type wearing one when he is at work. Saddam Hussein doesn't own one. They were appropriate for King Arthur's boys.

Having gotten that ancient gripe out of the way I have to admit something embarrassing.

After I got back to the Regimental CP that first evening when K Company was giving its all, my chief military function was hiding from the unrelenting mortar and artillery fire the Japs laid on us. They would walk half a dozen or so shells across the CP area, then we would have peace and quiet for half an hour or 45 minutes when they would start it all over again. This went on all night and through much of the next day.

I dug my hole down to about three feet where I ran into the coral bedrock, gritted my teeth and prayed a lot. But also I spent a lot of my foxhole time trying to get everything but my feet up inside my helmet. It made me feel a little better even though at the intellectual level I knew it was silly. So much for my steel helmet prejudice.

Normal military activity did go on through this time: comm wire was strung to the battalion and division headquarters; ammunition, water, and food was moved up to the line companies; wounded were brought back to be evacuated, and H&S Company had more than normal attritional casualties because much of this had to be done in sight of the Japanese except for the area immediately behind the coral mound in front of us. The regiment had to take the first line of ridges north of the airfield to get out from under this constant direct observation. That was scheduled for the next day.

Through the Hellgate

The 1st Marines had lost a sixth of their overall strength on the first day, but if support and rear area personnel are left out of the count, a full third of the regiment's assault troops were gone. The 5th and 7th Marines combined casualties breaking out of the Orange Beaches were slightly less.

At 0800 on the second day it was suddenly quiet along the ridges north of the airfield as the naval gunfire and air attacks designed to pin down the Japs abruptly ceased. These low coral ridges were the first rank of the Umurbrogol Mountain complex, soon to be renamed Bloody Nose Ridge by the Marines. Puller's 1st Battalion, under Major Raymond Davis, was brought up out of reserve and moved due east to swing north on the right of Honsowetz' 2nd Battalion, which had a Sherman tank and two amtracs with 37mm gun turrets. The 3rd Battalion moved northward on the left, with the depleted K Company in reserve.

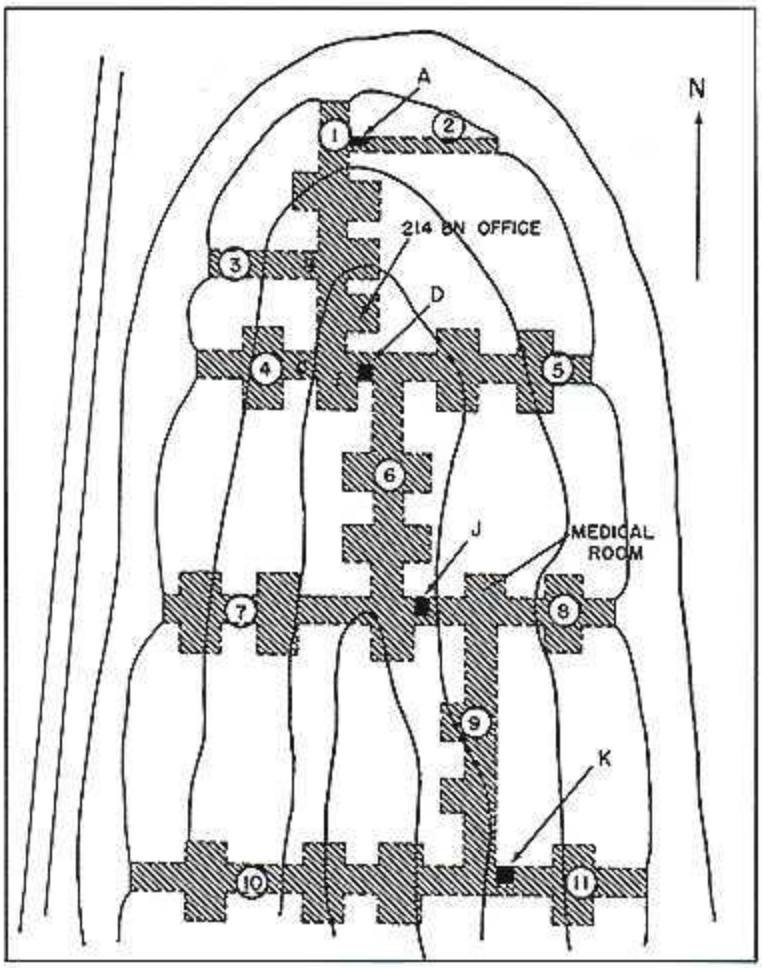
Harry Heyman and I, and a couple other scouts had crawled to the top of our protective coral mound to watch the naval bombardment and what we could see of the initial regimental advance, figuring the Jap's attention would be on them instead of us. At first there was virtually no shooting and the regiment's line moved quickly at least 250 yards with no opposition, almost to the base of the steep face of Hill 200 as this first ridge had been named. There were dozens of coral ridges making up Bloody Nose Mountain, each

named for its elevation above sea level.

I should stop for a moment and explain that we could see very little of the “line”. A real infantry assault isn’t like what the movies show, with bunches of guys running forward, standing straight up and yelling. Standard assault tactics call for “fire and maneuver”, also called “bounding overwatch”, where two four-man fire teams will move 40-50 yards quickly, spread out, while the third fire team provides a base of fire to keep enemy heads down. The maneuver teams will move one or two men at a time, running in a low crouch to the nearest cover, dropping to provide forward cover fire as the remaining team members come up.

So what we saw in this case was a man or two darting forward in one spot, another over on the left, then a couple more in another location, and so on. Our line of vision was restricted by coral terrain features, so we saw only a few guys moving here and there and had to interpolate the rest, which is not hard to do if you’ve done that sort of thing.

It looked sort of funny for a few minutes, with the tanks out of sight and growling while a few guys were darting here or there, but these scampering figures were the visible expression of nearly a thousand men intent on killing Japanese soldiers. And then the whole front of the steep slope ahead exploded in a firestorm from heavy machine gun nests in caves, sniper pits, concealed mountain gun and mortar emplacements, and hand grenades. The Japs had waited patiently until they could see the whites of the Marine eyes. The Sherman was immobilized quickly by 37mm hits on its tracks and the lightly-armored amtracs also were knocked out. Diabolically, when Marine fire was brought down on a gun emplacement, the gun would disappear and minutes later would pop out of another cave 30 yards down the line. This ridge, like many others to come, was a maze of fortifications and caves interconnected by tunnels cut deep back in the coral rock. They would be a nightmare for the regiment from this point on. The Japanese had zeroed mortars and artillery over every yard of the landing beaches, supported by interlocking machine gun fire lanes, but the serious defense in depth started here. The only tactical mistake they had made was mounting that hopeless counterattack across the airfield. They would have been better served to use their sad little tankettes as mobile 37mm gun emplacements. But maybe not. The fiendish terrain north of the airfield would make moving them about almost impossible.



Cross-section of elaborate Japanese cave system found on northern Peleliu

The 2nd Battalion companies in front of our grandstand seat scrabbled up the steep coral ridge finding whatever cover they could, and the scene became one of ferocious hand-to-hand combat; close-in fights with rifle butts, Ka-Bar knives, rocks and fists, bayonets, entrenching tools, anything that was handy. This action was 200-300 yards away and we could only see some of it because of the rough terrain and brush, but it was like nothing I had seen before- -the play-like hand-to-hand fighting in training did not resemble this. The ferocity was stunning.

Twice during the day our people pulled back and called in air strikes by F4U Corsairs. Those pilots were incredible—to avoid hitting our own they had to come in at very steep angles (our line people marked their positions with red and green smoke grenades), as much as 70-80 degrees, and they wouldn't pull up until we were certain it was too late and

they were going to splatter. Gallant as they were, it didn't help much; the groundhogs just crawled back in their tunnels. So our groundhogs went back at them the hard way, with flamethrowers and grenades, close-up stuff that came to be called "blowtorch and corkscrew."

We could not see the 1st Battalion action on the right but later learned they were in the same shape trying to get up the eastern extension of this same ridge, and were taking serious losses. Early on as they were moving east before swinging north they came under very heavy fire from a huge concrete blockhouse that anchored a line of coral pillboxes just north of the airfield. This was just the first of a series of vicious firefights they would stir up during the day.

We had seen the blockhouse on the aerial photos but the 1st shouldn't have run into it at all- -naval gunfire was supposed to have knocked it out before we landed. The naval gunfire liaison officer in the regimental CP called in 14-inch main battery fire from the old battleship Mississippi and with just two salvos it was reduced to rubble. Funny thing about those big naval shells- -you can actually see them going overhead. In this case they were only about 100 feet above us and made a loud swooshing noise before we heard the report from offshore. The four of us heard them go over but we couldn't see the blockhouse from our perch. We learned about all this later.

On the left, the 3rd Battalion was moving across fairly flat ground and was having an easier time of it than they had on D-Day. They had resistance but their casualties were light compared to the 1st and 2nd Battalions. By nightfall they had moved ahead about

700 yards and could have gone further, but held up at that point so they would not get too far ahead of the rest of the regiment.

We watched what we could see of the grisly action, feeling guilty because we were just spectators, but thankful that we were. Sometime before noon we crept back down to the CP because Stubbings was yelling at us. Because of the heavy casualties the regiment was taking, Puller scraped together all the people in H&S Company that were not indispensable to running the regiment, officers and enlisted alike, and later that day sent them forward to the battalions as replacements. This included Stubbings and all but four of the regimental scouts because no scouting was needed--all one had to do to locate the enemy was to stand up, which was unwise and discouraged since it tended to bring in mortar fire. The line battalions a couple of hundred yards in front of the Regimental CP served as very adequate forward observation posts.

Once more my angels were hanging around because I was one of the four scheduled to remain at Regiment. Del Stelck had been sitting and staring at nothing since the landing, not talking to anyone. He was kept back because effectively he was not there. Horton

also held Heyman and one other in the CP.

Somewhere around noon, as Russ Keyes and I were sitting in my foxhole finishing off some C-rations, there was a sharp explosion about 75 yards away where there was the hulk of a crashed Japanese transport aircraft. It had sounded more like a grenade than a mortar shell, and since we were security on the forward edge of the CP, we worked our way over with charged weapons, but there were already a corpsman and several others gathered around a spot just below the plane's cargo door. It turned out to be a supply section man who had triggered a booby trap and blown one of his feet off just above the ankle. The jagged end of his shinbone was sticking out of shredded calf muscle, and the man was looking at it as if he didn't understand. The corpsman and a couple of others carried him over to the aid tent nearby where the regimental doctor was patching up wounded line company people so they could be evacuated to the hospital ship offshore.

The only reason I mention this grisly episode is that it happened quite near the scene in the remarkable picture following this page, remarkable because I was lucky enough to run across it. The picture was taken by a USMC combat photographer from Division, Sgt. James Wasden, and it had to have been taken on the second day because I can identify three R-2 scouts who were helping with the wounded- -later that day they all were gone to the line battalions. The guy on the far left with a helmet is Hall, John Bauman without a shirt is to his right, and the man in the center with a helmet and a puzzled look is Barnett. You can probably identify these three in one of the group pictures later in this journal. There may be some other R-2 people in the picture that I can't identify because their faces don't show. I can't prove it, of course, but the man without a shirt at the very top center of the picture may actually be me- -it looks like my haircut and he is doing what I did a lot of that day and later- -staring in the direction of the regimental front, wondering how I got there.

Picture of Marines treating wounded described above. The author is possibly the man in the top center looking to the left. (From Peleliu: Tragic Triumph by Bill D. Ross).

So far nobody had asked me to do anything significant, which was all right with me, but early that afternoon Horton sent me over to Puller's "headquarters tent". This consisted of a rain poncho supported on four spindly sticks as protection from the brutal sun (it was somewhere around 110-115 degrees in the shade). One of his radiomen had picked up a Jap transmission and Chesty wanted to know what it was about. I was afraid it would be beyond me, but by the time I arrived the radio had gone silent. Puller asked me to stand by and said until further notice I was his runner/gopher and radio interpreter, in the event it happened again.

It never did, but that was the job I held for the next five days, and it was a good one considering the alternatives on that incredible island. The mortar and artillery fire on the CP had slacked off unless someone was foolish enough to get seen by the Japanese spotters. The fascinating aspect of the assignment was that it gave me a bleacher seat to watch the drama of running the 1st Marines in the most terrible mission they had ever been

given. I don't believe there was anyone in the entire Division, other than Puller and a few of his staff officers that had my vantage point for seeing the entire tragedy unfold. For most of those five days I sat there and listened to him argue on the radio or telephone with Rupertus and others of the Division staff about what should be done. I heard him pass on Division orders to his rapidly diminishing infantry battalions, orders that were obviously extremely bad in his eyes and that resulted, day after day, in horrendous casualties without gaining significant ground. All through it Puller never apologized or explained to his battalion commanders, taking the full responsibility to himself. I'll flesh this out later.

Anyway, back to the action on that second day, D+1. It was pretty much the same along the 2nd and 1st Battalion fronts, but the latter in particular was having a hard time. Since we couldn't see much from the CP, it is best described by quoting from one of my sources:

"What developed was a murderous cat-and-mouse game. When the Marines discovered a silent tunnel mouth, they waited for the Japanese to return. When the unsuspecting enemy came back they were wiped out by rifle fire and grenades, and the (tunnel and cave) entrances sealed by demolition satchels…Every torturous yard of the ascent claimed more and more Marine casualties, and mounting numbers of Japanese bodies marked the bloody route to the summit (of the first ridgeline). By evening, Ray Davis had the 1st Battalion's command post positioned, if precariously, atop the ridge. His troops had knocked out thirty-five fortified caves, none of which had been marked in the useless sector map made from pre-invasion reconnaissance photos. The cost was extreme: nearly 250 Marines killed or wounded."

Ray Davis ultimately retired as a four-star general, and while still a battalion commander in Korea, had been awarded the Medal of Honor for beating back a series of attacks by several thousand North Korean and Chinese troops against his unit of outnumbered Marines. He remembered D+1 on Peleliu as "the most difficult assignment I have ever seen…Company A depleted itself on the bare ridge on the right as Company C became seriously overextended on the left and was faltering. Everything we had was thrown in to fill the gaps. Remnants of Companies A and B, Engineer and Pioneer units, headquarters personnel, were formed into a meager reserve as darkness fell…"

By the time darkness came the 1st and 2nd Battalions had each managed to scrabble up to the top of the ridge, and each had about 200 men in place, only to find they faced another, higher ridge a few dozen yards ahead that looked right down their throats. One big plus was that the Japs no longer had direct observation of the beach area where they had poured so much mortar and artillery fire. This was a major advantage in bringing in supplies and ammunition, and in evacuating wounded. Also, General Rupertus had come ashore with his large staff and set up his own Division command post apart from General Smith (Assistant Division Commander) and Col. Selden, the Division Chief of Staff.

Rupertus informed Smith and Selden he was "taking over" and would run the show henceforth, despite the fact that the ADC and Selden had planned the whole operation and had conducted it up to this point. Rupertus still held out that it would "all be over in a few days," despite being informed by Puller that the 1st Marines had lost half of the regiment's combat effectives in the first 48 hours. None of Rupertus" staff or any of the senior line officers agreed with this patently optimistic view.

The following is from one of my sources that describes the state of affairs that second day brilliantly:

"Rupertus spent most of the day studying sector maps with Selden, and talking over the static-heavy field phone circuits to his regimental commanders. A lieutenant colonel on General Geiger's staff recalled the gist of the conversations. (My note: Major General Roy Geiger commanded III MAC, the Third Marine Amphibious Corps, which was comprised of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Marine Divisions with supporting elements. Rupertus reported directly to him. The lieutenant colonel mentioned was a liaison officer for Geiger attached to Rupertus' staff. Geiger was concerned enough about this operation that he came along with the task force and was afloat offshore at this time.)

Major General Roy Geiger

Rupertus…was disturbed when Chesty Puller told him of the hard times Davis's and Honsowetz's battalions were having:

'Can't they move any faster?' the general asked in a tone that was more an order than a query. 'Goddammit, Lewie, you've gotta kick ass to get results. You know that, goddammit!'

"Better news from Bucky Harris in the 5th Marines CP. Both Gayle's and Boyd's battalions had taken severe losses but were ahead of schedule; the airstrip and its complex of hangers and other installations around it were under their control.

"From the southern sector, Herm Hanneken and the 7th Marines had the situation 'well in hand.' The regiment had met heavy resistance, the colonel reported, but he expected to secure the area by sundown.

"Rupertus had just rung off from Hanneken when General Geiger appeared under the canvas tarp shielding the CP from the torrid rays of the late-afternoon sun. A look of surprise was evident on both faces.

'I didn't expect to find you here, Bill,' Geiger said in a quizzical manner. He didn't seem to notice the general's gimpy leg or cane. (Rupertus had broken his ankle coming ashore.)

'Likewise, General,' was Rupertus' answer. 'I thought it was time for me to see what was going on.'

"With that the duo moved out of earshot of the other officers and engaged in a heated conversation for ten or fifteen minutes. Geiger later told his aide that the argument was over the crucial matter of when Rupertus intended to call in the Army's 81st Wildcat Division to reinforce—or possibly relieve—Chesty Puller's badly shot-up 1st Marines. (The "book" calls for relieving or reinforcing an attacking regimental-size combat team after 15% or more casualties are suffered. The 1st Marines already had at least twice that many).

"Geiger thought the move should be made then and there. Rupertus adamantly refused to do so, short of a direct order from Geiger…the problem remained in limbo for three days."

D+1, Nighttime

Puller knew the desperate shape his regiment was in after the second day's terrible fighting. That evening after dark he called Col. Selden at Division and told him that half the regiment was gone and that there was serious doubt that he could carry out Rupertus' orders the next morning without replacements.

I could hear only half of the conversation, but it was clear that Selden did not offer to furnish replacements. I was five yards away from Puller, but his bullhorn voice wasn't hard to decipher. He never told me to move farther away when he was on the horn, but he had looked at me when he first gave me the job and said, "Old man, you may overhear some things while you stand by here, but you will not hear anything. Understood?"

"Aye, aye, sir!" I understood perfectly. And I honored the affirmation. I never gossiped with any of the R-2 Section, or spoke to anyone else about anything I heard until long after both Puller and I were repatriated to the U. S. I admit to getting a few things off my chest to some people, mainly my parents, after I was discharged.

Puller's voice rose as the dialogue went on. "Dammit, John! Give me some of those people down on the beach- -you must have 15,000 piss ants you call specialists running around down there."

I could not hear Selden's response, but Puller bellowed, "Give them to me John, and by tomorrow night they will be trained infantry!"

And that was the end of the conversation. From what I found out later, and from my reading to back up this journal, I am sure that Rupertus had laid down the law to Selden. The man was jealous of Puller and his reputation as the Marine's Marine, and there was no way he was going to enhance it. To this day I can get into an impotent rage when I think about this episode. All those poor, tired, outnumbered grunts that had to walk into hell the next morning with no help from this prideful, unforgivable, drunken egotist, when all he had to do was to call in some of the 81st Division reserve. From time to time there were a few other Marines I wasn't too fond of, but Rupertus is the only one I would call an unmitigated bastard. Nothing will ever get me to back off that statement.

After he rang off, Puller came over and said, "Pick up your weapon and come with me, old man. I have to talk with Davis and Honsowetz." No way I was going to suggest he call them on the field phone, and off we went in the dark and up the face of that godawful ridge after warning the perimeter that the Colonel was going forward and not to shoot us when we came back. He did let me lead off, and my ears grew to twice their normal size as we picked our way through the jagged coral, listening for any sign of hostiles who might have infiltrated after the sun went down. My faithful angels were with us of course and Puller let me do my job. He didn't push me to go faster, and he was quiet. The Navy had a couple of destroyers firing star shells over the beachhead every five or ten minutes to help perimeter security spot and discourage infiltrators. Every time we heard the offshore report which would be followed by an overhead "Pop", we froze until the bright light faded, so it was slow going

It took us almost an hour to find Davis' CP (I still remember the password that night, Daisycutter, and the countersign, Rose Garden). He only talked with Davis and his Operations Officer for about 15 minutes. The gist of Puller's closing remarks were, "You jump off at 0800. Full speed. Everybody you have- -cooks, bakers, clerks and typists, everybody. No packs, two canteens of water, and all the ammunition they can carry. I'll see that it gets up here. There are no replacements available for tomorrow." Not a word

about the conversation with Division.

And off we went again, west toward the 2nd Battalion, but faster this time because we were moving laterally along and behind our lines. The same story over again with Honsowetz and then we started back. By this time it must have been between 9 and 10 o'clock. The 2nd's CP was closer to Regiment than Davis' CP, and I sort of knew the best way now, so it only took us about half an hour. Puller slipped a couple of times on the rubbly coral and cut his leg rather badly once, but didn't make a sound except for one whispered expletive I won't repeat. The R-3 was waiting on the perimeter for us and we got back in without being shot at by our own people.

I don't know why he decided to track all the way out to the battalion CP's on foot rather than use the field phones. Even though they did tend to be annoyingly static heavy at times, it would have been more efficient and a lot less physical and dangerous. Chesty was hit hard when his younger brother, a Marine lieutenant colonel, was killed on Guam earlier in the year. Probably the stress from that event, combined with seeing so many of his own people cut down, along with the frustration of his relationship with Division, stacked up to the point where he needed to do something physical and dangerous to let off steam. I fervently hoped he wasn't going to make this a nightly adventure.

As it turned out, he didn't.

D+2, the Third Day

Honsowetz' 2nd Battalion jumped off without artillery or air preparation because he thought his position was too close to the Japanese and he didn't want to risk friendly fire on his beaten-up companies. They numbered something less than half the 954 that he landed with on D-Day. Davis' 1st Battalion was also at about half strength when they hit the ridge in front of them, Hill 210. Both battalions were using every man that could carry a weapon- -a scattering of replacements dredged up from the Regiment's support units, plus their own office personnel, cooks and bakers, supply people, and comm platoons.

They didn't know it that morning, but they were hitting the Japanese MLR (Main Line of Resistance) and they encountered a deluge of machine-gun, mortar, rifle and artillery fire, topped off by barrages from large-bore naval guns hidden way back in the Umurbrogols to the north. The racket was deafening even down in the Regimental CP. We couldn't see what was happening but didn't think anyone would survive that concentrated fury. Honsowetz called Puller less than an hour after they jumped off and said they were pinned down all along the line with extremely heavy casualties, and that there was no way they could take Hill 210 without replacements.

Reports I have read about this moment in the fight stated Chesty just repeated the orders to "get those troops in there and take the goddamn hill!" Maybe so, because I didn't hear all that was said. All I heard was, "Russ, you've got to keep trying," said in a rather quiet voice.

And then something happened that I never heard explained. All of a sudden the front went silent, with only sporadic small arms fire. The contrast was stunning- -all of that horrendous bombardment just ceased. The regiment's assault that morning was on the ragged edge of total disaster with the possibility that a determined counterattack might drive us right back to the beach. My first thought when the din subsided was just that-- the barrage had been lifted so the Japs could come charging out and shove the assault right back down in our laps.

It never came. There was no sign of a counterattack; neither was there any sign the enemy was abandoning Hill 210, but our two decimated battalions now had some chance of carrying out Puller's (Division's) orders. So up the ridge they went in a hell-for-leather assault. The official monograph of the battle read:

> "There was no other way. Clawing up and over razorback crests, shinnying up coral pinnacles, plunging down into sheer-sided gullies and ravines, dodging behind boulders, by evening Honsowetz's men had gained the forward slope of another hill and were firmly, if uncomfortably, established."

As far as I know, nobody has ever explained why that devastating barrage was lifted at that precise, critical moment. Knowing the Japanese inflexibility in modifying a battle plan drawn up by the gods in higher headquarters, my guess would be that they had been instructed to spend just so much ammunition, since they had no way to be re-supplied. But again because it had not been included in the plan, they missed a golden chance for a decisive counterattack, something the Japanese never managed against the Marines in the Pacific.

Remarkably, morale in the regiment and on the front was lifted by success on Hill 210, a feat that everyone had thought all but impossible halfway through that awful morning. An almost identical scenario had transpired in the 1st Battalion assaulting Hill 205 on the right. Initially, they had been hopelessly pinned down but came alive when the shelling lifted; they had all they could handle to reach the top of their day's objective, however, and only about thirty men held the narrow ridge at sundown. Still taking heavy machine gun and mortar fire from another ridge 100 yards farther on, there was no way they could dig in. The top of the ridge was solid coral and the best they could do for cover was pile up chunks of coral around shallow depressions in the ridge top. Darkness was a blessing.

The cost was high. In two days the regiment had 1,236 confirmed casualties, but the

condition of those that were left was poor to desperate. Two days of virtually continuous fighting in 110-degree heat, bad water (I haven't even told that story—ask me about it), and no sleep to speak of, had left the survivors less than combat-ready, and they looked it. Again, I quote from a combat correspondent's report:

"…Their appearance was…the grimiest, most evil-looking, stinking, and nonmilitary of any division at any time or place in the Pacific war. Except for…a few high-ranking officers and aides, those who had spent most of the time afloat and little, if any, on the island, not a man wore anything faintly resembling a GI uniform.

"Green dungarees were turned sooty gray from the coral ash, and ripped and torn from diving for cover or scampering over sharp rocks that were everywhere on the flat ground and the ridges. Streaks of gray marked the salty path of sweat down the back of blouses and across shoulders where packs and rifles were carried…Leggings had long been abandoned. Trouser legs were shortened, ripped almost to the knees or cut off with combat knives. Skivvy underwear shirts and drawers were discarded, blankets and ponchos thrown away…Smudged faces had the blackened look of miners emerging from a double shift in deep coal pits. Eyes were bloodshot and bleary from the fiendish combination of blazing sun, constantly swirling coral dust and debris- -and omnipresent fear."

And so on. I won't drag this out, but if I gave you the full picture it would make most of you gag.

Since the war there have been some bitter things written and said about Puller by some people who were there and went through the 1st Marines' seven days in Hell, and also some who weren't there, blaming the carnage on Chesty. This was natural and understandable, given the blood and guts reputation he had earned in some circles. Both are dead wrong.

I say again, both are dead wrong. I sat beside him for six of those seven days and I saw it all happen, heard all the talk. It was all Rupertus. Puller was simply a good Marine officer trapped by a superior's ego, as was Gen. Smith and others in the division headquarters. Chesty would not disobey an order, nor would he explain to subordinate officers that "it was the General's fault." One of his battalion commanders, after the war, described his "failure to recognize soon enough that we were a shot-to-pieces outfit while still ordering us to do impossible things with the worn-out, pitifully few men we still had." But I sat beside him while he swore at Col. Selden, on that second evening, telling the Division chief of staff exactly the same thing, and being coldly rebuffed. Chesty recognized that second evening precisely the shape his regiment was in. His language was not polite and he skirted at the edge of an insubordination charge the way he was talking to Selden.

There was an incident during this day that revealed more about Puller than all the second-hand commentary I have read. I was up the side of a 15-foot coral mound about 20 yards to the rear of Puller's poncho lean-to, keeping my head down but trying to get a glimpse of what was happening forward. A 1-ton utility vehicle was grinding and bouncing slowly through the CP below me, obviously headed toward one of the battalions, when some H&S man stopped it and a couple of people started unloading some cardboard boxes not more than 5 yards from the Colonel's "tent". Suddenly, Puller's bullhorn bellow erupted from under his poncho, "What in hell do you people think you're doing!? Get that stuff back in the truck fast or you'll be piss-anting it forward on your backs!"

I won't repeat the whole diatribe, but it was colorful. We had been surviving those first days on water brought ashore in 55-gallon drums that originally held diesel fuel, and which had not been cleaned adequately. In the heat there was no choice but to drink it, but it was making some people sick. Puller had sent our S-1 back to the beach to scrounge whatever he could find to supplement the miserable stuff, and the result was about 180 cases of pineapple juice (I think -- it could have been part tomato juice). Puller had ordered that all of it was to go up to the line companies, who needed it a lot worse than we in the rear.

The poor H&S guys didn't know all this background and simply were doing what any good Marine would do- -requisition their share as it was going by. But Puller was doing what he could for his people doing the dirty work. Nobody in H&S made that kind of mistake again. I thought the whole business was a hoot.

This controversy will drift into the past as the world forgets who Lewis B. Puller was, but not in the Corps- -there the argument will go on forever because the Corps will not forget him.

Despite reservations and concern expressed to Division about the 1st Marines capabilities at this point by not only Puller, but by the CO's of the 5th and 7th Marines, Rupertus' ridiculous optimism about a "quick victory" remained unchanged. Incredibly, the call came the evening of that third day to "resume the attack with maximum effort in all sectors at 0800 hours on 18 September." That evening the CP was moved forward several hundred yards so that we were about 150 yards behind the battalion lines. Once more the CP location was shielded by a coral mound just high enough to prevent direct observation from the hills ahead. There was more of the Peleliu travesty to come.

D+3, the Fourth Day

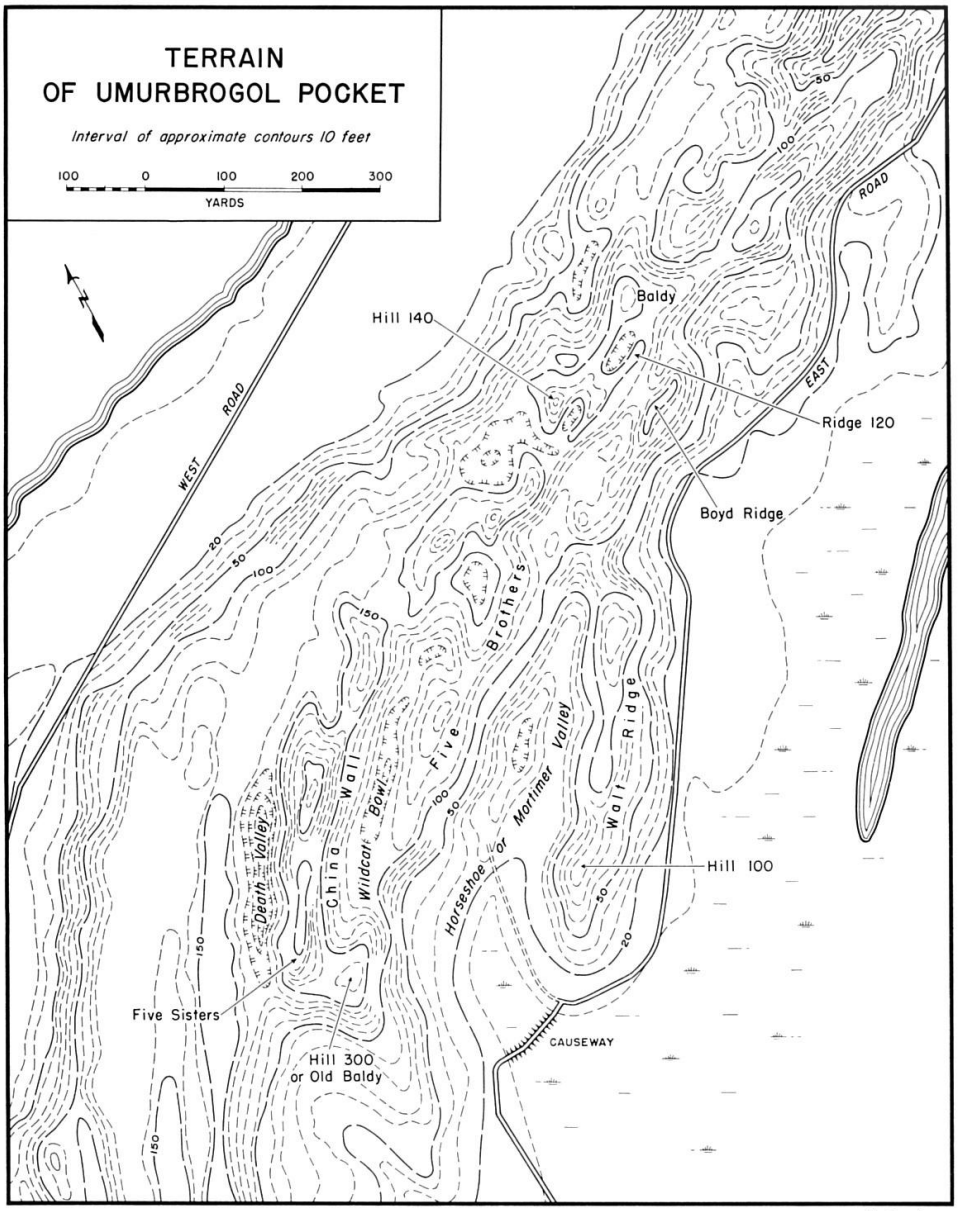
To put the situation on this morning in perspective after three days of fighting, the 1st Marines had suffered just six less casualties than the entire Division had taken in the three

months on Guadalcanal. Also, for the flavor of the CP environment that day I would like to quote Robert Martin of Time magazine, who was there that morning:

> "It was a scorching hot day and Puller was stripped to the waist with nothing more than a piece of tin and a poncho to give him some shade. He was smoking his battered pipe; characteristically he held the pipe between his incisors and talked out of the side of his mouth.
>
> "His CP was located where the bluffs [of Bloody Nose Ridge] came very close to the road. This defilade was necessary because the Japanese were laying down considerable mortar fire, and considerable small arms fire was passing overhead.
>
> "While I was at the CP some Japanese snipers worked down to a position north of the CP where they could fire down on it. Puller organized a patrol and sent them out to get the snipers. In a few minutes there were bursts of fire and shortly after that the patrol returned. There was no more sniper fire.
>
> "The field phone buzzed. The colonel listened and growled into it: 'We're still going but some of my companies are damned small.' A Jap mortar opened up and the men around the colonel flattened out. The CO himself did not change his position. He stuck out his chest and spat: 'The bastards!' "

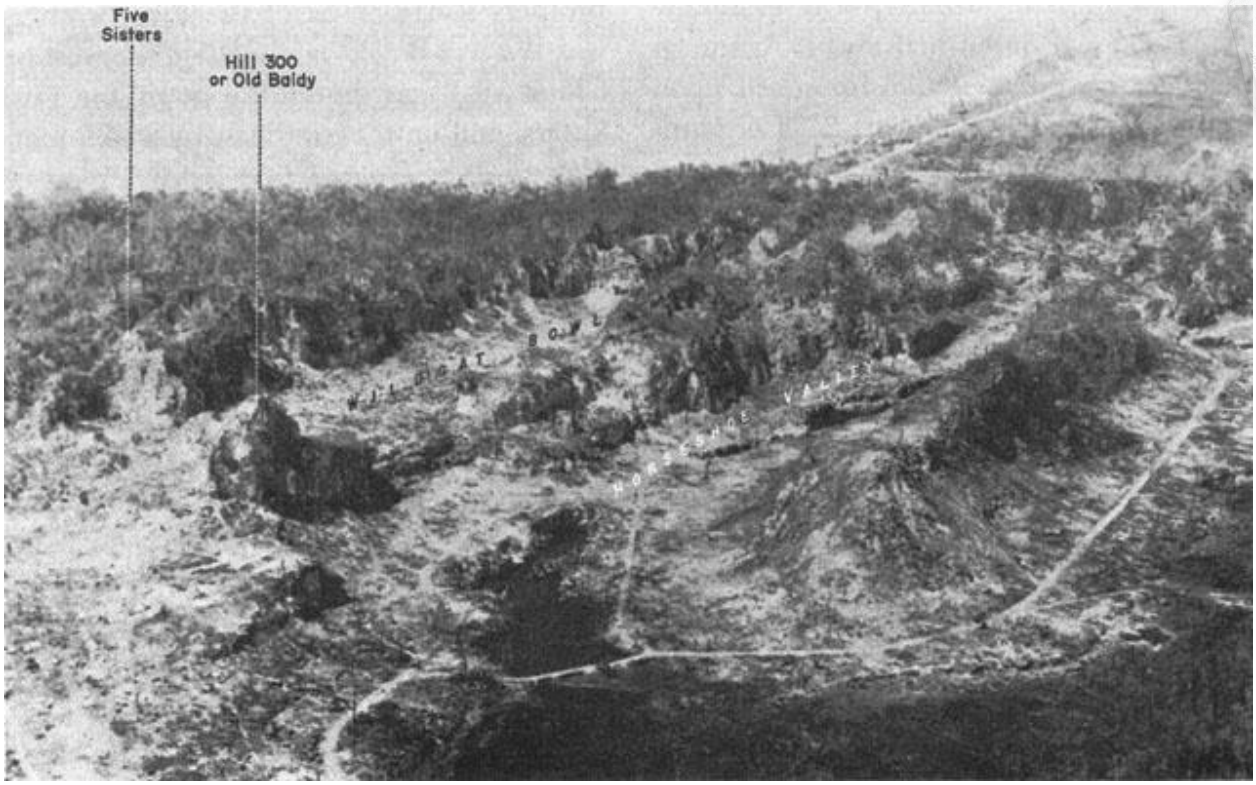
I was one of the guys who flattened out. I also was on the sniper patrol, led by Lt. Chandler. In fairness, we didn't get the snipers. There were only two and they were in a pretty exposed position -- we opened up on them and they took off. Prudent, for a Japanese sniper. They tended to stay in place and get killed.

By the way, "Bloody Nose Ridge" is a kind of misnomer. It is a basket term for a huge complex of ridges, one after another, making up the southern end of the Umurbrogol Mountains. And they are not really "mountains"; it is a tabular reef bank with small, outlying pinnacles that was gradually lifted out of the sea during fairly recent geologic time. As the regiment worked its way into this mess, individual features were given a variety of colorful names: Five Sisters, Five Brothers, The Pocket, Horseshoe Valley, the China Wall, Death Valley, et cetera, et cetera.



MAP 21

Contour Map of the Umurbrogols, aka "Bloody Nose Ridge"



This 1944 picture of the Umurbrogols gives a much better idea of the hellish terrain of Bloody Nose Ridge.

Marine's eye view of the Ridge. Note the sheer cliffs of the terrain.

This is supposed to be my memoir, but in truth I didn't really do very much in this terrible battle. The real story of Peleliu is in the gallant and heroic efforts of the frontline grunts doing their job under conditions and perils that they should never have been asked to face. Bad intelligence and blunders because of it is to be expected; war is that way. But these boys in the 1st Marines were told, day after day, to go out and probably be killed in what was a hopeless effort. There no longer were enough of us to do it, no matter how brave and determined. It was unconscionable, because it was purely to support one general officer's ego and ambition to be the next Commandant of the Corps.

That, plus his pathetic jealousy of one his regimental commanders.

I am not going to drag you through all of the gory details of that fourth day, but I think it necessary to encapsulate the day with one company's story that is typical of the whole.

It is the story of Company C, 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division, on September 18, 1944. Charlie Company, under Captain Everett C. Pope, was to attack a zig-zag ridge just beyond Hill 210, and it was expected to be a tough nut. Charlie Company was selected because it was in the best shape of any company in either the 1st or 2nd Battalions -- Capt. Pope had ninety effectives left out of the 242 that had landed on D-Day.

Because the ridge was in the 2nd Battalion sector, the company was temporarily assigned to Honsowetz. They moved out just before noon through a small swampy area in front of the ridge, but were immediately pinned down by heavy-machine-gun fire from two pillboxes at the base of the ridge. There was a small causeway on the left of the swamp that might support a tank, and Pope called Honsowetz to ask for tank support. Two hours later, four Shermans arrived, but the lead tank slipped off the coral bridge into the swamp, unable to move. The second tank tried to pull it out but slid over the other side, also immobilized. These two blocked the other two tanks from moving forward.

With no prospect of immediate help, Pope made a risky decision and ordered his mini-company to move out at the double and run across the causeway to cover on the other side of the swamp. The surprised Japanese did not react in time and there were no casualties in this mad dash. They assaulted the ridge and quickly made the top, bypassing the two pillboxes, which were reduced from behind with flamethrowers, only to find they were at the top of a very narrow feature under the guns of a heavily-armed strongpoint less than 100 yards away. By now it was almost dark and they were effectively surrounded with no hope of being reinforced before the next morning. They were on their own under point-blank fire from machine guns, mortars and light artillery.

Shortly after dark the Japanese began ground assaults, at first by infiltration, and when this didn't work, groups of fifteen or twenty at a time tried to storm the ridge top. The only support C Company had was from a 60mm mortar section behind them at the bottom of the ridge. They managed to throw back each attack, but at high cost.

By morning they were fighting with bare fists, Ka-Bar combat knives, chunks of coral, and some even threw empty ammunition boxes at the attackers. And by morning, Pope was holding the ridge with only eight riflemen. It was hopeless. Artillery bombardment began again and Pope was ordered to withdraw. He did get a smoke screen and 105mm howitzer shelling to cover the withdrawal as he and his few slithered, crawled, and rolled down any way they could. Within minutes of their withdrawal the Japanese reoccupied the ridge top, bringing 155mm mortars up to hammer the Marines below. Charlie Company had ceased to exist, literally. The following is from the official battle monograph:

"Four of Company C's officers and men received the Navy Cross, the Marine Corps' second-highest decoration (second only to the CMH-my note), for their heroism on the hilltop outpost. The Japanese considered the ridge so important that it was stoutly defended until it was finally seized on October 3, two weeks after Pope and his men first stormed the summit. Not until then, because of the constant and fierce fighting, was it possible to recover the bodies of Marines killed in the savage action."

Captain Pope was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his part in this

desperate action. Incredibly, Pope was the only company commander or platoon leader in the battalion who was not either killed or seriously wounded during the time the 1st Marines were on the island.

The story was similar up and down the 1st Marines' front on that fourth day, although C Company's ordeal was the worst. The regiment actually gained a little ground in spots on that day, but by nightfall it all had been lost.

One exchange that Col. Puller had that day with Division highlighted the insanity that prevailed. On Guadalcanal, Chesty had led a battalion-size amphibious end-around that was a major success. He suggested Division consider letting him pull his most intact battalion, mount them before dawn in Higgins boats and whatever amtracs could be spared and let him hit the Japanese flank from the sea- -at least, his men would not be forced to face the muzzles of all the Japanese ordnance at once.

I didn't hear the response on the field phone of course, but Puller bellowed, "Dammit! If I don't have enough men to hit them on the flank where they can't bring all their weapons to bear, how the hell are my people supposed to succeed frontally with all the Jap weapons pointed straight down their throats?" Red in the face, he slammed the phone down without waiting for an answer. I think it was at that point that I finally figured out what Rupertus was doing to him. Much later, back on Pavuvu, we learned that my guess was right.

While all this was going on, the 5th Marines moved up on the right of the 1st and gained some ground east of the Umurbrogol complex, and the 7th essentially mopped up any meaningful resistance on the south end of the island.

For comic relief, my part on this dreadful day was almost a Keystone Cops routine. Shortly before noon, a staff delegation in "clean greens" from Division and mid-grade liaison officers from the Navy came up to the CP unannounced, the latter in starched, immaculate khakis, about nine or ten in all. They all were wearing steel helmets and .45 caliber side arms. Puller was told that Rupertus and Selden wanted their staff people to get a firsthand report on "conditions at the front," and the Navy wanted to get a look at "why their 8-inch and 14-inch heavy stuff was having so little effect." They wanted to go up and talk directly with the battalion commanders on the line.

Puller didn't even crack a smile. He said, "Manhoff, take these gentlemen up to Colonel Honsowetz' CP so they can get a look at what we are doing. I'll let him know you are coming." The 2nd Battalion CP was reached by first going across a coral causeway similar to the one Charlie Company used that day. It was about eight feet wide, flanked on either side by swamp that was 2-3 feet deep, reaching a point on the other side where the ground started to rise and there was some tree and brush cover. These natural, low

causeways were used by the Japs and by us for vehicle traffic, but served as useful footpaths also. Once clear of the CP behind our coral mound, there was no vegetation cover for about 50 yards. Chesty knew it was under more or less constant observation by Japanese mortar teams higher up in the hills, but said nothing about this.

I had to, of course. Taking them to a spot where we could see the beginning of the little pathway, I explained why we would have to negotiate the first 50 yards quickly. When everyone was ready (a couple of them actually took out their .45's to check that they were loaded, like they do in the movies), we took off at high port for the other side. A minute or so after we reached the other side we could hear the cough of a couple of knee mortars, and a few seconds later there were two wet explosions on one side of the causeway, but not very close to it. The group grinned at each other because we'd been so quick and clever, but I wasn't so sure. Those two rounds looked like ranging shots to me. There were no follow-up shots.

Anyway, we got to the 2nd Battalion without incident and they had their talk with Honsowetz. There was occasional rifle fire cracking over our heads, and Honsowetz explained that it was aimed at his people out front, not us. He advised against trying to get to Davis' CP because there were several gaps in the line and several places where the group would be in clear view of the Japanese. No one suggested we go there, making me as happy as I got those days, and we started back.

When we arrived at our little roadway I asked them to be even quicker this time, saying if they dropped a helmet or anything don't stop to pick it up, and off we went. We hadn't gone fifteen yards before we heard four quick whump's and the whistle of incoming. Two rounds were short and behind us, but two hit twenty yards ahead of us barely off the pathway itself. Knee mortar rounds were not very big, but they could hurt if they were fairly close. We weren't getting the bigger stuff at regiment anymore; that had been shifted to our attacking units.

I went into my mile-a-minute mode as did several others, but all four of the Navy officers plunged headlong into the swamp water in their sharply-creased khakis. When I got to the end of the path and the cover of our coral mound I turned around and saw all four ka-chunking through the knee-deep water like it wasn't there. They were covered top to toe with gray-black slime, with the whites of their eyes glowing bright.

There were two more quick mortar rounds, but luckily all got back with nobody injured. I knew exactly what had happened. One of those Jap spotters was watching the causeway with those good Nikon binoculars and saw the spic and span uniforms, figured out it was a high-level staff visit and that they would be returning, almost certainly, along the same route. Except for me, the group didn't look at all like the Marine Corps they knew. They

had to wait an hour, but when we reappeared they were ready and fast

Puller's face was a sight to behold when we straggled back. He didn't actually laugh, but one could see it was pure torture holding it back. He was polite and asked if anyone had further questions he might be able to answer, and two of the Marine staff went off with him for about twenty minutes before the group headed back to the beach. I didn't expect we would have another staff visit, and we didn't.

In any normal environment the events of the Division staff visit would have made a pretty good comic routine. In the 1st Marines circumstances at that time, though, my recollection of it borders on the macabre; it was grotesque. I assumed they were there on a serious mission, to evaluate how serious the 1st Marines' situation was for the General, but one can't fail to note that neither Rupertus or Col. Selden were with them. The latter had visited the 5th and 7th Marines headquarters; I assume Rupertus told him not to come with the delegation to our CP.

I also assumed their visit presaged a decision to relieve the regiment from its impossible mission, now that Division staff had seen the horrendous condition of our line troops. I could hardly believe it when the order came that evening: "All infantry units will resume the attack with maximum effort in all sectors at 0830 hours on 19 September."

And all the while, in a former palm grove near the beach where the soil was deep enough to dig, the work went on from daylight to dark. The grave registration platoons buried the dead according to the book: "Three feet from centerline of body to centerline of body, fifty bodies to a row, three feet between rows." It was the worst assignment the Marine Corps had to offer.

D+4, the Fifth Day

It started out like the day before, with slightly reduced ferocity, but again it was the 1st Marines who were hit the hardest. The 5th Marines, now on our right, managed to gain about 300 yards into the ridges in that sector. The 7th Marines finished their work in the south and cleared some pockets of resistance in the east near Purple Beach. The 1st took a couple of small positions but were forced to give them back at nightfall. I don't think we achieved any net gain anywhere along our front, but on this day we gave up another hundred killed or wounded.

I didn't know it then, of course, but things were beginning to happen that would lead to a resolution of our disastrous situation. Word leaked down to us that Geiger had reappeared at Division during the day, and that there was a big argument between him and Rupertus. I didn't learn until I started reading background material for this journal that

the two points of contention were:

1. Why did Rupertus continue to order the infantry regiments to "hurry up" despite atrocious casualties (and that Geiger felt were unwarranted in some cases)?

2. Why was Rupertus so firm in refusing to commit the 81st Division reserve?

Well, I knew, and if a lowly grunt corporal knew then I believe Geiger and the Division staff knew that Rupertus was thinking of his image and reputation, and that he was not thinking about the poor riflemen who had to do the job. And he refused to recognize what Geiger and the other regimental commanders recognized: there simply were not enough poor riflemen left in the 1st Marines to do the job they were assigned. To demand that they do it was to sacrifice lives uselessly and shamefully. Rupertus had predicted a quick, easy campaign accomplished entirely by Marines, without having to call on a green Army division for help. His bloody ego was at stake.

But nothing occurred on that fifth day to change things.

Incidentally, this was the day the first American plane landed on the airstrip that the Seabees had been repairing. It was an F4F Wildcat from one of the carriers that had lost its engine on a strafing run. The pilot made a bumpy but respectable deadstick landing- -if you have ever seen an F4F you'd question whether the stubbly little machine could glide at all.

Strangely, although the airstrip was in full view of the Japanese, this event didn't draw much attention. There were only a couple of small mortar rounds that missed by a bunch.

Photo # 80-G-7026 Grumman F4F-4 "Wildcat" of Fighting Squadron 41 in flight, circa early 1942

D+5, the Sixth Day

By the morning of this day, only 120 hours after the landing, my regiment had lost more men per hour than any regiment in Marine Corps history, and that includes Iwo Jima and the heavy 6th Division losses on Okinawa.

1st Battalion casualties were 71 percent. The 74 men left in its nine rifle platoons were 11 percent of those who had landed. The 2nd and 3rd Battalions casualties were slightly less, but the bald fact was that the regiment had ceased to exist as an assault force.

A Marine on Peleliu, September 1944. The look on this man's face says a lot.

I don't remember the exact sequence of events that morning, and I haven't found a reliable source to fill in my memory gap- -there may not be any. I do remember that the assault companies had orders to press the attack as usual, but it really didn't happen that way. They may have started out, but it couldn't have been with any conviction. The sounds in front of us that morning were way different than before. We heard only sporadic small arms fire and there was very little counter fire from the Japanese. Even this faded to near silence by mid-morning. There was much more ruckus from the 5th Marines sector on our right.

Chesty had scraped and cut his left leg on coral coming back from our visit to the battalions on the second night. This was the leg that had taken a shrapnel wound on Guadalcanal, and it had developed an infection that by now had caused the leg to swell

badly. He could only walk with assistance from a makeshift cane or somebody's supporting arm, which infuriated him, and he was more crotchety than usual. The regimental surgeon came over with some pain pills and suggested he lie down and elevate his leg, but to no avail. Puller made some comment I didn't completely catch, but it was to the effect that he was asking a few boys to go out to get their legs completely shot off.

Sometime before noon, Puller was on the phone with the 2nd Battalion, asking what their situation was, and whether they had advanced at all. I have read that he was "profanely barking 'hurry up' orders to Russ Honsowetz", but I don't believe it. My impression was that Honsowetz was not in the CP at the time, because Chesty was talking with the battalion's Operations officer.

Anyway, who should appear at this moment but Gen. Geiger himself, accompanied by a lieutenant colonel from his staff. There also were a couple of MP sergeant's with Thompson submachine guns. Chesty said, "Good morning, General. To what do we owe this visit?" I thought I heard an edge of testiness in Puller's tone.

"I thought I'd drop in and see how things were going- -I know you've got a handful in front of you." With that, they moved out of my and the staff officer's earshot, but their dialogue was animated, particularly on Puller's side. One of the MP's offered me a cigarette, and all four of us sat and waited. I believe the lieutenant colonel wanted me to remove myself, but he didn't say anything. I was not about to leave unless Puller gave me the order.

The rest of this story comes from sources other than myself. I'm not sure how accurate they are, because some of it doesn't quite fit with what I could observe of this rather momentous tete-a-tete. It was way out of protocol for Geiger to show up at our CP without Rupertus or one of his senior staff along. All of us sitting there knew it and our silence was on the verge of funny. Also, Capt. Horton was nearby talking with the R-3, and both were obvious in their interest.

The naval historian Harry A. Gailey says Geiger "came to the conclusion that Puller was out of touch with reality," but Gailey wasn't there and he never identified his source for this opinion. I think the statement is outlandishly wrong, and I am sure that Capt. Horton and the other regimental officers would agree with me. Everything I observed during those six days would suggest he knew precisely what the reality of the regiment's predicament was, and I heard him express it clearly and forcibly to Division over and over again, to the point of exasperation.

You have heard me say before that in researching events and places, I have been repeatedly surprised by inaccuracies, exaggerations, and outright prevarication about things which I had a close personal knowledge. I believe the collective history and

memories of Chesty Puller's life have, in some cases, been subtly distorted by a few of his detractors out of jealousy, and I suspect Gailey's second-hand opinion of Geiger's conclusion that morning is an example of this.

Anyway, they didn't talk very long and Geiger signaled his escort and they took off. I couldn't read anything from Puller's scowling face and he didn't say anything to anyone at that point.

Picture: General Geiger, Commanding General, III MAC, visiting Puller at the 1st Marines CP, 21 Sep 1944. Behind Puller's right shoulder is the ADC (Assistant Division Commander) of the 1st MarDiv, Brigadier General Oliver P. Smith, later a Commandant of the Marine Corps.

Also note the makeshift hooch that Puller used as a CP. The "book" called at that time for a regimental CP to be 300 to 400 yards behind the front lines – Puller was rarely more than 100 to 150 yards away from his front-line Marines.

This visit to a regimental commander by a Corps commander was extremely unusual in that the Divisional commander, Rupertus, was not present.

To keep this short but intelligible I'm going to quote from one of my sources what happened next – I didn't know any of this until 58 years after the episode itself. When

Geiger left our CP he headed straight for Rupertus' beach CP. He found Rupertus, Chief of Staff Selden, and the Division G-1, Col. Fields, going over the situation map. Geiger "asked to see the latest casualty reports from Lewie Puller's outfit."

"The general scrutinized them with slow deliberation, but he made no immediate comment…the figures confirmed his judgment and worst fears. The 1st Marines no longer existed as a combat regiment; it was an organization only on paper, without enough manpower to be called an assault force…Unless the survivors were pulled from the lines as soon as possible…the skeleton units faced total extinction. Fields, who retired as a lieutenant general in 1970, recalled the grim Geiger-Rupertus confrontation. Speaking of the 1st (Marines), he said:

> "'They weren't fire-eaters anymore. They had to be replaced if we could find someone to replace them. Geiger wanted to use one of the 81st Division's regiment of Army men. But here, of course, we came into personalities….' (The grammar in that next to last sentence is Fields', not mine.)
>
> "Geiger had made his decision before the conference began, and was rapidly losing patience over Rupertus's obstinate, bewildering, nonsensical position. He listened for five or ten minutes before (Col. Fields) spoke up.
>
> " 'I felt we needed fresh troops,' Fields said, 'so I told General Geiger we should bring in the Army. He (Geiger) then turned to Rupertus, and said he felt the same way, and told him to act immediately.
>
> "There is no record of the reaction of the 1st Division's volatile commander to his G-1's flagrant disregard of military protocol in speaking out to Geiger. But Geiger was the commanding general of the III Marine Amphibious Corps, and…was Rupertus's superior officer; Rupertus thus could do nothing but comply with Geiger's orders to bring in Army reinforcements…
>
> "To emphasize his certainty that Chesty Puller and the 1st Marines were totally spent and unfit for further combat under any circumstances, Geiger went further. He directed that all of the regiment's survivors, officers and men, were to be evacuated as quickly as possible to the division's base camp on Pavuvu."

I quote the foregoing outside source so you will know it is not just some little pipsqueak corporal griping about a general officer he disliked. As far as I know, this striking incident was the only time in the Corps' history that a division commander was summarily ordered to do something with his division that he did not want to do.

That afternoon, September 21, an urgent dispatch went out, as follows;

MUELLER FROM GEIGER XXX URGENTLY REQUEST RCT 321 IMMEDIATE TRANSFER FROM ANGAUR AND ASSIGNMENT TO COMMANDING GENERAL 1ST MAR DIV PELELIU HQ XXX REPLY SOONEST XXX HQ III MAR AMPHIB CORPS XXX

Even that dispatch is significant. Geiger apparently took the matter totally out of Rupertus' hands (or, possibly, Rupertus refused to act, figuring his career was irretrievable anyway after this confrontation -- there was no way he could be Commandant after such an episode.)

I didn't know at the time what had transpired, but it was a gift straight from heaven when we were told to stand down, that the Army's RCT 321 (RCT stands for Regimental Combat Team) was embarking that day from Angaur and would pass through our lines in relief on September 23. The regiment hunkered down and in the afternoon of the next day the 321st showed up. With a fair amount of razzing back and forth with the Army guys, the bedraggled, frazzled remnants of the 1st Marines shook themselves and shuffled rearward for the first time in eight days, on their way to Purple Beach on the southeast side of the island. The area mostly had been cleared of Japs by the 5th Marines. From there we were to embark on troop transports bound for Pavuvu, our Paradise in the Pacific.

I knew part of the route, which skirted behind some of the former 2nd Battalion sector, I was assigned to probe a little farther east and then come back to a small road intersection and help direct traffic. It was only about two miles to Purple Beach, but there was quite a bit of north-south vehicular traffic behind the 5th Marines and our people had to work their way through this, west to east. As I was waving my hands at various elements of this snarl, a platoon of tanks with infantry riding on them came through going north. I noticed some of the infantry looking down at my feet and grinning, but I didn't pay much attention until these four clanking monsters had cleared the intersection.

All the wheeled and tracked traffic during that day had chewed up the muddy roadbed, and when the tanks were past I looked down and saw that I had been waving traffic onward while standing in the greenish, gelatinous remains of what once had been one of Nippon's finest whose mortal remains had been ground into the muddy road. I haven't mentioned it before, but the strong odor of rotting flesh had been growing from the second day in the 110° heat, so I hadn't even noticed the vapors wafting up from below me. I was so inured by this time that the only thought that popped into my head was that I'd never get the smell off my boondockers. I never did, even though I washed them in the ocean when we arrived at the beach that night, and a couple more times during the following days. It wasn't too bad after about a week.

Eugene Sledge, a PFC mortar man in the 5th Marines, wrote one of the best-known

accounts of the campaign in his book With the Old Breed on Peleliu and Okinawa. As the 1st Marines shambled toward Purple Beach that relief day, the last elements of the 5th were vacating the premises, and Sledge was among them. He wrote:

> "As we walked along one side of a narrow road, the 1st Marines filed along the other side to take over our area. I saw some familiar faces as the…battalions trudged past us, but I was shocked at the absence of so many others whom I knew in that regiment…We in the 5th Marines had many a dead or wounded friend to report about from our ranks , but the men in the 1st Marines had so many it was appalling.
>
> " 'How many men left in your company?' I asked an old Camp Elliott buddy in the 1st Marines.
>
> "He looked at me wearily with bloodshot eyes and choked as he said, 'Twenty is all that's left in the whole company, Sledgehammer. They nearly wiped us out. I'm the only one left of the old bunch in my company that was with us in mortar school at Elliott.'
>
> "…What once had been companies in the 1st Marines looked like platoons; platoons looked like squads. I saw few officers. I couldn't help wondering if the same fate awaited the 5th Marines on those dreadful ridges. (Twenty-two) bloody, grueling, terrible days and nights later, on 15 October (D+30) my regiment would be relieved. Its ranks would be just about as decimated as those we were filing past."

Actually, the 5th eventually had 1,594 killed or wounded versus 1,672 casualties in the 1st Marines. The big difference was that the 1st had acquired theirs in less than six days; the 5th took 30 days.

The R-2 Section led a comparatively charmed life during the Peleliu action. After the first and second day casualties, nobody else bought a ticket home. Except for Sadler, all of the people we had sent up to the line companies came back in one piece, although they came back shaggy, smelly, and decrepit. As it turned out, it took seven or eight days before we actually were evacuated from Purple Beach. The early evacuation of an entire (?) regiment had not been in the plan of operations, so it took the Navy a few days to organize the necessary transport, and to fuel and supply it for the trip back.

In the meantime, conditions got almost urban compared to the way we had been living on the other side of the island. On the third night after D-Day there had been a light rain. I was pooped enough that I slept right through that night, face up, discovering in the morning that I was all wet. At Purple Beach we had a real rain the second night, but some talented supply people had turned up a bunch of pyramidal tents and cots, believe it or not!

Also, Puller got an actual mess organization operating and they, with Navy cooperation, put together some very creditable chow, not just for the headquarters company but for all the rifle companies, too. We also received a new dungaree uniform issue, whereupon all our foul-smelling, ragged, original stuff was burned. Which was a good thing, because I doubt the Navy would have allowed some of the rifle company people on board in the condition they were in when they came off the line. Many of them were in truly disgusting shape through no fault of their own. I won't go into gory detail, but there were days when many of them were not able to make a head run, day or night, without risking being shot. War is hell.

We had reached that inevitable point in any military operation where there is little or nothing to do except hurry up and wait. So we did. I shaved for the first time in over a week and washed my boondockers twice more. We played pinochle. Life was getting pretty good.

There was one small incident I should include. I have mentioned that the 5th Marines cleared out most of the Japanese from the southeastern corner of the island where Purple Beach was located, but there were a few stragglers left behind. The second or third day on the beach, a couple of cooks who were scrounging south of the CP for souvenirs came tearing back yelling that somebody had thrown a grenade at them. Puller wanted a patrol out to track them down, and Lt. Chandler and Harry Heyman came by and told me to take five of the scouts south for that purpose. Chandler said, "Charlie, go out far enough that you will be out of sight and stay awhile, but don't take any unnecessary chances. We'll set up Cossack posts on the perimeter tonight."

There was a sort of an intermittent footpath running south from the CP through scattered trees and light scrub, and we moved out along it. For the life of me I can't remember whom I took out except for Cernik and Bishop. I remember them because I put them out on our right about twenty yards so we wouldn't get surprised from that direction. The rest of us guided on them because they didn't have a trail and had to move more slowly. I had told them to stay in visual contact and most of the time the vegetation was broken enough that it was possible. As I'm writing this it has floated to the top of my head that Leo Bouchard may have been with me that day; he was one I would have picked because he was always reliable and steady.

We had moved about 500 yards and were approaching a fairly broad, low coral mound when Cernik and Bishop froze like two pointer hounds. They had heard something. I spread out the other three scouts and we hunkered down waiting for a signal from our wing men. Before they did anything we heard a telltale "clunk!" from dead ahead and spotted a small, dark object arcing toward us from behind the coral mound- -pygmy grenade! (The Japs had a small grenade that looked for all the world like a big thread

spool without any thread on it. At one end was a small, brass detonator cap that armed the grenade when it was tapped sharply on something hard, frequently the perpetrator's helmet or a handy piece of coral. It was not very effective beyond five or six yards unless one was standing up and very unlucky.)

It was obvious the thing was going to fall ten yards short of us. We flattened out and waited for the explosion, ready to pick off anybody carrying a firearm that might be following. The thing went off, but nobody showed up. Cernik and Bishop had seen where it had come from and were already moving forward in a crouch, disappearing around the shoulder of the ten-foot high coral mound.

We waited. Nothing. Not a shot, or even any voices. After 30 seconds or so I motioned to the three with me to move forward toward the base of the mound, when two Japs in nothing but loin cloths appeared at the top of the mound, their hands clasped over their heads, walking straight at us. Mindful that they could be holding grenades under their clasped hands, we trained four weapons on them and waited.

Not to worry. Cernik and Bishop quickly came into sight behind them, with two Tommy guns pointed at their rear ends. It turned out that they had caught the two bandits, who had been peering at our approach down the trail, completely by surprise. These guys were pretty pathetic. They had no rifles, only a dozen grenades and a couple of bayonets.

These two were probably support troops of some sort, but I wasn't going to question them until we got back to the CP, and as it turned out, I never had a chance to do it.

We picked up their remaining grenades and headed back. Halfway back one of them suddenly bolted straight down toward the beach on our right. I don't know what he was going to do when he got there, but he hadn't made ten yards before Cernik held his nine-pound Thompson out like a pistol and laced four rounds right up his spine. He went down and never twitched.

I probably should explain about Cernik (pronounced Cher-nik), who frequently acted without instruction, like moving out after these guys back at the coral mound without any signal from me. He was tall and strong, and he practiced firing his Thompson from the hip as well as holding it straight out like a pistol. He was from Chicago, and his avowed ambition after the war was to be a gangster. I don't think this was a joke. He spoke little and tended to be a loner, but he was utterly dependable and fearless, and he always did what I asked him to do without question. It's just that he sometimes did things <u>without</u> being asked. On Okinawa when things were quiet he would sometimes go off alone in front of our lines looking for souvenirs. Surprisingly, he didn't get killed. I don't know if he achieved his gangster ambition, but I would not have been one to accost him in a dark alley.

Anyway, that's not the end of the story. When we got back to the CP I took our lone captive into the R-2 tent. Puller was there, talking to Capt. Horton and Chandler. He took one look at our prisoner and then at me and barked, "Take that little bastard behind the tent and shoot him."

It took me totally by surprise and for a split moment I hesitated. There is no way I would have argued with Puller's order or brought up the Geneva Convention. In the back half of that split moment I would have snapped off an "Aye, aye, Sir!" but Chandler saved me with, "I'll do it, Colonel." He took the sorry little Jap out and did just that.

I have been grateful through the years for Chandler's gift. In that crammed, kaleidoscopic moment before Jim Chandler jumped in I had a flash vision of my taking the Jap out, not behind the tent but down the beach a distance, firing two shots into the ground while motioning the Jap to take off. He probably then would have been killed by some line company man down the beach. What I actually would have done without Chandler's intervention I'm not sure, but I suspect I would have taken the prisoner behind the tent and shot him twice in the head. The reasons are complex. Since it didn't happen, I won't bother explaining.

Despite Puller's reputation with people who didn't know him, or who were jealous of him, I don't think this isolated episode was typical of the man. His left leg had become excruciatingly painful and swollen, he had left the action with three-quarters of his fine assault battalions killed or wounded, and his regiment had failed to achieve its objective. There was not another instance in the Pacific war where a Marine regiment underwent such a fiery trial, and had failed on top of it. Add to this the loss of his younger brother. At that moment, it was too much. We shouldn't have brought the little Jap back.

He hadn't really failed. The official Marine Corps monograph stated this about the 1st Marines:

> "In accomplishing its mission to this point (September 21), it had killed an estimated 3,942 Japanese (nearly a third of Colonel Nakagawa's garrison) and reduced the following major enemy positions and installations: ten defended coral ridges, three large blockhouses, twenty-two pillboxes, thirteen antitank guns, and 144 defended caves."

It was enough. We left the rest of the Division and the Army to finish the job and started "home" to Pavuvu. Peleliu, for the 1st Marines, was history.

I remember little about the trip back, not even the name of the ship, which was a bona fide troop transport this time. All of us were so numbed and relieved to be off that island that we just tuned out the world for a time, but I have a recollection of a sweet, peaceful feeling

in the soft, tropical air at night, and the quiet of the sea as we ghosted along. No gunfire. I didn't feel like cleaning my weapon, which I had been doing religiously each day for weeks, so I didn't. I do remember sitting on the fantail in the evening and watching, fascinated, as our wake roiled up the brightly luminescent plankton that can be so spectacular in the Pacific.

On the trip up to the Palaus it had taken half a dozen ships of various sizes to carry the regiment and its equipment. We only needed two troop transports to bring us back to Pavuvu. Believe it or not, I can't remember seeing any escort vessels with us on the return, but the Navy must have sent at least a couple of destroyers along, maybe more. Surely, they did.

Funny, I don't believe we even talked much among ourselves during that voyage. At least, I can't remember doing it. No trading of stories of what had happened, who was missing. In all the years since then, I have occasionally thought about going back to Peleliu to see how it looks at peace, and to do some snorkeling in what is described as one of the world's best diving environments. But each time I pushed it aside- -too many ghosts.

Pavuvu Refurbished, Revisited

The tattered, tired, decimated 1st Marines were the first combat elements from the Division to return to Pavuvu. It was late September I think, although I don't remember the precise date. The 5th and 7th Marines remained on Peleliu along with the rest of the Division to help secure the island. It was still a tough fight, and it was early November when the rest of 1stMarDiv joined us. In staying on another five or six weeks, both the 5th and 7th almost caught up with the 1st Marines in total casualties.

But back to our homecoming. Sailing into Macquitti Bay I had the same impression as the first time – it was a pretty little South Sea island. Once ashore the island had not been so attractive, but things had changed. The Navy Seabees had been very busy (CB's, stands for Construction Battalion, big guys with bulldozers, etc. Get it?). There were new loading docks and warehouses on the beach near Division headquarters. The road from there to the 1st Marines area had been widened, subgraded, and covered with finely crushed coral. The Division Movie Theater had been enlarged and covered so one didn't have to sit in his poncho if it was raining.

There was a new Division Recreation Building and as we were filing ashore, the word quickly got around that it was "manned" by six or seven Red Cross hostesses. I understand that when the remainder of the Division arrived six weeks later these charmers met them as they were debarking and handed out paper cups of grapefruit juice,

accompanied by pretty smiles and words of welcome. The idea behind their presence, I guess, was that a pretty female face from home would cheer up the weary troops and remind them what they were fighting for, and if the enlisted boys would come down to the Division Rec Building after duty hours they could get a doughnut and a cup of coffee. If they were very lucky maybe one of the girls would play ping pong with them. At least, that may have been the thinking in the Red Cross administration back in the States. I have another idea that will emerge later.

Nobody met us as we came ashore except the truck drivers who would take us to our respective unit areas, which was fine, but I have to stop here and comment on this bizarre situation because it drew such dramatic responses from almost every enlisted man in the Division, myself included.

Imagine, if you will, a true desert island that held roughly 20,000 tough, randy young studs that had been involved for a couple of years in killing every Japanese they could lay a rifle sight on, and that hadn't seen a white woman in all that time. Then put half a dozen nubiles on the island, ensconce them in an MP-guarded barbed wire compound with their own mess and other facilities, with the expectation that they would come out in the evening and "entertain" with coffee and doughnuts. They always had an armed MP escort when they were out of their compound, of course.

The idea struck me as outrageous, verging on insult. It was the dumbest thing I ever saw the Corps do, before or since. During the previous residence on Pavuvu many of us would go to the movies at Division once or twice a week - we didn't have a regimental theater as the other regiments did because Division was only a quarter of a mile away. After the show we merrily kicked the daylights out of the land crabs on the road as we moseyed back to the regimental area in the dark (no street lights, son). In this second stay I never did go to Division for a movie, and I never set foot in the "Rec" Building. I am even angry as I write this, and it is almost sixty years later. I didn't want to even see those Red Cross women.

My response was typical of at least 80% of the enlisted men in the Division. Quoting E. B. Sledge in With the Old Breed, as he came ashore with the 5th Marines that November:

> "On the beach we walked over to one of several tables set up nearby. There I saw – of all things – an American Red Cross girl. She was serving grapefruit juice in small paper cups. Some of my buddies looked at the Red Cross woman sullenly, sat on their helmets, and waited for orders. But together with several other men, I went over to the table where the young lady handed me a cup of juice, smiled, and said she hoped I liked it. I looked at her with confusion as I took the cup and thanked her. My mind was so benumbed by the shock and violence of Peleliu that

the presence of an American girl on Pavuvu seemed totally out of context. I was bewildered. 'What the hell is she doing here?' I thought. 'She's got no more business here than some damn politician.' As we filed past to board trucks, I resented her deeply."

Sledge was a 60mm mortar man and therefore spent most of his time behind the riflemen who are my heroes. I think he is often a bit much about the "veteran combat Marine" stuff, but I am totally with him on this. I am sure at least some of those girls were just trying to "do their part" in the war effort, but I resented them, too. No women around for two and a half years is lousy, but with those totally unavailable girls on the island we didn't even have the cold comfort of "out of sight, out of mind", so I just never went where they were. (With one involuntary exception, which will come out later in this narrative}.

There were other refinements. Messhalls had been upgraded, new tents erected in place of some of the ratty, mildewed ones we had left, and there even was a Regimental Library tent. Beyond that sort of thing it was still the same old Pavuvu, but most of us were happy that there would be considerably less need for construction and maintenance work parties.

The H&S Company area looked pretty much the same as we left it, although replacements that came in before our return had obviously been busy policing and sprucing up the tents and company streets. I went back to my old tent where we had stacked our sea bags holding the stuff we didn't take to Peleliu. The tent wasn't new but there was a new wooden floor (there were a few land crabs under the floor and under our sea bags that we had to evict, but everything I had left behind was intact). Les Bishop and Leo Bouchard were two of my tent mates and there was a baby-faced replacement named Gobi who had been billeted to watch over our gear and keep the place tidy for our return.

Gobi was a pleasant kid, quiet and always doing his share, and I liked him. However, I had to overcome a little personal ego problem because of him. Everyone in H&S had re-qualified on the M1 rifle earlier in the year and, as was only appropriate, I fired the high score in the company. When we qualified again in January 1945, Gobi took the honor right off my plate. He fired 180 out of a possible 200 and I only managed 179. I was so used to being "top gun" that it rankled me for quite a while. I would never have picked him out, with his sweet smile, as being a High Expert rifleman. You can see him and his sweet smile in the accompanying picture.

But the war was not over; I will push on.

Some of us, not so cleaned up, shortly before Okinawa
I was now Chief of Regimental Scouts, 1st Marines, 1st MarDiv
(Even if I don't look it)

Gobi – Carroll – Berg – Keyes - Bauman
Kadish – Blake – Stelck – Bishop
Manhoff – Brokaw – Barnett - Bouchard

Enter the "R" Phase

Funny title. Popped into my head because at this point in time the regiment was engaged in so many activities beginning with the letter "R":

R&R – Rest and Rehabilitation. We did get a smattering of this because everyone was down and pooped, physically for some and emotionally for most. The powers that governed us didn't hand out many work party or training jobs for a while. We were given time to draw stuff from the library, catch up on news from home, read our mail and write letters so people back home would know we were still kicking. Some of us in the Scout section had the opportunity to do quite a bit of beaching during duty hours – the swimming and snorkeling off Pavuvu was pretty good, with many strange and gaudily-decorated fish to chase. I learned later of an ulterior motive in letting us indulge ourselves this way.

It just would have been a bunch more rejuvenating if we could have done it in Melbourne like the Guadalcanal rats did. Or Honolulu or Wellington.

Refit We were given time to clean ourselves up, do laundry, draw new gear and field uniforms where needed, go to sick bay for minor ailments acquired at Peleliu and ignored until now. Almost everybody needed new boondockers and a little time to break them in before we had to do any serious hiking or marching. My rifle had to go to the armorer for some repair and I persuaded Ski, the company Supply Sergeant, that I should have a carbine as a temporary replacement. Ski was very proprietary about his job and the equipment he watched over, but he reluctantly agreed. The M1 Carbine only weighed 6 pounds versus the MI rifle's 9 pounds, plus I wanted to find out how good it was.

Rotation. This refers to the lucky jarheads, enlisted and commissioned, that had enough overseas time to get rotated back to the U. S. for a time. Col. Puller was one, never to return to the Pacific in this war. (He did get back, of course, during the Korean scuffle, finishing as a major general commanding the entire 1st MarDiv. He was largely responsible for execution of the brilliant "retrograde movement" from the Chosin Reservoir when the Chinese got into the act. As far as I am aware the Division left no wounded behind and precious little equipment as it fought its way out of what could have been a massive disaster. I've got to Google up that story and see if what I just said is accurate.

We also lost Captain Horton, and three enlisted from the R-2 Section to Stateside rotation. Gobi was transferred to a line company, but I don't know why. He seemed like he might make a pretty good scout. He sure could shoot straight.

Replacements

By far the most significant replacement in the Division was Maj. Gen. Pedro del Valle who, as a Colonel, had been the CO of the 11th Marines, the Division's artillery regiment on Guadalcanal. He took over from Gen. Rupertus, who went back to the U. S. under his own little personal cloud. He was scheduled for the obligatory backwater honor assignment, and he actually was given the Distinguished Service Medal. Essentially, his career was over, a far cry from becoming Commandant of the Corps which had been his ambition. To my mind, the award of the DSM was a travesty and an insult to all the people who died or were shot to pieces trying to carry out his ego-based orders.

I don't think Rupertus actually assumed his new assignment. In March of 1945 he had a massive heart attack and died. He was 55.

But life went on in the 1st Marines. A Captain Boyd came in as R-2, replacing Capt. Horton. My suspect memory of him was that he was a lawyer from somewhere on the east coast. My memory is dim because there was nothing distinctive about him. He had come out fresh from the States with no combat time and tended to do most things totally "by the book". None of us knew how he had become a Marine officer or what his previous assignment was. As far as any of us could tell, he did not seem to have any particular qualifications as either a military intelligence officer or as a troop commander – as both Horton and George Hunt before him clearly did. Lt. Chandler (now a 1st Lieutenant) was obedient and respectful but the two did not talk with each other much as far as we grunts could tell. Lt. Craemer (now a Captain) gradually disappeared from R-2 on some mysterious, unnamed assignment. We never did get a replacement for him.

Although I now was one of Capt. Boyd's more experienced NCO's, I can't remember ever having a dialogue with him on any topic other than "Aye, aye, sir!" when he asked me to do something. Although I don't remember him ever asking me a personal question, later events revealed he actually was my sponsor and supporter. In distant retrospect, I believe he simply may have been a bit intimidated, surrounded as he was by a flock of fire-baptized veterans of the Old Breed, both officer and enlisted, and simply kept his counsel relatively private. Not so dumb, really.

The other principal replacement was Colonel Kenneth Chappelle. He took Chesty's place in December, 1944 after the regiment's Executive Officer (XO), Lt. Col. Ross had filled in for about a month. My memory of Col. Chappell is pretty vague, but I think he was a gentlemanly, patrician sort, impersonal with enlisted men. I don't remember ever speaking with him.

None of my comments about Boyd and Chappelle are meant to be critical – no officer at any rank should try to be "one of the boys". The military is not a democracy, and nobody gets to vote. This is as it should be - - at crunch time there is little room for discussion or disputation. Some officers have the knack of establishing a limited personal link with their troops through a joke, a question about home or a girl friend, or similar, without sacrificing the necessary separateness of command and this tends to strengthen the loyalty of subordinates. Puller had it, so did Captain Horton and Lieutenant Chandler, but it isn't a requirement for a good officer. Being competent, making good decisions, and looking out for the welfare of subordinates is what counts.

Some new scouts were assigned to us to fill the gaps left by casualties and rotation – "Killer" Kane, Buck Buchanan, Ken Sommers, "Snuffy" Smith, Henry Blake, Jack Carroll, and George Bartram, if my memory can be trusted, which it probably can't. None of the foregoing nicknames connoted anything – they were just drawn from cartoon characters of the time. (Are you old enough to remember Killer Kane from the Flash Gordon strip, for

example?) None of the new men had been in combat before, but I don't remember any of them being particularly overawed by us "seasoned veterans". Two or three were draftees that took some ragging for being "involuntary volunteers", but that wasn't really fair. I think all had actually volunteered for the Corps after they were drafted. They could have picked Navy blue or the guys with the mustard brown pants. Occasionally, one would ask about some aspect of Peleliu or New Britain, but mostly they just looked ahead like the rest of us.

There were two promotions, but none for me or Harry Heyman (you may remember he became Chief Scout when Katrinis was hit the first day on Peleliu).

The R-2 Section Chief, Sergeant Stebbings, got his first rocker bar, making him a Platoon Sergeant. This resulted a couple of months later in him drawing a transfer to a line company platoon, where there always were shortages of experienced senior noncoms.

The complete R-2 Section, cleaned up, December 1944.

Keyes—Bauman—Kane—Berg—Cernik—Davidson—Sommers—Smith
Manhoff—Bishop—Hall—Bouchard—Jones—Stelck—Buchanan—Michaels
Clark—Heyman—Foreman—Lt. Craemer—Capt. Boyd—Lt. Chandler—Stubbings--Gray

My recollection of events during this period is rather vague. A number of weeks went by as Christmas approached which are pretty much a blank in my mind. I do remember a fairly sumptuous Christmas dinner with turkey and cranberry sauce and real (not dehydrated) mashed potatoes. There was mail from home indicating they had received my letters following Peleliu and knew that I wasn't one of the statistics. This was comforting to me in a strange sort of way – I didn't want Mother and Dad to be worrying about me, which strikes me as fairly ludicrous. Of course they worried, but they never told me this in letters. My father collected the vivid pictures from Life magazine depicting the Peleliu campaign by Tom Lea, but he didn't give them to me until after I returned home. They were graphic and must have horrified Mother, particularly. I still have them.

[Note to the reader: The pictures by Tom Lea published in Life Magazine in 1944 on the

battle of Peleliu are truly shocking. They are so graphic that I have included two of them in the bottom of this book in an appendix. View them only if you have a strong stomach.]

Overture for The Next Act

The soft life couldn't last, of course – there was another campaign lurking somewhere ahead and we started to get some indications that it was approaching pretty fast. One of the first clues was when the entire H&S Company was lined up one morning for inoculations, and there were a couple of new ones. H&S had a corpsman who was an absolute magician administering the needle. He knew us all by name and as each of us reached the head of the line he would start a conversation on something topical, all the time picking up the syringes and giving them in sequence, pausing after two or three to say "Turn around, Slim," to expose the other arm, and never missing a beat. He used a smooth, upward arcing motion and the needle slid into the muscle cap at the shoulder painlessly. Made us think we were all stout fellows.

The pain came later. You would see guys walking around with their arms held out motionless from their body, like some bird drying its wings. After a day it wasn't so bad, but it took almost a week before I wanted to go swimming and swing my arms over my head.

The next clue was when we got the word that the Division would be loading out for maneuvers on Guadalcanal, one regiment at a time. Regimental-scale maneuvers? A company exercise was about all that pitiful little Pavuvu could accommodate, so it was obvious that whatever we would be training for was going to be on a bigger landmass than the last one. No word on where, however.

It puzzled us, but for several weeks nothing much happened. No training exercises scheduled for the R-2 section, a little more spit-and-polish than we had had under Puller and Horton (no more wandering around the company area without a shirt or dungaree top), but also not much work party activity. There was some softball and volleyball organized.

Informally, the Scout section held some hand-to-hand combat exercises for the benefit of the new replacements, with much jocularity that these techniques should not be employed if there was <u>any</u> chance of running away instead. Russ Keyes, a Tri-State (Washington, Oregon, Idaho) wrestling champion from Tacoma was a principal instructor. Catlike, and at 190 pounds (no fat) he enjoyed this role immensely. There was no serious competition for him. I remember demonstrating various disgusting uses for the standard issue Ka-Bar knife, including how to sharpen them. They were always dull as issued.

I also conducted some classroom map reading problems, cleverly integrated with offhand comments on how to move to an objective and back without being detected, with the idea that we would find opportunity and time to practice around the island. We never seemed to get around to that, and our officers didn't press it.

It was during this period that the Division in its wisdom decided that there should be a round-the-clock submarine watch to protect the island from surprise attack. Each infantry regiment was to provide five-man teams from their R-2 sections, each team to man the observation post on a rotational basis, a week at a time. Don't ask me what Division had in mind. What were the Japs expected to do – slip in under cover of darkness and torpedo the loading docks? The biggest Jap sub might be able to land 30-40 raiders who could drop satchel charges in the supply warehouses near the docks before being obliterated by several hundred gleeful 1st Marines (we were the nearest regiment to the dock area), but this seemed so unlikely as to be laughable. The nearest operating Jap naval base was a couple thousand miles away and there were much bigger and more vulnerable targets than our remote little rest area that housed 20,000+ disgruntled men specially trained to kill Japanese hostiles. They could do more physical damage by sinking one large supply ship at sea.

The watch was to be manned on a remote point on the far side of Macquitti Bay, from whence we could clearly observe the natural approaches to the island. A radio call from this spot would give Division ample time to prepare a reception party for any intruders. The 1st Marines drew the initial watch and Stebbings asked me to pick four men and draw ammunition together with 10-in-1 rations for a week. A radioman from the Comm section would be assigned to us.

I think I remember Harry Heyman with an envious look on his face. This meant we were in for a seven-day picnic out at the observation point with no duty other than to go swimming (there was a beautiful white sand beach), read, play pinochle, and report to Division (and Regiment) whenever we spotted a submarine. We were also to report once a day even if we didn't see a submarine. I am making fun of this operation, but maybe somebody in Division knew something se didn't. Off we went early the next morning in an LCVP without a care in the world. There was a coral-founded islet about 75 yards off our private beach called Marulaon Island. It was maybe 10-15 acres in area, with a maximum elevation of roughly 20 feet. We decided to explore it after we settled in.

That afternoon John Bauman and I did so, the others waiting to see what happened to us before they committed to the modest swim. John and I discovered that the channel only reached about 8 feet in depth but that it was running a good 3-4 knot current. We made it without drifting away to the open sea and walked along the beach line to the other side of the island. There we found a fairly large clearing in the scrub palms. It obviously had

been used by someone having their own picnic because there we found a couple of empty bottles and some ashes where a small fire had been built. John and I swam back and didn't think much about it.

Our sojourn on the point was pretty tame except for one thing that occurred halfway through the week. The only reason I am telling this episode, other than to illustrate the kind of silly things that occasionally go down in the military, revolves around this event.

It was after evening chow and we were lying around talking after the sudden tropical sunset without any light except that from the full moon. We had been given instructions that there would be no fires, no light even from flashlights after dark. Security, you know. We all felt it was ridiculous because there were electric lights all over Division headquarters two miles away, but we were being obedient. And that was good because sometime around nine o'clock the Division power launch came chugging by with half a dozen rowdy male and female people aboard, laughing and singing rude songs. The launch putted on by to the other side of the little island and then went silent. We could still hear voices, but nothing that could be understood.

Bauman and I had the same thought simultaneously – let's find out what they were doing over there. No one else was even slightly interested in braving the channel current in the dark, but John and I were curious enough and dumb enough to go. Actually, there was very little current running this time. Using all our hard-earned stealth skills we crept straight up to the top of the gentle mound that formed the high point of the little island. Actually, it was easy because there wasn't much vegetation to deal with. Sort of like playing cowboys and Indians; John and I were the Indians.

Well, it was a spectacle. They had paired off and were in various stages of fooling around, drinking beer, and laughing and yelling at each other. One couple, dressed only in skivvies, repeatedly climbed up the after-ladder on the anchored launch 20 yards offshore and jumped off with their thumbs over the mouths of the beer bottles they were holding. Another pair was sort of curled around each other on the sand, not making any noise and not doing anything we could make out from where we were crouched, but it wasn't hard to tell that <u>they</u> knew what they were doing. The third couple, also only wearing skivvy shorts, was chasing each other up and down the beach laughing and carrying beer bottles that were foaming over because of the jostling, with the clear intention that one of them was going to catch up with the other.

With our sharply honed reconnaissance scout minds, John and I quickly deduced we had come upon…a PARTY! We couldn't talk about it then because we were too close to the action and they would have heard us, even in their semi-inebriated preoccupation. We both knew we were totally outranked and that prudence demanded we get out of there

promptly, which we did.

Back on our side of the channel, we concluded we had seen three willing Red Cross dollies rollicking with three Division staff officers that had enough rank to commandeer the Division launch for some mutual R and R. None of the men were wearing insignia of course, but they were too young to be generals and too old to be lieutenants or captains, so in our wisdom we classified them as majors, lieutenant colonels or colonels.

So much for military intelligence as performed by battle-hardened regimental recon scouts. In our deprived condition, the whole business didn't do much for our morale. War is Hell – and RHIP!

The Plot Thickens

No enemy submarines were detected on our watch. I believe the submarine watch was manned two more times and then dropped. This might have been related to the situation when we returned to the regiment. Events had moved along. There was news about the Iwo Jima landing and it wasn't good. It sounded like a repeat of Peleliu, only twice as big because the entire 5th MAC was involved (3rd, 4th, and 5th MarDivs). Our division was gearing up for imminent maneuvers on Guadalcanal, and the regiment was hard about their own preparations.

Boyd and Chandler were secretive about some maps that had been delivered to the section, working over them after evening chow a couple of nights, rolling them up and stowing them in the section's locked file cabinet with a guard posted. This turned out to be sort of a joke, because when they showed them to us after a few days they turned out to be fairly large-scale maps of two islands without any coordinates or names attached. There was a graphic scale and one of the islands was roughly 20 miles wide and 60 miles long, the other much smaller. Terrain was represented in some detail. Chandler made a wry face explaining that he couldn't tell us where they were, or the names of the islands, but that they were probably our next assignment.

The next day Heyman came into my tent and said that the schedule had been moved up and the regiment was loading out in four days for the Guadalcanal maneuvers, but that Capt. Boyd wanted to see me in the office tent. When I arrived the Captain sat me down and said I should pack my gear for the maneuvers and help the Scout section get ready, but that I would not be leaving Pavuvu with the regiment. He said I would stay back for a special training assignment, at the conclusion of which I would have the opportunity to volunteer for a special mission that was being planned. Boyd said he couldn't explain the nature of the training or the mission until after the regiment left for Guadalcanal, but that he didn't want me to be caught off guard at the last moment about the change in orders.

He smiled a little and said he also wanted to find out if I could keep my mouth shut about this until the regiment mounted up and moved out, but that I would learn the Division's new objective very soon. He said he also would not be leaving until three days after the regiment's departure, that Capt. Craemer was going to another assignment, and that Lt. Chandler would take over the R-2 section until Boyd rejoined the regiment on Guadalcanal in a few days. He then asked if I was all right with all of this, and did I think I could resist talking about it, and if so that would be all for now. He was still smiling. I stood up and said, "Yes, sir. Aye, aye, sir." As I said earlier in this chronicle, that was my usual dialogue with Capt. Boyd.

I did my part in getting ready, as if I expected to be leaving with the others, but as you can imagine I was pretty antsy. I dreamed up all sorts of scenarios, none of them remotely on target.

I Get the Word

The day the regiment loaded out with much bustle and roaring of 6x6 truck motors, I got a lot of funny looks and ribbing when it became apparent I wasn't going along. "What's the matter Charlie? You do something naughty?" Or, from Johnny Bauman, "I know what you're doing, Charlie. You've pulled sick duty so you can sneak out and crash one of those parties at the Submarine Point." I just grinned and said, "I'll be seeing you later, dumbguards!," without any idea whether I would or not.

Boyd called me in the following day and showed me the mysterious map he and Chandler had been working with. It had some pencil notes and arrows on it, but still no place names or coordinates. The first thing he said was, "Nothing you see or hear this morning will be discussed with anybody except me, Col. Chappell, or the R-3, until we say so. Understood?" "Aye, aye, sir!"

(It has been 60 years, but that morning was so electrifying it was burned deep into my memory. I believe the following account is pretty accurate.)

Boyd said the big island was Okinawa, the main island in the Ryukyu Group, located about 350 miles south of the big Japanese island of Kyushu. It was to be our next objective, and Boyd said the entire 3rd MAC (3rd Marine Amphibious Corps, consisting of the 1st, 2nd, and 6th Marine Divisions) would be involved, along with four Army divisions. It would be the biggest operation of the Pacific war to date.

He said, “I know you are wondering why I held you back and why I’m telling you about it now, so I’ll let you off the hook. Okinawa is expected to be very tough. I don’t know about the Army, but I understand Geiger and the 3rd MAC planners don’t want a repeat of the intelligence fiasco at Peleliu. They are after an up-to-date report on the landing beaches and defensive dispositions in the landing zones, and they don’t want to depend entirely on the Navy’s UDT’s (Underwater Demolition Teams) – they want input from people who are going to have to do the landing.

“I don’t have all the details, but the present plan is for daylight amphibious reconnaissance of all the 3rd Mac landing beaches on Okinawa two or three days before the landings in force. I understand it will be a multiple rubber boat operation all up and down the landing zones, and that it will be coordinated with the UDT operations going on simultaneously. Since it will be in daylight, the Navy will provide substantial fire support as required. The individual teams will be checking water depths, bottom consistency, beach egress routes, emplacement locations that haven’t been identified by the Navy, etc. They want continuous water level photography of the beaches, for instance. It will be quite a large and complex undertaking that will need precise timing and speedy execution, so there is a need for the people involved to have some pretty intensive training and preparation.

"Every regiment from the two Marine divisions that will be landing abreast on D-Day will provide one man from their respective R-2 sections, along with a man from each of the involved rifle battalions, and Division Recon will also be in the act, so with the UDT people it will be a pretty sizeable party. I have tentatively recommended to the Colonel that you be the R-2 representative for the 1st Marines, and the battalions will also be picking one man each from their S-2 sections.

"Before I go any further, I have a question. Even though this is supposed to be on a 'volunteer' basis, it's obvious to all of us that if you are part of the training you will be expected to be part of the operation. I think I see some reservations in the furrows between your eyes. You're an experienced hand at this sort of thing – what do you think so far? You can be honest and it won't be held against you." (I'd heard that before, somewhere.)

Actually, I was dumbfounded by the whole proposition at this point. I didn't know nearly enough to have an intelligent opinion, and said so, respectfully. Having acknowledged that, I said I did have reservations. My choice would have been a clandestine reconnaissance at night, with far fewer people, even though it would sacrifice the beach photography since infra-red would be of little use. It sounded like there would be 40 or 50 of us out there poking around, enough to attract the entire Jap garrison, to say nothing about showing them, two days ahead of time, exactly where we were going to land. There probably would be so much fire and smoke that doing a useful job might be all but impossible, but I said maybe I just don't know enough about how it will be carried out. I had other reservations but I stopped at that point, figuring I had already said enough to compromise myself.

Boyd looked at me for a very long moment, and then surprised me by saying, "OK, son. I appreciate your comments. Tomorrow morning at 0900 you will report to a Gunner Archer in the Division G-2 office; he is going to be your training honcho. We can talk later, if you want, after G-2 fills in the rest of the story." ("Gunner" rank in the Marine Corps is a Warrant Officer, sort of midway between enlisted and commissioned status – there were two grades of Gunner).

I had thought Boyd was going to ask if I wanted to "de-volunteer", but no dice. Had he done so I'm not sure what I would have said, but this didn't look like a volunteer deal to me. Anyway, that "volunteer" stuff happens in the movies a lot more than it does in real life, at least in the Corps. With my usual "Aye, aye, sir!", I left the R-2 tent, much bemused.

The Big Picture…

The next morning I counted 15 of us collected in folding chairs inside the big G-2 tent – I say "tent" because it was canvas, but it was about 20 by 40 feet, stretched over a wooden frame, with a wooden floor. We faced a small table behind which sat a staff major and a red-haired giant. Right on the button of 0800 the major stood up and said, "Welcome, glad you could all make it (this said with a smile) – I'm Major __ (I don't remember his name), and the gentleman beside me is Gunner Archer, who will be your counselor and relentless instructor for the next two weeks – don't forget a word of what he says to you during that time. However, you are specifically instructed to forget everything that I say this morning. "Absolutely nothing you hear from me goes out of this tent. I don't intend to sound melodramatic, but this is a threat and you can see that I am not smiling now.

"I know every one of you is a trained, long-reach reconnaissance scout, and all but two of you have been in at least one major campaign. Your unit commanders have provided only an outline of why you are here, so I'm sure that most of you think a daylight beach reconnaissance in full view of the Emperor's Finest is a lousy idea, especially working out of little rubber boats.

"However, hear me out. Firstly, any of you who were in one of the first three waves at Peleliu know that we need to have a hell of a lot better picture of what we are facing on Okinawa than we did there. This time there is going to be roughly sixty thousand of the little buggers (actually, there were more than a hundred thousand), only 350 miles from their home islands. They will be tough, and we cannot afford to get thrown off the beach.

"Secondly, this operation will take place when the pre-invasion naval gunfire and air bombardment is at its highest intensity. It will be continuous, and part of the naval gunfire will be devoted to laying heavy smoke on and behind the beaches. We think that anyone dumb enough to stay in place during this preparation fire will have their heads down, and even if they don't they will be able to see precious little.

"Off the beaches we principally need to know bottom conditions for supporting Shermans as they come off the LCT's, including serious reef potholes. The tanks will be waterproofed and snorkeled, of course, so they will be able to handle eight feet or so, but if there are any 10-15 foot potholes we need to know where they are. There are some other things we want to know about, which Gunner Archer will cover.

"Of course, there are risks. We think we will be able to cover you splendidly while you are working the littoral, but two things we particularly want to know about are egress routes from the beach adequate to handle the tanks and other heavy equipment that we want to get ashore fast, and the location of any serious weapons emplacements naval and aerial

reconnaissance have missed.

We also need to know the condition of the seawall – the Navy is going to do their best to create breaches in the seawall with large-caliber gunfire and air bombardment, but we need to know how successful they are and where the big breaks are that could pass a tank or 6x6.

"We had some major gaps on gun emplacements at Peleliu, particularly The Point, which cost K/3/1 (K Company, Third Battalion, 1st Marines, to you civilians) too many good people, to say nothing about pinning down Puller's CP and cutting him off from the 3rd Battalion for a whole day. If there are any undiscovered spots like that on our beaches we need to know it ahead of the landing.

"This is the high-risk phase, because we will have to roll the naval gunfire back, including the smoke, to clear you for working the beach proper. However, in support, you will have at least a cruiser (8-inch and 5-inch guns) and two attack destroyers (5-inch guns) on close-in station and exclusively on call to you, along with air support, to engage opportunity targets that you develop. There will be both a naval gunfire liaison officer and an air liaison officer in an LCVP standing just off the area you will be working. Each team will have redundant waterproofed radios so you can talk them in directly, as necessary.

"We think it can be done, and we think we can get you back. You will be working alongside the Navy's UDT's, and there will be quite a few people for us to keep track of, but we will have a rigorous radio protocol set up for coordination, and you will be mounted on multi-chambered rubber boats with outboards. The armored, fast LCVP's that will pull you in to the operational area will be standing by to haul you back out if it gets too hot.

"That's about all I wanted to get across. The rest of the show belongs to Gunner Archer, who will answer any questions you have. Thank you all, and Semper Fi!"

With that, the major went off to other important duties. (We could see him in the next tent talking with a Gunnery Sergeant in starched khakis, laughing and drinking a coffee. There were no Red Cross girls in view, however.)

Life at the Working Level

Gunner Archer stood up (he was at least 6'5" and must have weighed around 250 pounds) and said, "We will be pretty busy for the next two weeks, out on the Submarine Point (Bauman was right!). I have a list for each of you with what you will need to take. Do not bring your issue weapons because we will provide. Your units know that you will be AOL for a bit. Show up here at 0700 tomorrow. Until then, compadres." And he followed the

major out.

Dear reader, have no fear. I am not going to drag you through all of the detail of the following two weeks, but it was exhausting and exhilarating all at the same time. Nobody had put a name to it or even developed the concept then, but Gunner Archer was a prototype of what are now known as the U. S. Navy Seals. Man, was that guy in shape! We learned later that he had been expected to be a member of the US swimming team in the 1940 Olympics, which of course never came off.

Archer explained that we could spend as much as an hour or more swimming in the open sea off the beach, possibly in heavy weather, before we could go ashore to run, crawl, dodge, etc while we systematically did our work there, and then we had to make our way back to safety. He explained that conditioning would be a constant part of the program, not just here but all the way to Okinawa aboard ship.

We spent a lot of time in the water. Only two or three guys had swim trunks, so the rest of us cut the legs off a pair of khaki trousers. During the submarine watch we swam in our green skivvy shorts, but that didn't seem right for this business. We learned how to swim and measure water depths with our telescoping poke-poles, recording it on little multi-leaf map boards, all at the same time, all the time keeping track of where our rubber boat was and coordinating with our buddies so we wouldn't duplicate effort, etc. etc. And we had to do it fighting the current I described earlier. I thought I was in pretty good shape until I got into that routine. Archer washed out two of our group because they simply couldn't hack it.

At Okinawa we would have to do all this in the dopey rubber suits the UDT people wore because the water would be much colder. No lightweight neoprene wet suits back then.

We all had to learn how to work the waterproof radios and master communication protocols, which were complex, and we had to know them by heart and answer Archer's questions instantly without referring to a manual. We practiced the routines of being picked up by a fast-moving LCVP with a rubber boat lashed alongside, grabbing the ½-inch security ropes and rolling into the rubber boat with the help of a swabbie (sailor) riding in the boat, sometimes burdened with a "wounded" buddy in tow. If you don't think that will jerk your arm out of its socket, try it.

There was quite a bit more, especially concerning the onshore part of the job, but I won't wear you out with it. By the end of the two weeks we weren't thinking much about how we were going to keep from getting killed so much as worrying about how we were going to get on top of all this without screwing the operation up. But by the end of the two weeks most of us had made enough progress that we could see a little light at the end of the tunnel. We also had begun to bond and subconsciously began to feel a little special, like

we might do some things no one else could do.

The plan was for the UDT and reconnaissance teams to proceed to the staging area at Ulithi Atoll (where the combined fleet would come together to form up for the final run to Okinawa) ahead of the assault divisions. There we would run through full-scale dress rehearsals and then hop on fast fleet destroyers in order to beat the main task force to the island. To keep my mind off some of the obvious hazards involved I entertained visions of us being rushed aboard the fleet command vessel after a successful mission and having important dialogues with senior Navy and Marine Corps officers.

It never happened. Only a couple of days before we were scheduled to mount up, word was passed down to me through Boyd that the operation had been canceled. We were never informed why. I can think of any number of fairly good reasons – too complex, inadequate preparation time, some old admiral exploding that it was a loony idea, etc. Whatever the actual reason, I don't think it had anything to do with the surprising development during the actual landings. More about that later.

I was much relieved, of course, but there was just a ghost of regret – could we have pulled it off…? ? I sure didn't dwell on it and the idiotic feeling went away quickly.

Also, there was a compensating distraction for me. While we were splashing about in rubber boats off the Submarine Point, Sergeant Stebbings, Section Chief, had been transferred to a line company, Harry Heyman was promoted to his job (without the appropriate additional stripes), and I had been named Chief Scout (also without the appropriate stripes).

Because of the amphibious reconnaissance training episode I had missed the regiment's maneuvers on Guadalcanal. Harry had to fill in for me and I had no chance to establish an identity as Chief Scout in a simulated combat situation. Harry's style was a bit different than mine and we had half a dozen new replacements that needed to know what I expected and how I worked, especially on patrol. I had only one day to check out their weapons handling skills with live ammunition, for one thing. It wasn't enough. Also, a couple of the new men were pretty spicy and this caused a bit of awkwardness later.

But the bos'n whistle was about to sound and the hook was about to be raised. We stowed our extra gear and prepared to climb the transport cargo nets. It was the middle of March, 1945

Gathering of the Clans

The word had started to leak out where we were going (I had known earlier, of course) but as soon as we were afloat the entire regiment got the scoop, in spades. General Geiger

and the entire 3rd MAC would be part of the new 10th Army under Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner. It rankled some of us that we would be under orders of the Army in a major amphibious operation, where the Navy and the Marine Corps had written the book and done almost all of the really dirty work to this point, but Chandler had the appropriate comment. He just grinned and said, "Hard cheese, mate!" In addition to 3rd MAC, there would be four Army divisions, the 7th, 27th, 77th, and 96th, making up the 24th Army Corps

I don't think many of us grunts, even I who had been given some early warning, really appreciated the scale of the events to come, but as we sailed northward and more and more details filtered down the reality began to dawn. Iwo had been big, where the 3rd, 4th, and 5th MarDivs had taken nearly the same proportional casualties as the 1st did on Peleliu. This one would be more than twice the size of the Iwo Jima campaign. It was fairly obvious that Okinawa, if and when we captured it, would be the last island stepping stone and would be the staging area for invasion of the Japanese islands proper. It was also obvious that the Japanese would be motivated to defend it to the bloody end because the homeland was next.

As the sea days wore on I could sense edginess in some of the scouts. Nobody, including myself, knew what we were going to be asked to do, but by now they all knew what I had almost been involved in and they were thinking – always bad when one is just waiting, waiting.

We anchored in the enormous lagoon (about 20 miles long and 5 miles wide) of the Ulithi reefal atoll a little before dawn. Ulithi atoll was one of the side issues associated with the Peleliu operation, captured by units of the 81st Infantry Division. I don't think there was anything but a token Japanese garrison, and Ulithi became the major anchorage for the U.S. for the balance of the war.

Thinking backwards from D-Day on Okinawa, it must have been about March 20th when we arrived at Ulithi . As the lavender and pink of pre-sunrise grew stronger in the east, we began to see the silhouettes of more ships and smaller craft than I knew existed. We knew it was going to be a big fleet, but I don't think any of us expected what we saw that morning. Vessels of every description, from PT boats, supply craft, troop transports, mine sweepers, oilers, up through destroyers, cruisers, battleships, and escort and fleet carriers. Our O/D (Officer of the Deck, the Navy duty officer on watch) told us that only half the fleet was on station. The others were still on their way or engaged in actions off Okinawa and the Japanese islands.

Task Force 38, Ulithi Atoll, November 1944. As big as this Task Force is, it is nothing in size compared to Task Force 50 assembled for Operation Iceberg – the invasion of Okinawa – the largest naval armada ever assembled.

The first of the Japanese kamikaze (Divine Wind) attacks began in March, 1945. We had heard stories about the one-way suicide attacks, and a stark example was a big fleet carrier anchored less than two miles away, listing noticeably and with smoke coming off her after deck. We found out that she was the Benjamin Franklin, which had been hit by kamikazes during a raid on the Japanese islands a few days earlier and very heavily damaged. The fleet carriers Wasp and Yorktown had also been hit, the former with a hundred killed and more than 250 wounded, but the fires were controlled and both Wasp and Yorktown remained on station.

With binoculars we could see sailors on the Franklin's flight deck working with the fires. There were two tenders standing alongside, apparently helping with the damage control. We learned later that Franklin had had more than 700 killed and about 250 wounded.

Miraculously, she managed to limp to Ulithi accompanied by destroyers and a cruiser, with a valiant crew fighting fires all the way. Ultimately, she was successfully towed all the way to New York for repairs.

USS Benjamin Franklin and USS Belleau Wood just after the kamikaze attack.

In macabre contrast to this scene, we were given a kind of picnic afternoon on Mog Mog, one of the numerous little islets sitting on the edge of the Ulithi reef.
After going ashore in LCVP's there was softball and volleyball, beer and Navy hot dogs, and swimming off the white sand beach, a fine change from the smell of diesel and the cramped decks of our transport. As we sadly returned to the ship at sundown, we could see a few small tongues of flame from the Franklin's stern quarter, and those poor swabbies still scampering about.

My memory is vague about how long we were at Ulithi, but it was at least two or three days. More ships kept arriving, the Franklin disappeared, and we were given detailed briefings on the upcoming operation. These were very business-like but not very cheerful, because the sense was that this could be the toughest fight to date. Our original intelligence had been that there were about 60,000 Japanese combat troops present, but these numbers had been revised upward to nearer 100,000. One of the major problems was going to be handling the more than 300,000 civilians, and also distinguishing Japanese soldiers if they took off their uniforms and blended with the civilian population. We (including our officers) had no training in how to fight hit-and-run guerillas.

It now was moot, but Boyd told me that Col. Chappell had been reluctant to release me for the pre-invasion amphibious reconnaissance because I was one of only two men in the regiment who had any Japanese language at all (Del Stelck was the other). This wouldn't help with the older Okinawans, but we knew that Japanese had been a required subject in Okinawan schools for the preceding 30 years. I should be useful in communicating with younger Okinawan civilians so they could be moved to detention camps in the rear.

We were also cautioned about two very deadly snakes on the island. One was called mamushi and the other, I think, was called habu. Whatever the correct name, its venom was neurotoxic and about as deadly as cobra or krait. (As it turned out, I never saw <u>any</u> snakes in the four months I spent on the island.)

Finally the great armada was assembled and we took off at stately convoy speed, headed northwest. There were ships all the way to the horizon in all directions, which I took to mean that our transport divisions were roughly in the center of the formations. Occasionally a fast destroyer would slash through our wakes and frequently would disappear over the horizon ahead of us. We knew the 6th Division was traveling with our task force, and it was obvious the Navy wanted to get us to the objective undamaged, because they were actively screening day and night. Made us feel kind of cozy. We hadn't had this much attention in previous actions.

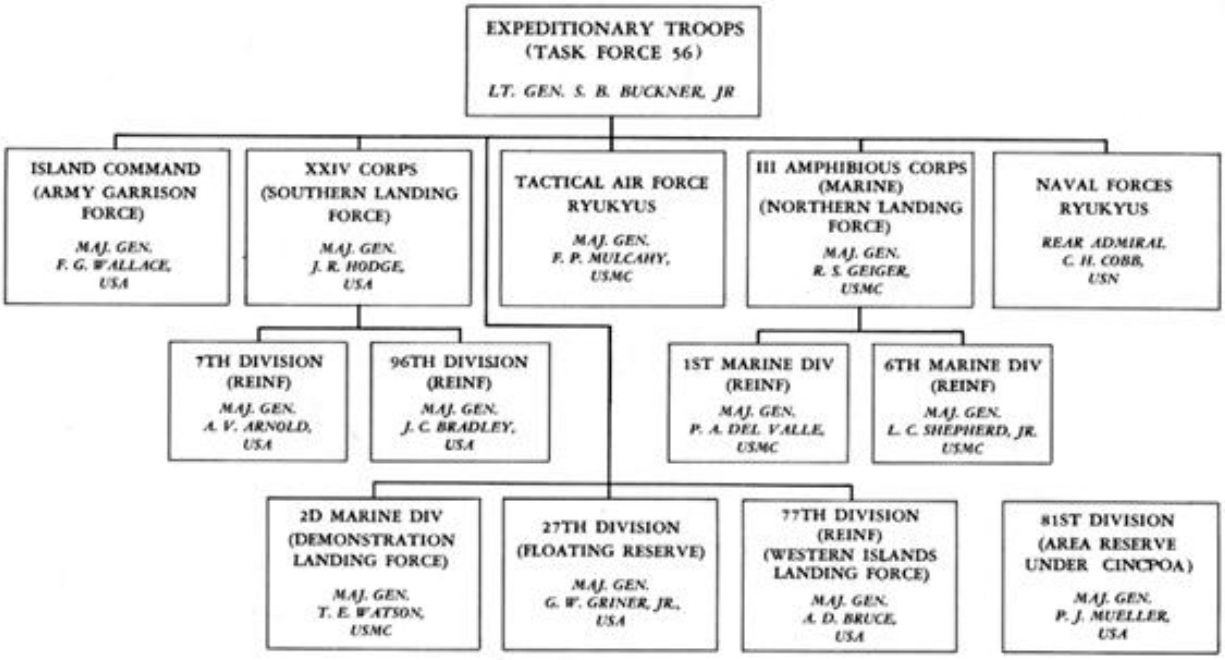
We didn't know where the 2nd Division was mounted up, nor were any of the four Army divisions with our group, but we presumed we all would come together just before D-Day. That momentous day had been designated as April 1st – April Fool's Day. There were quite a few sardonic comments about the brass having us on. I distinctly remember the growing feeling of pensive sadness that had crept over me just before landing at New Britain and Peleliu, but this time it was more intense because we knew that this fight was for all the marbles. No one even talked about the one which would surely follow. One step at a time is all that any of us would commit to or even contemplate, as if that might somehow diminish the odds against getting through this one, although no one said as much out loud.

I have puzzled often about the peculiar semi-insulated mindset of men going into a battle where, intellectually, they know the survival odds are atrocious. Of course there is a percentage who see clearly and are scared stiff, sometimes to the point of impotence, but their numbers are really rather small. I never have been satisfied that I understood it properly, but there was a subconscious protective layer operating in most of the Marines I knew which kept them from being craven and ineffective. Of course, there was more to the average Marine's performance than just this psychological insulation.

I don't believe in innate bravery – the natural beast (and we are) fights only when there is no alternative – otherwise, he flees. Even lions scamper unashamedly away from danger, unless they are hungry, or cornered, or in the case of lionesses only, something threatens their cubs. So a Marine or soldier who will walk steadily into deadly fire is motivated by something he has learned, and the reasons are complex and individual – training, responsibility to a bonded buddy covering one's back, fear of disgrace, pride of identity as a warrior, esprit de corps, all are at work.

But all that isn't what has puzzled me. Most of us went into the furnace realistically fearful, but not paralyzed. Hopeful that it wouldn't be us, but resigned that it could be. Sad, but more at peace than was rational because war really is hellish, savage, unremittingly ugly, "Madness!" as the doctor in The Bridge on the River Kwai cried out. Somehow, it had to be faith-based in something, even for those who claimed to have none, but I won't argue the point.

Order of Battle, U.S. Forces, Operation Iceberg (Okinawa Invasion)



April Fool's Day, 1945

Inevitably, we got there, off the west coast of the big island of Okinawa on 1 April, with H-Hour designated as 8:30 in the morning.

Again, this is a personal journal limited primarily to what I saw and can remember after 60 years. I will include enough background for narrative clarity, but I won't make it a global history of the Battle of Okinawa, available in great depth elsewhere.

One thing I should mention is that it probably would have been moot whether I would have been involved in any pre-invasion reconnaissance. The 1st Marines had been designated as division reserve for the landing, so the regiment had no immediate responsibility on the beach – we would be following in the tracks of the 5th and 7th Marines.

A Strange Silence. . .

We had learned about steak and eggs for breakfast from the Aussies, and ever since Guadalcanal the Navy has made it kind of a tradition to serve this to Marines on the mornings they were scheduled for D-Day on a hostile beach, and that's what we had at 0600 hours off the Hagushi beaches that day. We would not see fresh eggs, fresh meat, oranges and milk for many weeks. All through breakfast we listened to a continuous, intensifying thunder of naval gunfire and air strikes "preparing" the beach for us. Some of us made our way topside for a quick look as the dawn brightened. We could see ships all the way to the horizon, north, south, and west, and to the east there was The Beach, obscured by smoke and beset by explosions.

This time, instead of riding with the second wave of assault infantry I would go ashore with the regimental CP in the fifth wave, with strict orders from Boyd to stay glued to his side. About 0800 hours we mustered on deck and started crawling down the cargo nets into LCVP's. The first assault waves were already forming lines abreast as our boats circled in rendezvous behind them. The first line of amtracs started churning shoreward, and simultaneously the roar of naval gunfire dwindled rapidly to silence.

Directly in front, we could see three Hellcats (Grumman F6-F fighters) playing follow-the-leader down the line of the beach, strafing with their .50 calibers into the pall of smoke that hid the beach itself, and then curling up and out to sea in search of their mother carrier. The 6th Division on our left and the Army to the right were similarly engaged, but as far as I could see in both directions there were no geysers of water exploding out of the surf as at Peleliu, no sound of explosions since the Navy ceased its barrage. As the low-lying smoke on the beach began to thin, the only sound was the rumble of boat and amtrac engines, the slap of waves against moving hulls.

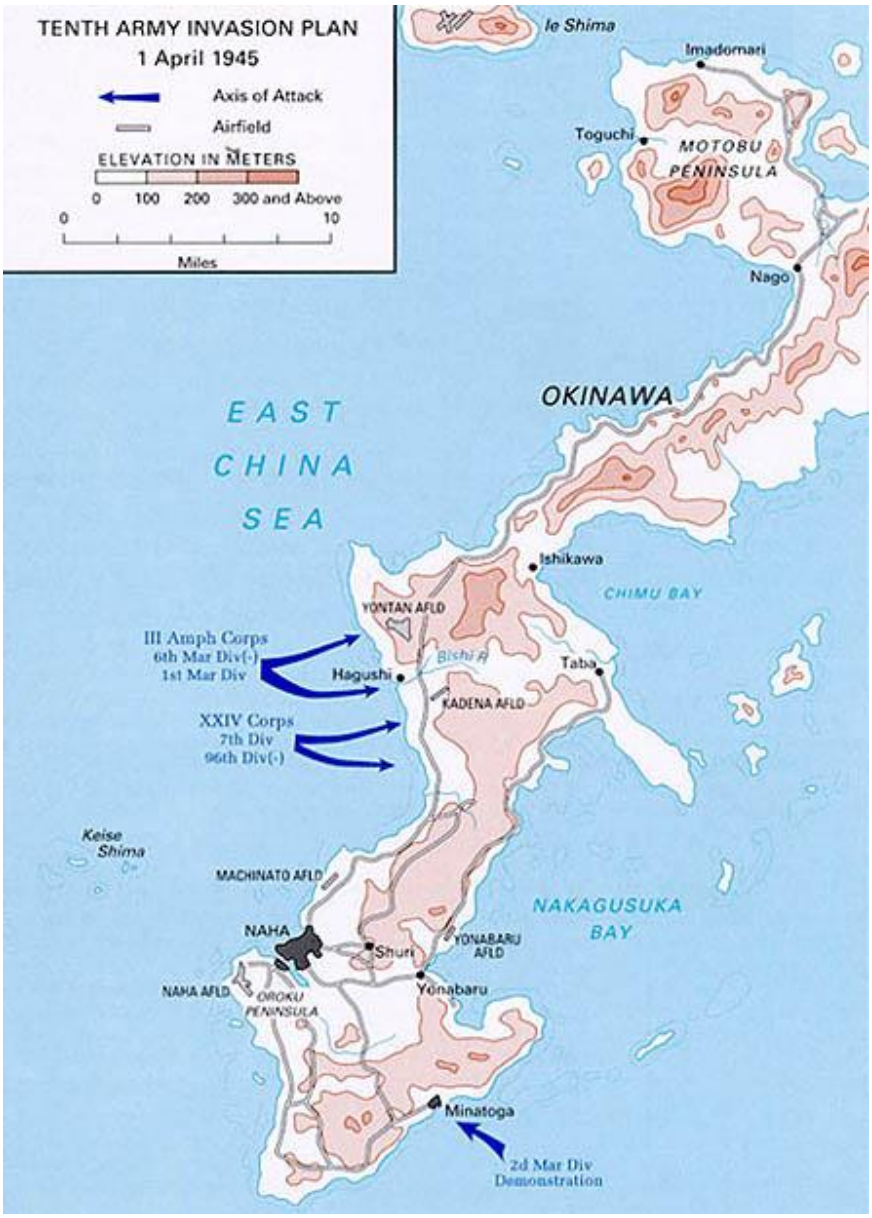
As we drew closer in, we could see men walking upright along the beach, a sure sign that nobody was shooting at them. What was going on? The boat next to us with Col. Chappelle and his staff suddenly went to full speed. Our boat and the others in our wave did likewise, and we were all ashore within a few minutes. As it turned out, there were no Japanese behind our beach and we were told that only an occasional sniper or small ambush had been encountered anywhere along either the 3rd MAC or 24th Army Corps fronts. What, indeed, had happened? Simply put, the Japs had not opposed the landings.

In passing, I should mention that the 2nd MarDiv, the third divisional element in the 3rd MAC, had engaged in a theatrical diversionary action off the southeast coast for two days before we landed, hoping to convince the Japanese that we intended to land down there. We actually never saw hide nor hair of the 2nd during the entire campaign.

Captured documents after the operation was over revealed that the Japs expected the main landings to be exactly where we came in – we didn't fool them at all, but the antics of the 2nd MarDiv probably caused them to hold a substantial reserve in the south. Not that it affected anything. Their defensive plan called for their main reserve to be in that area. Without going into detail, the Japanese had changed their defensive philosophy. The extreme attrition of beach defenses from naval gunfire and aerial bombardment, particularly at Iwo, convinced them that trying to defend at the shoreline was a losing proposition. Their plan on Okinawa was to build multiple lines of defense in depth in the most favorable terrain, much as we had seen on Peleliu, hoping to wear us down by staying in their caves and tunnels, contesting every foot and conserving manpower and materiel. It was clearly the best strategy for them, and although they didn't hew to it entirely in the following three months, it cost Army and Marine infantry dearly in the three months that followed.

So, Away We Go. . .

With no significant opposition everything speeded up. Our line battalions had moved inland at quickstep speed and the 6th Division was already well beyond Yontan Airfield, wheeling northward. The 1st Division assault battalions were rapidly moving to the east and the 7th and 96th divisions of the 24th Army Corps were moving east and starting to swing south across Kadena Airfield, like an enormous, ponderous gate. The 1st Division's job was to secure the waist of the island between these two forces and stand by. Within a few hours there were more than 50,000 assault personnel ashore and moving, with more to come.



Landing Sites on H-Day, April 1, 1945

After the surprise of the unopposed landing sank in, I had the thought that maybe the combined early reconnaissance plan shouldn't have been scrapped. The Navy UDT's had the entire responsibility for offshore and beach activities, but they sure hadn't done much onshore. Fog of war.

We didn't know the numbers at the time, but to give you a little background for understanding this operation (Operation Iceberg it was called), the combined task forces made up the largest naval armada in history. This was Adm. Raymond Spruance's 5th Fleet. There were 18 battleships, more than 40 aircraft carriers, over 200 destroyers, and more than 1000 other ships of all types. I believe there were over 30 fleet submarines involved. The ground assault forces alone, over the four months of organized fighting, would count 183,000 men, and if all the active Navy combatants, support personnel, and medical units were counted along with miscellaneous logistical echelons on station, roughly half a million men and women were involved.

Back on the beach, the accelerated velocity of events made some adjustments to phase lines and objectives necessary, and while the big brains were replanning, Boyd had me take a few scouts and make sure the area around the regimental CP was not harboring any of the bad guys. It gave us an opportunity to move half a kilometer inland on a strolling reconnaissance, during which a young Okinawan woman appeared carrying a piece of white cloth on a stick, obviously upset, who could speak Japanese. She said her 5-year old son had run away during the shelling (she showed me a deep trench the Japanese had dug which they had been hiding in), and when I asked her where the Japanese were, she told me they had all gone down south ten days before, that there were none around this place.

Whether this was true or not, I wasn't going to let her wander off on her own and I had John Davidson take her and her information back to the CP. She didn't want to go until she found her son, and for a moment we had a bit of a standoff, but I was saved by her son running out from behind some bushes, crying. John took her back to the CP while the rest of us poked around some more, but found nothing. By the time we got back, MP's had taken the woman and her boy back to Division's collection compound for civilians.

It was only about 1400 hours and there still was no word on moving out, so I asked Boyd if I could scout the road leading eastward, which I presumed we would be taking before long. He agreed as long as we didn't get out of sight of the road and didn't go farther than about half a mile. My unstated reason was that I wanted to get a look at Yontan Airfield, just north of the 1st Marines sector, which had been secured by a battalion of the 6th Division.

I took Russ Keyes and Les Bishop and one other - -I can't recall who it was.

The airfield was a flat expanse about 20 meters higher in elevation than the beach area, so it was necessary to climb before we could see the field proper. We had almost reached it when a low-wing trainer type aircraft with a big red ball painted on the side of the fuselage appeared, apparently coming in from the sea, banking and circling slowly around

us as the pilot stared down at us and we stared up at him. He was very low, not more than 100 feet over our heads, flying with his flaps deployed, obviously preparing to land. He was low enough that we might have brought him down with our Thompsons, but I was so dumbfounded by this incredible sight that I, at least, didn't react in time. I was on the phone with Russ Keyes the other night (March 24th, 2004) and he said he fired but missed. I don't remember hearing any shots and I'm sure I would have heard the blast of M-1's if Bishop and the other guy had fired.

After completing his slow circle around us he leveled off and disappeared toward the field above our heads. We could even hear the chirp of his tires as he touched down. We ran up to the edge of the airfield and saw him taxiing straight toward the buildings at the far end, about a mile off. When his machine braked to a stop there was a burst of small-arms fire and then silence.

At the time I couldn't imagine what in the world he had in mind. The plane resembled the Navy's SNJ trainer, and I am sure it was not armed. He had to have flown over at least 300 ships on his way in, so he knew the invasion had begun. After a while it dawned on me that he knew the game was over for him, that he would be imprisoned and disgraced. This may have been his way of committing the equivalent of seppuku, ritual suicide. His circling low over us at near stall speed may have been an invitation to shoot him down, thereby meeting his death in battle. So he landed, taxied up to the hangar area, probably drew a pistol as he climbed out, and let the boys of the 6th Division do the job for him.

By this time there was a growing crescendo of truck motors and other stirrings behind us, so we hustled back to the CP. The colonel and his driver were already mounted up in his jeep, motor running, and he was talking to Boyd and the S-3. The entire H&S Company was obviously getting ready to move out. When Chappelle saw us he motioned us over and asked what the condition of the road was behind the beach, and were there any signs of hostiles. I told him we had only gone out a thousand yards but that far, at least, everything was clear.

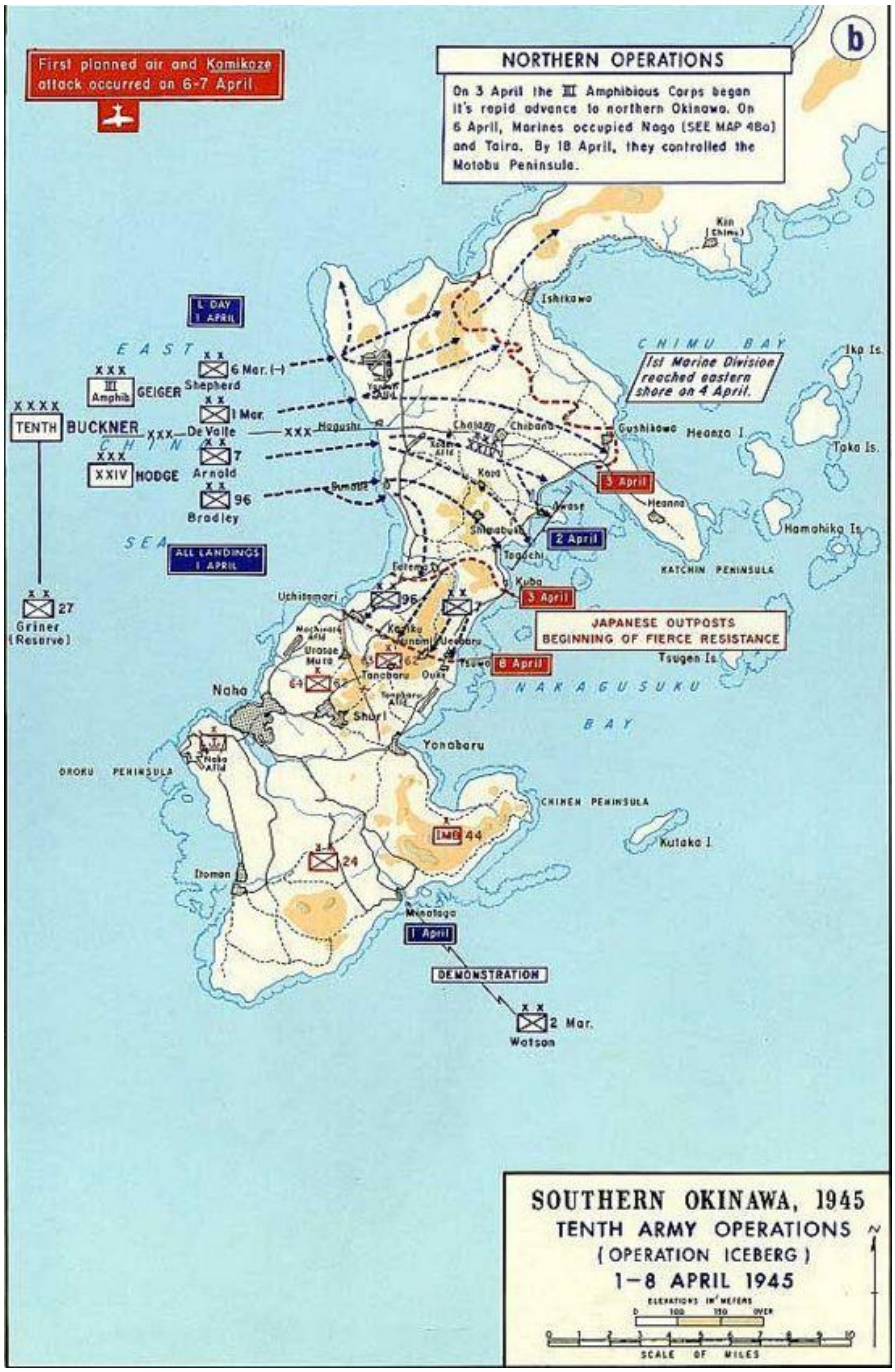
He nodded at Boyd, who came over with a map and said, "The colonel wants to get here (pointing to a small village on the map, name forgotten- -it looked to be about five miles) before dark. We'll have to move out smartly. Your scouts will screen 100 yards ahead of the column, with three flanking people out on each side of the road. The rifle companies are about two miles ahead of us, moving in columns because there hasn't been any opposition yet. It will be quick time all the way. Let's go!"

Off we went. I didn't much like the idea of moving so fast because I knew there would be sizeable gaps between the rifle columns up ahead, and there had been sporadic small arms fire to the north where the 6th was moving. If there were a few Japs around they

might be smart enough to let the dangerous line boys go by and then ambush poor old H&S Company. But the colonel gets what he wants.

The march was physically painful. I kept Sommers and Barnett with me and stayed on the road so I could communicate with the outriders stomping along on either side about 50 yards out. We all were carrying full packs with two days rations and extra ammunition. My Thompson and ammo alone weighed close to 20 pounds, so I was probably carrying about 60 pounds altogether. That wouldn't have been so bad if we hadn't been walking just short of a trot. After about half an hour the colonel's jeep pulled up behind me and stayed there for the balance of the parade, the colonel periodically shouting, "C'mon, Manhoff, step it up!" Irrationally, I resented that because he was sitting on his duff in that jeep. I particularly felt sorry for the guys out on the flanks, because they had knee-high grass and dry rice paddies to negotiate while continuously keeping an eye out for trouble.

The war angels were with us and nobody fired a weapon during this ordeal. When we reached the outskirts of the village and held up, both of my hip joints were really sore and inflamed from all the weight and rapid movement, but it went away in a couple of hours. We didn't go into the village itself because dusk was settling in and it would have been a perfect setup for an ambush. I didn't have any trouble falling asleep that night.



Initial Invasion Route. The northern side of the island tasked to the Marines was only lightly defended while the Army in the South soon ran into heavy opposition. Luck of the draw for the Marines…at first.

Temporary Rest Stop …

The next morning we were up early, with the entire scout section vamping through the little village in a skirmish line, looking into every house and community structure in search of civilians or otherwise that might be lurking, but we turned up not a single soul. Most of the houses were small, made of wood and bamboo, some with sliding wood and paper room dividers, as in Japan. Most had wooden floors, and I remember them as quite clean. The line companies had gone through so rapidly they didn't have time to steal or damage much, but it looked as if the owners had carted away most of their personal belongings when they evacuated ahead of the approaching storm. I don't even remember chickens or other animals being present. Probably all the noise from naval gunfire and air attacks plus the tramp of 50,000 feet and the roar of trucks and tanks that first day had scared them all into deep hiding.

The 1st Division rifle battalions ahead of us were moving out rapidly that second day to continue their march toward the east coast (only a couple of miles farther on), which would secure the island between the 6th MarDiv to the north and the 7th and 96th Army Divisions to the south.

The colonel decided our village was pretty well located relative to the Division CP and decreed we would use it for his command post until further orders came down. That was fine with us. Harry Heyman and I set up with the scout section in four adjacent little houses near one that Boyd and Chandler had commandeered. It meant we would be sleeping for a while on wooden floors instead of out with the snakes and wild critters. Some of us even had private rooms with sliding doors.

Because we were some distance from line company support (and to keep us busy), Boyd decreed we would scout the surrounding environs twice each day to flush out any armed infiltrators and also collect any civilians that needed to be moved back to the internment centers on the beach. We would also set up a regimental observation post (OP) on a prominent hill about a half mile to the southeast. I was happy about this because it gave me a chance to work with the newer men developing patrol technique and discipline in a low stress situation (remember, I had missed the Guadalcanal maneuvers). A couple of the replacements were a little edgy, and some of the older hands (like Cernik and Davidson) were inclined to disappear for several hours without explanation, looking for souvenirs, so a schedule was set up to keep idle hands busy.

That first day I took Russ Keyes, a backpack radio, and two other scouts out early in the afternoon to set up the OP, intending to dig foxholes and spend the night. I planned to return to the CP the next morning, leaving the others one more day before rotating in another team. The hill was about 250' above the surrounding terrain and was nearly ideal

because the top offered almost 360 degrees of view. We could see the ocean to the east, the village where the regimental CP was located, and had good observation of almost the entire area the regiment was holding.

The plan was a good one for a reason I hadn't anticipated. Typical of the kind of stupid things that happen in fluid combat, the Navy hadn't quite kept up with where the rapidly-moving ground elements were located. This became apparent when an F4U Corsair flew over the CP, spotted people on the ground and circled back around for two strafing runs. There weren't supposed to be any friendlies this far to the east in the pilot's mind. Corsairs carried six .50 caliber machine guns in their wings and these made a terrifying racket as the F4U roared over the CP at less than 500 feet.

We had a safe ringside seat for the whole show, which was pure dumb luck. Sadly, there were several casualties although none of the R-2 section were hit. Very few people survive a hit by a half-inch .50 caliber slug, and every other one of these was an explosive round, evidenced by the damage on a number of the village houses.

There was a story that Boyd had come sailing out of the house he was in, landing in its adjacent pig wallow, but I never believed it. What really happened was that the colonel got on the horn with Division raising holy hell, and they passed it on to Fleet air command, who shut down all air strikes over land that day not specifically requested by air liaison officers with the ground units.

And Then, Sadness Made Us Quiet…

Patrols that first day in the village had not uncovered any bandits, but in the early afternoon of the second day we got a radio report that one of the R-2 scouts was down, victim of a sniper, about a half mile north of the CP. Four of us and Lt. Chandler took off at high port to help the three other patrol members search for the sniper. When we arrived at the scene it was Andy Clark, "Clarkie" to most of us, who had been hit. Andy was a replacement, one of the steadiest, best-liked men in the section, and one of the few who was married. Buchanan had reached him first, while the other two scouts fired in the direction the shot had come from, although they did not have a visible target.

Buchanan was sitting, leaning on a rice paddy dike, with tears on his cheeks, still holding Andy's upper body. I don't recall seeing much blood. Buck said when he first got to Andy after the single rifle shot, Andy looked up at him and asked, "Is it bad?" Before Buck could answer, Andy's eyes closed and he was gone. The bullet had entered his upper side and exited lower down on the other side. It must have sliced right through his heart.

There was a tree line to the north where the shot had come from, and we searched until

almost dark before returning to the CP with Andy's body, but we found no trace of the shooter.

The loss of any friend and buddy always hurts, even when it is somebody who frequently irritates you, or that you argue with a lot. When one is lost all the superficial stuff falls away, and the invisible bonding comes to the fore. This human linkage lies close beneath the surface in the minds of most men, and probably women, who depend on each other as they engage in life and death situations day after day. It grows out of many things- - training, esprit de corps, simple appreciation that someone is dedicated to watching one's back. We were not responsible for Andy's death, but still there was a (nonsensical) feeling that somehow we hadn't done enough.

Losing Andy had even more of an impact than usual though, not only because everybody liked him. Up until this moment the Okinawan operation had seemed like a training exercise. It had been so different from the last landing that guys were making jokes about the "hardships" of war. His death in broad daylight brought reality back. Back home (Kentucky, I think it was), Andy had a wife he had married not long before he shipped out, and there was a baby daughter named Sue Ellen he had never seen. It was a black day.

(Thirty-nine years later we held the very first reunion of the 1st Marines R-2 Section in San Diego. I was the dinner companion of Sue Ellen, by then married and a mother herself. She came all the way from Ohio to meet the combat brothers of the brave father she never knew. It was an emotional time.)

The three weeks that followed were relatively uneventful. We ran our daily patrols, found quite a number of Okinawan civilians that we sent back to the beach. Most were women, children and old men because the Japanese had conscripted the younger men for labor details. Most were scared to death that we were going to herd them down to the beach and execute them, but the word I heard filtering down from Division was that they loosened up and did a lot of talking after they had been fed and figured out that we weren't the devils the Japs had described. Over time, it became apparent that most of the civilians were not overly fond of the Japanese, that they had been treated as second-class citizens and hicks.

We never during this period found a Jap, although we heard the line people near the coast ran across an occasional sniper, and there were a couple of small ambushes.

One little girl of 9-10 years that we found wandering alone one day didn't want anything to do with us at first, but the dark look in the accompanying picture changed to a sunburst smile after she tried the D-ration bar I gave her. D-rations were chocolate bars that had been treated to survive under all climatic conditions for about 500 years. They couldn't be melted, they never spoiled or went rancid, and it took a sound set of teeth to break them

down, but that little girl thought it was a wonder.

Chuck Manhoff
Rockhound Extraordinaire
Okinawa – May, 1945 – a little girl I pulled out of a burial vault – no parents around – I think she told me they "blew up" – she was not happy

Most of what I remember about this period is pretty trivial. For instance, on one morning patrol which was really just a walk in the countryside, we went past a small, unoccupied farmhouse that had several large, clay jars sitting on the front porch. They were maybe 20 yards away. The thought occurred to me as we ambled past that I hadn't fired my Thompson even once since the landing—what if I needed it and it misfired or jammed? I had been cleaning and oiling it religiously, so this wasn't likely, but I called out, "Hold it up a minute. I'm going to break the rules." (We had orders not to do any shooting except at Japanese, but we were a long way from the CP). I set my Thompson on FA (full automatic), swung down on those helpless clay jars and squeezed off a four-round burst that completely demoralized two of them.

"I guess it's operational," I said.

I think Hall and Bishop were with me and one other I can't recall. They all looked at me in surprise, grinning, because I usually was fussy about the rules. Without saying a word, all three unslung their M-1's and, still grinning, obliterated the remaining jars. So much for my unit discipline.

However, when we got back to the CP and I was cleaning the Tommy, I noticed a very slight bulge near the muzzle. Looking down the barrel I saw that there was a brass cartridge casing, minus its rear end, that apparently had followed its bullet down the barrel, sticking inside almost at the end of the barrel. I had never heard of anything like this happening, but subsequent bullets forcing their way past this casing must have been what caused the barrel to swell a bit. I figured it wasn't safe to fire this weapon again and hit up Ski, our Supply Sergeant, for a replacement. I asked for a carbine, since it was three pounds lighter and I thought it was more effective out past 30 yards. Like many Supply NCO's, Ski was very proprietary about "his" stuff, and even after I told him what had happened he clearly intimated I had done something to damage my Thompson in order to acquire a lighter weapon.

I thought this was rather funny, considering that Ski never had to leave the comfort and protection of the CP, and he had all those solid rifle company guys between him and the enemy. Smiling benignly, I said, "OK, Ski. If you come with us on our next deep patrol I promise to protect you with the Thompson, at least if it doesn't blow up in my face. Then you're on your own." With his literal take on things, it took Ski a long five seconds to appreciate my humor, but then he grinned and handed me a new M1 carbine, complete with two 15-round magazines. He really wasn't a bad guy, but sometimes his sense of proportion was a little weird.

We had a quiet and restful week, during which I really got to know my newer scouts a little better. There were two, Sommers and Carroll, who always seemed irritable and angry

about something. Along about the fifth day we had some rain (nothing like what came along later) which made OP duty not a lot of fun. With not much to do, some trivial bickering developed among these two and Davidson, over stuff like whose turn it was to go out and sit under a poncho in the OP, or why didn't regiment set up a mess tent so there would be some decent chow, or some other equally lightweight issue.

Sommers and Carroll had come over straight from the States, had not been in combat, and had not had the advantage of being "conditioned" by staging with the heat and rats and centipedes of New Guinea, or the incessant, sweaty work parties of the early days on Pavuvu, to give them perspective. Anyway, my other distinct memory of this "rest" period was that I spent a lot of time talking with them, drawing them out, giving them an ear to bitch to. Gradually, it dawned on me that part of what was bothering them was uncertainty. They had joined on Pavuvu, had heard the stories about Peleliu and Iwo, and for weeks had heard how Okinawa was going to be even worse because it was the last barrier before the home islands.

They had steeled themselves to walk into hell, and then what happens? The dreaded landing turns out to be a walk in the park, they relax a bit and decide war wasn't so bad after all, and then suddenly one of them gets killed, almost as a surprise. Subconsciously, they knew the scenario had not played out, they knew the reprieve couldn't last. Would they hold up when things got bad, etc., etc? I came to believe they would probably settle down when the regiment really went to work. And that's they way it actually came down.

Davidson had been around for some time and was not nervous or edgy for the same reasons, but he had gradually gotten crabbier over the preceding several months and I never found out why. He was a corporal and it may have been because he didn't get the promotion to Chief Scout instead of me, but he never intimated or said anything to that effect and none of the other scouts commented on it. He had been one of the company barbers for a long time and seemed to enjoy cutting people's hair at, but maybe he felt like he had been relegated to the role and was tired of it. Anyway, I took care of my ducks and stayed friendly – live and let live. He did his job as required, except for one instance later on which I will recount.

All through this period we had been hearing escalating stories about the trouble the Army was having driving south. The fresh 27th Division had been thrown into the right end of the Army line, some miles short of the capitol of Naha, but had made almost no forward progress. This held up the two divisions on their left who were gaining some ground, although it was slow and hard. Casualties were pretty high in all three divisions. The 27th mounted a number of poorly-coordinated attacks, and spent quite a bit of time waiting for Army artillery to pave the way for them, but to no avail. During one abortive attempt to advance they had lost almost thirty tanks, most of the division's tank battalion, when

accompanying infantry under heavy small arms and mortar fire abandoned the armor and the Japanese had a field day with satchel charges and unsuppressed anti-tank fire.

The story of the Army's 27th Division, built from the New York National Guard, is a drama unto itself which I will not dwell on, but their performance on Okinawa was not outstanding. It was the first Army division to be sent from the States to the Pacific theater, spending considerable time in Hawaii. They were not untested because the division had seen action in the Marshalls and on Saipan, where they were pulled out of the line because of poor performance. Their commanding general was relieved by Lt. Gen. Holland (Howlin' Mad) Smith who was in command of ground operations. I should explain that Smith was a Marine, and this episode did not build inter-service relations.

Also, along about the end of the second week we received the shocking news that Franklin Roosevelt had died. I was a confirmed conservative, largely due to my father who told me the social programs being put in place by FDR and his cronies would keep my generation from having opportunities his and earlier ones had had. Nevertheless, I experienced a sense of loss when FDR died – he was almost the only President I had ever known. My tendency at this point is to digress on the current U. S. political mess (I have seen little in 60+ years to persuade me that my father was wrong), but there is a war to finish.

We're Movin' Out – Pass It Along…

It was a week or so after this news that we got the word – the 27th Division had taken many casualties, were exhausted, and would be pulled off the line and take over the security role of the 6th MarDiv, which had "pacified" the northern half of the island. The 1st MarDiv would pass through the 27th's lines and take up their position on the right flank of the push southward. The 1st Division's artillery regiment, the 11th Marines, was already in place, having been ordered south to reinforce the Army artillery.

Originally, Gen. Buckner had requested that our Division tank battalion be loaned to the 27th to replace their losses until the Army could bring up new armor from the reserve (don't ask me where that stuff was located, or when it would have arrived), but Gen. Geiger objected strenuously to having any more of his major elements being committed piecemeal, and he prevailed. The word around our CP was that both Geiger and Gen. del Valle were hopping mad and were not about to put any of the Marine tankers under Army officers who had managed to lose almost all of their own in one engagement.

My recollection is that the Division's move south and the passage of lines took several days. As the 1st Marines packed up and loaded out the electricity began to mount; the "play" war was over. And we were no longer in division reserve; we would be the extreme

right flank of the 10th Army line, attached to the XXIV Corps, and anchored to the China Sea on our right.

If you had been there and watched, it wouldn't have looked or sounded much different than the load out for the Guadalcanal maneuvers, regiment by regiment, followed by the various support echelons. When it was H&S Company's turn there were truck and tank engines roaring, non-coms and MP's shouting orders and traffic directions, guys already loaded into 6x6 trucks razzing others still sitting on their helmets by the roadside. But if you looked a little closer you would see ammunition belts were not flat and empty, but filled out with live clips and magazines, and guys carrying M-1 rifles had extra cloth ammo bandoleers crossed across their chests like old Mexican bandits. The razzing was a little softer than it had been on maneuvers, and here and there were silent ones with that faraway look on their faces.

I don't remember a lot about the trip south, except that the trucks kicked up a lot of dust because the brief rainy period was over. There were quite a few of our aircraft in the air in the west over the sea where most of our enormous support fleet was anchored, and after the first few miles we began to see huge supply dumps, with busy bulldozers and other construction activity going on. We also passed by some of our own 105mm artillery batteries, methodically and slowly firing as we moved down the road. It was about at this point that we started seeing some of the tired and bedraggled 27th Division people moving to the rear, we on one side of the road and they on the other.

We moved in stages, although the total move must have been only about 20 miles. A "passage of lines" is a military maneuver that I have never seen described in the popular media or in any of the popular books written by people "that were there". On division scale or larger it is a complex and potentially dangerous operation that needs to be carefully orchestrated, timed, and supported because it can provide a marvelous opportunity for an alert enemy to counterattack.

Imagine that roughly 20,000 men strung out over 3-4 miles laterally and over half that much front to back need to be replaced by an equivalent number, and that a hostile group of people is looking down their throats while this is going on. It is like a massive, crude ballet and extremely difficult to execute on a division scale at night, so even though much movement starts before dawn, most of the activity occurs in broad daylight.

In the front lines the passage was squad by squad, platoon by platoon, company by company, battalion by battalion, and regiment by regiment, in such a fashion that no sector was left undefended, no large gaps in the line were created in the process. Disciplined traffic control on the few roads was important, and everybody had to know at all times where they were and where they were going.

In support, artillery and air bombardment increased steadily during the day to keep Japanese heads down, and smoke from field artillery and naval gunfire was used liberally along and behind the Japanese front to obscure their vision.

There was some counter battery fire from the Japanese, but not a lot, and at least what I saw was poorly-placed. One of the funnier sights was the first that I saw of what we quickly named the Flying Garbage Cans. We would hear a dull whump, and a few seconds later a plainly-visible thing that looked for all the world like a skinny garbage can would come tumbling over, 300-400 feet above our heads, falling somewhere off to the side or rear with a big BOOM! The concussion was impressive and I wouldn't want to be near one when it went off, but I don't think they caused many casualties because they were so inaccurate. The proper name for these things was spigot mortars.

During this time we had opportunities to talk to the 27th Division people. They were beat and happy to be moving back. They also were very impressed with the savvy and determination of the Japanese they had come up against. Several said they were sorry for us. My personal impression of these men was that most sounded like Marine veterans I knew – realistic, matter-of-fact, not given to overblown "war stories", but thoroughly convinced that we had a tough row to hoe.

None that I talked to said anything negative about their officers, but my suspicion was that the quality of their leadership may have been poor. As I reviewed material for this journal to help fill in gaps in what I had seen or remembered, I found support for this view. The 165th Infantry regiment who had fought and suffered in the area the 1st Marines took over had obviously been victims of fragmented and confused assignments. Without swamping you with detail, it was fairly obvious (at least to me) that their troubles lay primarily with field grade officers (Lt. Colonels and Colonels) and higher, and not with platoon and company commanders, several of whom had shown considerable determination and skill. And it wasn't the grunts themselves, many of whom were wounded and killed while gallantly trying to carry out their mission.

A few days before we moved into the line, the 165th's CO had relieved one of his battalion commanders over a dispute about what could and could not be done – a couple of days after that he himself was relieved by Gen. Griner, CO of the 27th Division, who had "become increasingly distressed over the slow progress of the 165th."

Army historians had written the stuff I was reading and were not judgmental, but it wasn't hard to read between the lines. Any time senior officers are kicking each other off the job in the midst of a pitched battle the poor guys at the bottom are in trouble. Neither the regimental nor the division commander in this scenario spent any quality time where the stuff was flying – their CP's were <u>way</u> back and I am sure they never witnessed the fight

where they could see what they were asking their people to do. It made me think of Chesty, who had me go with him up to the battalion command posts in the dark that second night on Peleliu, and it made me think of Gen. Rupertus, who never came as far forward as our CP.

The 1st Marines were in place on April 30, and the 5th Marines came in on our left the next day, with the 7th somewhere behind us in reserve for the time being. The Army's 77th Division held the ground immediately east of the 5th Marines, having relieved the badly shot-up 96th Division, and the 7th Division was moving to take the eastern end of the line. That same day we found a great spot for the regimental OP a little left of the center of our line, with an excellent overlook of the 1st Marines front, and a fairly good view of some of the positions the 5th was occupying. To rephrase that, it was a great spot to assess the dismal picture the Division was facing along its three-mile front.

Ghosts of Past Battles…

It was a beautiful, bright morning as we looked out over the terrain before us. We could hear intermittent small arms fire to the east, but for the moment it was quiet in front of us. As I looked though, a chill settled in my stomach. Transverse coral ridges interspersed with deep draws and stand-alone hills were liberally sprinkled with new spring vegetation. It wasn't as dense a terrain complex as that of the Umurbrogols (Bloody Nose Ridge) on Peleliu, but it was ideal for the same kind of defense. The flat terrain immediately in front of us looked up at a coral ridge that was bound to be full of caves and tunnels to neutralize our heavy advantage in artillery, naval gunfire, and aerial attack. The area also was exposed to enfilading fire from any emplacements in the hills to the southeast.

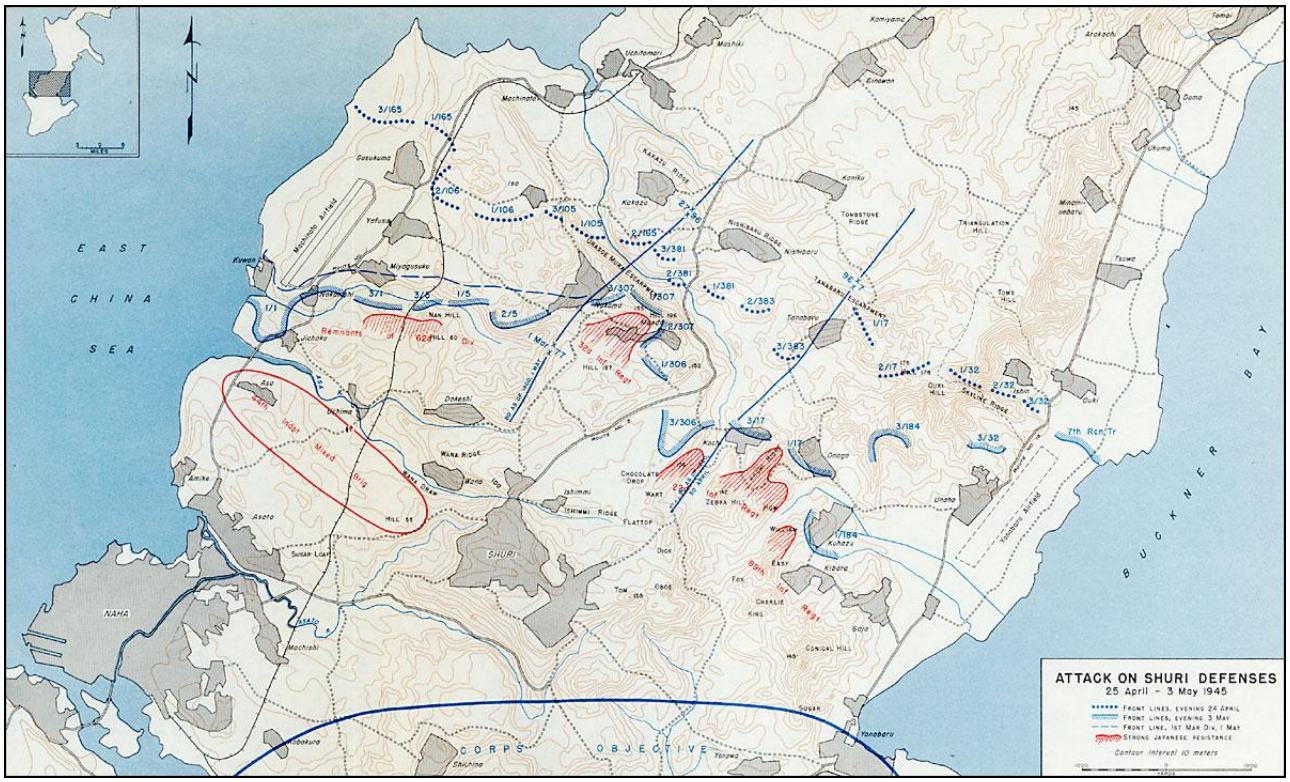
It was not hard to see why the 27th Division had so much trouble gaining ground.

They had been attacking a hornet's nest of mutually-supporting defenses in depth, with the Japanese fighting from underground, interconnected fortresses that allowed them to appear, fire, and disappear, to pop out somewhere else, fire, and disappear once more. It would be blowtorch and corkscrew (flamethrower and demolitions) to root them out, foot by painful foot. It would be Peleliu all over again.

Because Okinawa was much larger than Peleliu I had assumed there would be maneuver room and that the fighting would be more fluid, with more reliance on tanks employed as they should be, as moving armor punching holes in infantry defenses for follow-up by our own infantry, instead of as movable pillboxes fighting in place. That isn't the way it played out because the Japanese chose to defend in strength only a relatively small area of the island, from heavily-fortified static positions prepared long in advance. For the Japanese it was the best choice they had because of our air and naval dominance, and it cost the

Allied forces dearly. They could not defeat us, but they could delay us and cause heavy attrition of manpower and materiel, and they did just that.

The heart of the Japanese defense was the Naha-Shuri-Yonabaru line (see map), anchored by several mutually-supporting defense rings around the central hill mass where the old capitol of Shuri was located. Shuri Castle, south of the town, was the domicile of the ancient Okinawan kings. This was the nut the XXIV Corps, 1st MarDiv attached, was supposed to crack.



Naha-Shuri-Yonabaru line, late April 1945

The fact that the Japanese conducted an in-place, static defense may account for why I am here 59 years later to write this journal. I have mentioned earlier that under tactical doctrine then, regimental scouts were responsible for finding out where the enemy was, what they had and what they were doing, out to about 3500 yards. For most of the heavy part of the fighting we knew exactly what he was doing and where he was. He was waiting for us to come at him and we could see where he was from our OP's. There was

little need for deep patrolling.

This lengthened lives in the regimental Scout Section, but line companies faced the same kind of deadly fighting as on Peleliu, with refinements. The basic approach by the Japanese in the Umurbrogols was to fortify the front of a given ridge or hill, with covering fire from the next ridge back and from the flanks where possible. On Okinawa the same technique was used, but they added a sophisticated reverse slope defense. When an attacking force managed to destroy frontal defenses and take up positions on top of a ridge, instantly they faced many of the same people, at close range, who had moved back through tunnels into prepared positions on the reverse slope, and who could then be supported by fire from the next hill back.

Example of reverse-slope cave system with two tiers of caves. Brutally effective at stopping assaulting Marines.

It was a deadly tactic that spawned local counterattacks, and time and again disorganized attackers were driven off the high ground and back to their starting point with nothing to show for their effort but casualties. Another factor doubled the cost of taking positions in the Japanese MLR (Main Line of Resistance). Japanese mortars and artillery had not been used heavily in the first stages of the operation, but it was quickly apparent that the defenders of this vital system had far more strength in mortars and artillery, of all calibers, than had ever been seen in the Pacific before. It was used with great effectiveness against us as the 1st MarDiv and the 77th Division tried to advance in their sectors on May 1-3.

On May 1-3 we pitted the greatest concentration of firepower from naval gunfire, sea-borne rockets, air attack, massed artillery, and determined tank-infantry teams that had ever been used against such a restricted area. Nothing in Europe matched it. The

Japanese were literally enveloped in high explosives from the air, from ground elements, and from the sea, and one would think their positions would have been pulverized to coral dust. They were not. The Japanese burrowed deeper, and waited.

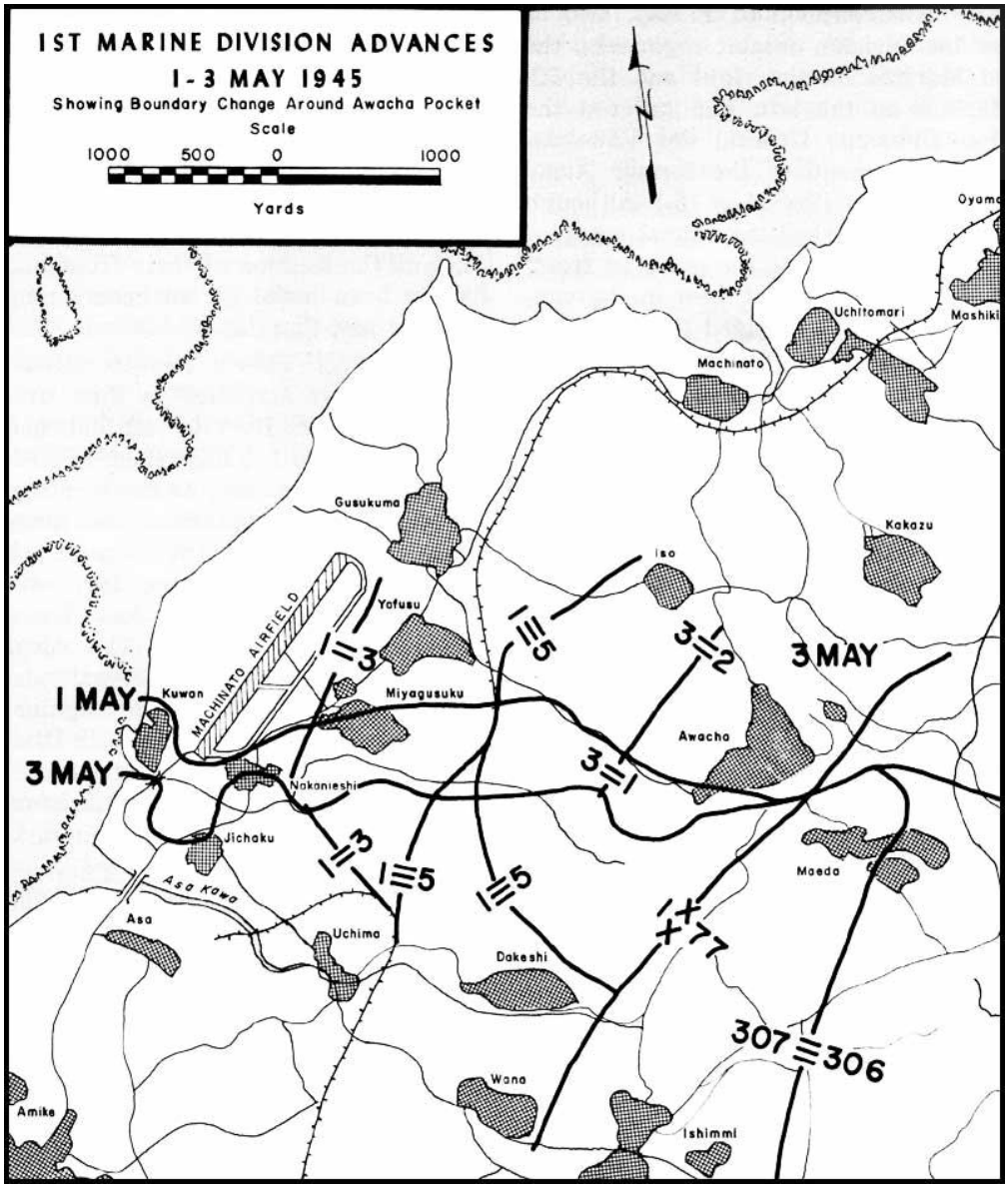
It was blowtorch and corkscrew, and death in the afternoon.

Hey, These Guys Are Good …

I would like to report that the 1st MarDiv blew in and saved the day after relieving the beat up 27th Division, but it would be revisionist history. The 165th Infantry had been trying to advance over an area called the Item Pocket near the coast. To the south was the Asa River and Naha. Looking to the right, our OP could see part of the Item Pocket. One of our battalions was trying to push south across it and was having the same success the Army had – blistering machine gun and mortar fire shoved them back with casualties.

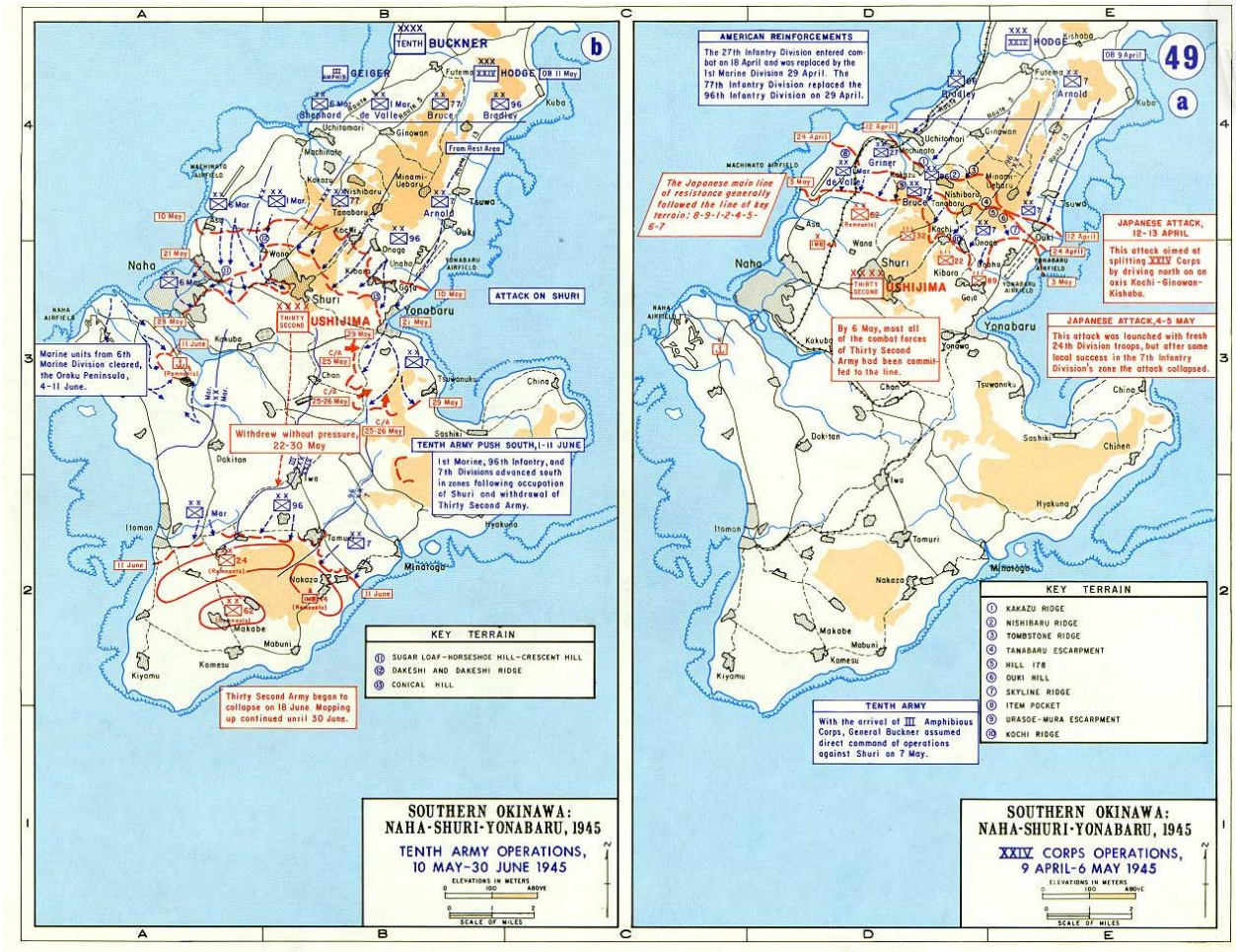
During this day and the next two, both the 1st Marines and the 5th Marines on our left tried to advance in a coordinated attack, the two regiments abreast, with tank and artillery support. Our 2nd Battalion on the coast advanced but had to hold up because the entire rest of the line was stopped cold. The 77th Division on the left of the 5th Marines fared no better. There was high ground in front of them that commanded not only the 77th's sector, but had clear fields of fire over most of the 1st Division's front. It was a stalemate for the moment, and XXIV Corps decided to shift emphasis of the attack to the 7th Division on the eastern end of the line, in an attempt to neutralize this critical high ground from the flank. The 1st and 77th Divisions would hold their present positions, threatening to advance if the Japanese tried to move resources to the east.

During these first three days on the line the 1st Division had more than 500 casualties without gaining any significant terrain. Nobody in the foxholes was making jokes about the 27th Division. The Japanese 32nd Army was doing an excellent job of defending its island.



As this map shows, the advances of three days of hard fighting by the 1st MarDiv on May 1-3 resulted in gains that could be measured in mere yards.

All we in the OP could do was watch. Two of our battalion commanders, Lt. Cols. Honsowetz and (I think) Hanneken) visited our OP, talked for half an hour with each other and stalked off with glum faces. In our first three days on the line, the 1st MarDiv had managed to do about as well as the scapegoat 27th Army Division.



A Difference of Opinion…

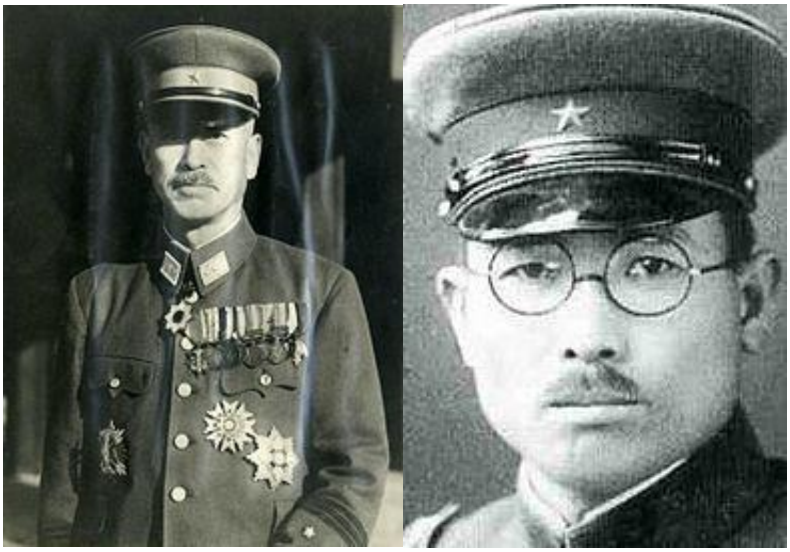
We did not know it then, but Gen. Ushijima and his 32nd Army were about to make their first big mistake. Gen. Cho, chief of staff, led a faction that favored taking advantage of the virtual stalemate by mounting a major counter attack to turn the battle in their favor. Sitting and waiting for us went against the proud grain of Gen. Cho and some of the other staff officers. Against this approach was Col. Yahara, architect of the brilliant defense the Japanese had mounted up to this point, who believed a major counteroffensive was premature and would yield unacceptable casualties and loss of irreplaceable materiel.

I have to admit I wasn't present at the decisive meeting in a bunker under Shuri Castle where the Japanese decision was made on May 2. The following is a quote from a Tenth Army monograph recounting an interview with Col. Yahara, August 1945, after the

Japanese surrender (Gen. Ushijima and Gen. Cho had committed hara-kiri – apparently Col. Yahara was more pragmatic):

> "Sake was flowing freely, and the meeting became tense and quarrelsome. When it was proposed that the 63rd Brigade of the 62nd Division come under command of the 24th Division for an attack, the brigade commander, Gen. Nakashima, retorted hotly with a pointed and biting comparison of the abilities of the 62nd and the 24th Divisions. His brigade would not fight as a mere branch of a weak tree; rather it would die where it stood. Gen. Nakashima won his point, and the meeting moved quickly to a decision. Gen. Fujioka, commander of the 62nd Division, vehemently backed up Gen. Cho. Most of the Japanese commanders were impatient with defensive fighting and saw no prospect of success in a battle of attrition. Col. Yahara's warnings were unavailing, and once again he was overruled. Gen Ushijima ordered an all-out offensive by 32nd Army for 4 May."

Shuri Castle, Okinawa



General Mitsuru Ushijima and General Isamu Cho

Colonel Hiromichi Yahara, the brilliant strategist behind the entrenched Japanese defenses, who was bitterly opposed to the May 4 assault by the Japanese. The assault only succeeded in shortening the defense of the island.

A-Calling They Did Come…

I left two scouts and a radio in the OP and three of us (the other two were Sommers and Henry Blake, I think) made our way back to the regimental CP, which was no short hike. Col. Chappelle liked to keep his CP a comfortable distance behind the line battalions. My recollection is that it was about 800 yards behind our OP, and I definitely remember that the Jap artillery, which had been sporadic the first couple of days, gradually began to pick up tempo and density during our trek back. Most of it was dropping behind us, but I swear some Jap mortar men had spotted us as we moved back and were trying to pick us off. It seemed to be coming from the high ground in front of the 5th, at least a mile away.

In the CP there was no clue that anything was afoot, although the word was that the kamikazes had been at the fleet all day and sunk several ships. After reporting to Boyd and Heyman, I dug myself a hole and made the rounds of the four Cossack posts around the CP perimeter. I then settled down to organize evening chow for myself. I don't remember anything about the rest of that night until about midnight when Heyman woke me up urgently and said, "Capt. Boyd wants to see you ASAP! I've got to wake up the rest of the Scout Section."

I picked up my carbine and hustled over to where Boyd was sitting in his hole with a poncho draped over him to hide the small penlight he was using on a map.

He said, "We've had a report from Division that the Japs are attacking the 77th and the 7th in force, and the 1st Battalion has reported activity offshore, but they don't know what it is yet. Also, Division says the pickets have reported seeing several transport aircraft flying in formation north of the island and we should be alert for possible hostile paratroop activity. Since the CP is a little isolated, the Colonel wants you to take all of the scouts, including those on the perimeter, and run a circle patrol all around the CP a half mile out. We'll man the perimeter posts with other people for the rest of the night.

"Heyman will stay here with us. Hop to it and make sure everyone knows the password and countersign. (Boyd liked to say things like that. None of us were about to wander around in the black of night without the password which would keep us from being cut down by friendly fire as we moseyed back to the CP, but it was a logical thing for him to say.) If you spot anybody that's not supposed to be out there get everyone back here fast and come to me."

We-e-ll… I thought it would make more sense to double the perimeter outposts, keep quiet, and listen. The idea of stumbling around in the dark with a nine-man patrol didn't appeal to me at all, especially since I didn't know precisely where the friendlies were and they didn't know we were going to be out there. And if there were Jap paratroopers

stumbling around in the dark we would be better able to deal with them dug in and ready, like they were doing to us. But the colonel gets what he wants.

There were two roads leading to an intersection about 100 yards west of the CP, one from the north which continued on south and one which angled in from a little north of west. I told Boyd we would go out on the road leading north and circle eastward, then south, and then westward around to the other road and come in from that direction. I asked Boyd to call the word to the battalion CP's that we were out, in the hope it would leak down to at least some of the shooters. I also asked him to be sure the perimeter on the west side of the CP knew we would be coming back in that way.

I also didn't intend to go out the full half mile, and we didn't. I wasn't about to spread the patrol out, so I set us up in column with a five-pace interval and asked John Davidson to take the point, to go slow and quiet, and if he heard or saw anything to stop and stand like a pointer. I planned to be the second man in the column. Well, it turned out that John was so pissed off at having to do this at all that he took off at quick time despite my hissing at him to slow down. It would have been funny if it wasn't so stupid.

There was no way to stop him without raising a ruckus, so I passed the word back for the others to guide on me. There was a half moon and I let John get 40 yards ahead and then kept up with his pace. I figured if he ran into any trouble we would have time and space to react. John actually did a pretty good job of running the route I had laid out, but he didn't slow down until we were on the west side of our circle. No paratroopers or hostile U. S. Marines were encountered.

What made John slow down and stop until we caught up was a big firefight that broke out west of us. It sounded like it was in the vicinity of the beach, about a mile off, and then we started seeing star shells being fired for illumination by the Navy. The firefight didn't slack off and actually grew in intensity, and the star shells were bright enough to illuminate us a bit, so I had everybody sit down and wait. We were ahead of schedule, anyway. I didn't want to get back to the CP too early and have Chappelle and Boyd send us out again on some risky wild goose chase.

The small arms fire and what sounded like small mortar or grenade explosions went on for about a half hour, then dwindled off to relative silence with just an occasional machine gun burst. By this time we had been out a couple of hours and I figured it was safe to find the CP. As we approached we were challenged by one of our perimeter posts. We gave the password and were allowed in. Strangely, I didn't recognize any of the three people manning the post, but I immediately dismissed the patrol before reporting to Boyd, to further discourage any new assignments in the dark.

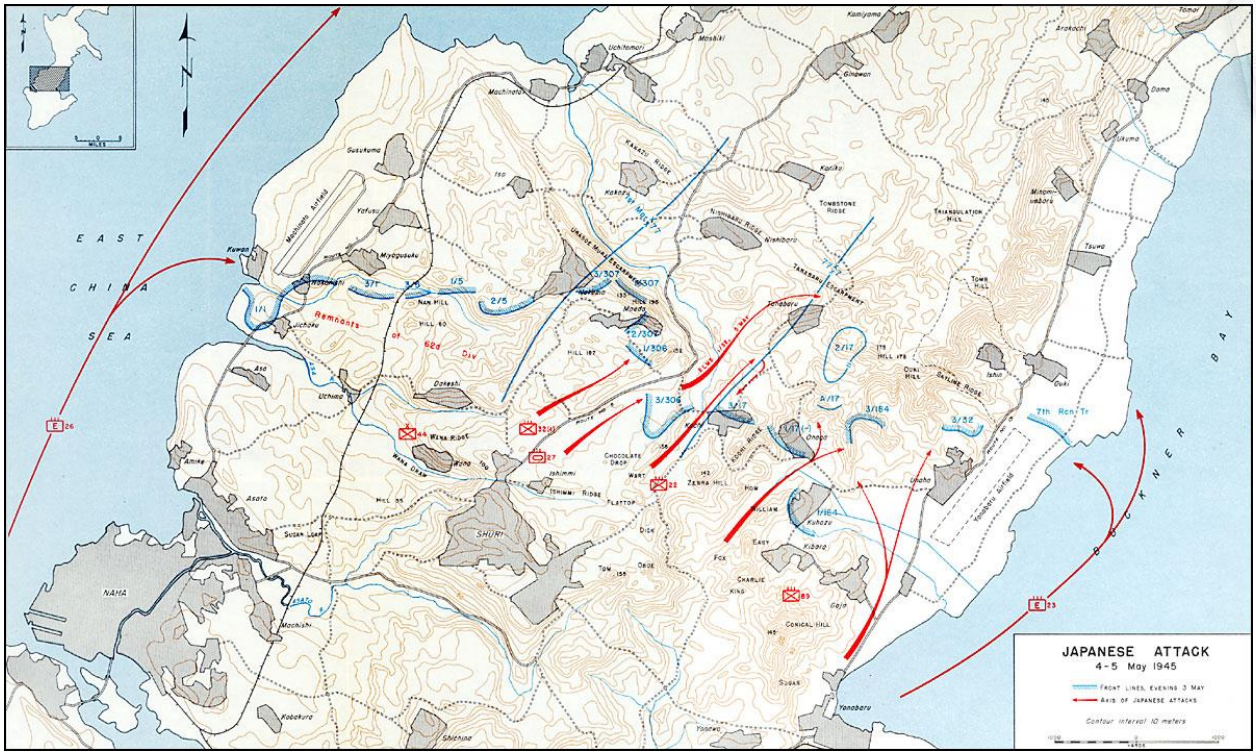
I found Lt. Chandler first and gave him my "all clear" report. He smiled and said he would

take it to Boyd and for me to get out of sight – I think he had the same opinion of our midnight jaunt that I did. Still smiling, he told me Chappelle had called in an infantry platoon from the reserve battalion for CP security while we were gone. I smiled back and said, “Aye, aye, sir”, and trundled off.

The next morning we found out that the firefight we had heard was an abortive amphibious attempt by the Japanese to land on the beach in the Division’s rear. They had been spotted by 1st Battalion outposts who took them under fire while they were still outside the reef. The 1st Battalion CO moved two companies into position along the seawall while the attached naval gunfire liaison officer called for illumination from two destroyers. With the assistance of several armored amtracs, the 1st Battalion systematically shot the invaders to pieces, with very few reaching shore.

The next morning the 1st Battalion S-3 reported to regiment that they estimated 600 Japanese dead, along with destruction of almost all of the assault boats. I have to acknowledge that the information in this paragraph is from my memory of information we got in the CP that morning. Boyd was pleased enough with the outcome of our paratrooper patrol that he let me take Bauman and go over to the 1st battalion area. I can verify there were bunches of shot up wooden and metal landing craft, and there were a lot of bodies sloshing around near shore and on the beach.

While we were on our midnight adventure the main Japanese attack, supported by extremely heavy mortar and artillery action as well as tanks, hit the 7th and 77th Divisions, and it was still going on at daybreak. We could hear the rumble of artillery in the east, both theirs and ours, as we heated coffee for breakfast. There was no general breakthrough, but the Japanese managed to infiltrate the better part of one battalion to high ground a mile or so behind the Army’s front. If there had been a more massive penetration and the amphibious landing had been successful the Japs would have had a hammer and anvil on either side of the 1st MarDiv rear echelons, but I believe they would have been sorry. For a change they would have been out in the open while we were dug in, and the 3rd Battalion was available to shoot them up.



Map of the Japanese attack – May 4, 1945. Note the amphibious "end around" on the eastern flank that the author witnessed.

Incidentally, on the second day of this fight we got the word that the Germans had surrendered. It was nice to hear, but it was expected by that time and we still had a lot of fish to fry in our backyard.

Fighting in the Army sector went on another day, but the battle was essentially over by the sunset of this first day. The two Army divisions took something over 700 casualties overall, but counting those we killed in the amphibious blunder, the Japanese lost roughly 5,000 of their best people, many of them to artillery fire as they tried to regain their main line positions. Additionally, they lost much of their artillery to counter-battery fire, as well as most of their tanks. I never saw a Japanese tank after this battle. It is my personal guess that if the Japs had simply stayed in their caves and continued their fight of defensive attrition, it would have added at least two months to the battle for Okinawa, and it would have cost a lot more American lives than it eventually did.

For illustration, our division was simultaneously trying to take high ground west of

Machinato airfield and we had as many casualties as the two Army divisions combined during the first day of the Japanese attack. My regiment was trying to capture a couple of small bumps in front of the Asa River called Hill 60 and Nan Hill and it took four days of extremely costly blowtorch and corkscrew. On our left the 5th Marines were having an equally difficult time, as were the 77th and 7th on their left.

"Blowtorch and Corkscrew": Armored Flamethrower assaulting Hill 60…

…while other Marines wait for the smoke from a satchel charge blast to clear out on the same hill.

It was during this period that Col. Chappelle was relieved and the regimental command was assumed by Col. Arthur Mason. We never heard an explanation but few of us were surprised. Perhaps someone in Division thought that Chappelle kept his CP too far back. I surely did. Mason turned out to be a competent CO; he ruled by the book but I thought he was pretty sound. I never had any indication he knew I was alive, but later events contradicted that notion.

Gen. Buckner had decided that the misguided Japanese offensive had used up enough of their resources to make a coordinated 10th Army offensive against the Shuri defenses feasible. He had ordered the current effort to advance and straighten the XXIV Corps line for that purpose.

At that point, the 1st MarDiv was still attached to the XXIV Corps, but not for long. The 6th MarDiv, having been relieved by the 27th Division, was now free and was ordered south. About the 10th of May the 6th slipped into the line on our right as the 1st crabbed eastward to let them in, and they absorbed the ratty missions we had been struggling with. It would lead to some bad times for the 6th later on. With their arrival the 1st Division was detached and returned to command of the 3rd MAC. Two full corps were now on the line, both reporting to Gen. Buckner. From east to west it was 96th Division, 77th Division, 1st MarDiv, 6th MarDiv, with the 7th Division as Army reserve.

Buckle Down, Wynsocki…(for you youngsters, that's the title of a fake college fight song popular in the 1950's)

I should mention that this massive, four-division attack was at least in part motivated by a request from Admiral Turner, commander of the naval forces protecting the fleet and supply vessels. The Japanese had escalated their kamikaze and conventional air attacks in support of their big land attack, and the navy pickets and supply vessels were being hit hard. Turner asked Buckner to speed up his attack if at all possible. Occasionally, the big radio in the Comm Section would pick up voice transmissions between pilots in the Combat Air Patrol (CAP) who were engaging Jap aircraft over the offshore anchorage, and we could listen to their interchange while actually watching them zoom around. They couldn't stop them all, but they were knocking Japs down right and left.

On the ground the shift along the line had two results: We had to move the regimental OP east and somewhat south, and again we found an excellent spot on high ground right behind the middle of the 1st Marine lines. The second important effect was that the 1st MarDiv was now in front of the Shuri Heights and had the responsibility of taking the keystone of the Japanese defense. Two prominent features in front of Shuri Ridge had to

be taken before the Ridge itself could be reached – Dakeshi ridge to the east of us was the responsibility of the 7th Marines on our left. Our objective was Wana Ridge, flanked by the deep Wana Draw. Both were a hive of enemy defensive emplacements. The 5th Marines were in reserve.

The forbidding Wana Ridge. This is the reverse slope – Marines attacked from the other side…

…from the Wana Draw shown here from the east end looking west.

At first we made relatively good progress, coordinating with the 6th Division on our right, but the farther the battalions moved the heavier the flanking fire from Dakeshi Ridge on our left and from Shuri Ridge to the southeast, and the advance stalled.

The next day our mission was to attack up Wana Ridge and tie in with a coordinated assault by the 7th Marines. Our people made it halfway up but never were able to connect with the 7th, and that afternoon the Japs mounted a heavy counter attack supported by mortar fire, artillery and anti-tank fire from both Dakeshi and Shuri Ridge that threatened to isolate our lead companies,

Two Marines from 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines, Davis Hargraves and Gabriel Chavarria, attacking on the Wana Ridge, Okinawa, May 1945.

From our OP we could see most of the tank-infantry action below us, and we saw two of

our tanks knocked out by two-man Jap suicide teams with satchel charges. One tank lost a track and the other had its turret blown catty-whompus. Two of the bombers were blown up by their own charges, and the other two were instantly cut down by infantry fire, but they had accomplished their job. We did not see any of the tank crews get out, but learned later that all but one had escaped that night out the belly hatches and made their way back to safety.

The M4 Shermans were much more effective than anything the Japs had, but because they were used primarily as slow-moving mobile pillboxes it was critical that they be supported by close-in infantry to keep these suicide satchel charge teams off their backs. They were also vulnerable to the Japanese 47mm antitank guns. Our line boys were very fond of the flamethrower version which could squirt out a rod of napalm 60-70 yards in a blowtorch operation, versus the 25-30 yards from the infantry backpack type. The corkscrew teams with their satchel charges and grenades usually could skulk along behind as cover for their follow up assault.

We had the best observation point anywhere along the 1st Marines line, and with binoculars we could also see some of the 47mm and 75mm guns on Shuri Ridge popping out, firing, then pulling back into their emplacements. We called this information in to Regiment, who had the artillery and naval gunfire liaison officers with the 2nd Battalion move up to our OP. Within twenty minutes they had a blanket of smoke laid down that covered our advance platoons withdrawal from the hot spot. It had been a long day; there would be more of the same.

But Not For Awhile…

That evening the 5th Marines took over the 1st Marines position and mission. We had been hammering at the Japanese defenses for almost two weeks without much territory to show for it, although an estimated 1500 of the enemy were no longer functional. Our casualties had been about half that. Ironically and sadly, if one is a bean counter that is a good ratio for an attacking force. The regiment moved about one mile to the rear where the battalions set up a triangle of strong point perimeters, with the regimental command post in the center.

The 5th Marines R-2 scouts took over our excellent OP. I left Bauman with them overnight to point out useful things in the morning, and that afternoon I took Keyes, Cernik, and Bishop out to locate some fairly high ground where we could watch the approaches to the regimental “rest” area.

I haven’t specifically commented on it, but infiltration by small suicide units of 3-10 men were used by the Japanese throughout the Okinawan campaign in an effort to disrupt our

rear areas and destroy supply and ammunition dumps. The willingness of the Japanese soldier to die in these forays continually dumbfounded us. They didn't succeed often, but it took constant vigilance and good security discipline to not get bayoneted in your sleep in "safe" areas.

Anyway, we found a grass-covered hummock about 40 meters high that wasn't all coral, so we could dig a decent foxhole. Where possible, I avoided the very top of a terrain feature for an OP because that was where Japanese mortars would shoot first. The first place I picked on this hill was about a third of the way up the slope. There was a good view of the regimental area and our location wouldn't be conspicuous.

We all started digging, but I decided to take a look from the top of the hill. From there I realized that any infiltrators might see this hill and decide to also take a look around. If this happened we would be the proverbial sitting ducks down below, so I called down for the other three to stop digging, bring their gear, and come to the top. Grumbling a little, they came on up and we dug new holes. It was better, because now we had a 360 degree view. We could always move back down, if necessary.

By now it was dark and all four of us were breaking out some C-rations. I heard Keyes say, "Damn it, I left my D-Bar down there!" (He had been munching on it while he was digging.) Almost at the same moment we heard some scuffling noise in the grass near the first location, and we all reached for our weapons. That was when I heard Keyes stage whisper, "Shee-it, I left my Thompson down there, too!" Russ' Thompson had a 50-round gangster drum on it and I instantly visualized some fanatic Nihonjin lobbing a grenade and then charging us at close range with that monster. But maybe it hadn't been found yet.

Chuck Manhoff
Rockhound Extraordinaire
Russ Keyes + I on Okinawa, late in the campaign (June?) — notice how much weight I've lost - 'C' rations don't cut it. Russ was a little careless w/ his Tommy gun — notice there is a magazine in it.

I whispered, "Russ, we are going to go get it, now!" With Cernik five yards out on one side of Keyes and me five yards out on the other, safeties off, we hunched down the hill, eyes out on stalks and ears expanded to twice their normal size. Bishop had instructions to cover us with his M1, but not to fire at anything except a muzzle flash below us. I have to acknowledge Russ was a stout fellow going down that hill with nothing but his Ka-Bar in hand.

Well, we arrived without incident. Keyes' Thompson lay a yard off the hole he had started. There was no sign of the D-Bar. Russ picked up his weapon and we carefully backed up the hill, safeties still off. At the top I said something like, "Geez, Russ! How could you pick up your pack, your entrenching tool, and your ammo pouch, and leave your weapon behind?!" With a perfect imitation of Mortimer Snerd, grinning, he said, "Just stupid, I guess." He was embarrassed, but didn't admit it. It was so stupid it didn't merit further comment, so we all let it go. For the rest of the night we stood two-hour watches, with the other two sleeping. We still didn't know what had made the noise we all had heard.

The next morning as dawn broke we looked around and down and saw nothing, but after about five minutes we heard that same scuffling noise and the grass below was definitely being disturbed. Again, we all flipped off safeties and stared at the moving grass. Cernik had the best viewing angle and he stood up and said, "It's a pig." With that he squeezed off one round from his Thompson and the pig squealed, jumped in the air, and fell over dead. We went down the hill and saw Cernik's .45 slug had gone right in the pig's left eye.

What we had heard the night before was the pig schnoffling about, finding Russ' D-Bar and making off with it. Our immediate thought that morning was – BBQ!

None of us had ever butchered a pig but I had seen it done on the farm next to us at home, and with my rather inept guidance Cernik and Keyes hung the pig on a stout bush, slit its throat and we let it bleed for a half hour. Bishop and I collected some wood for a fire while they gutted it. We figured we could get away with a small fire at the base of the hill.

Then Russ called me over and asked, "What are those white things, Charlie? You're the farmer." He was pointing at a number of small, whitish cysts on the interior of the pig's rib cage. I said, "I don't know, I'm a cherry grower. But it occurs to me they could be trichinosis worms, or their eggs." Russ said "Tricka-whatsis? What's that?"

I explained it was a parasitic worm one gets from eating pork that hasn't been cooked to a high enough temperature, and that the worms start migrating through one's muscles, causing a great deal of pain. I also explained that the reason I knew about it was because a good friend of our family, a doctor, had contracted trichinosis in Africa.

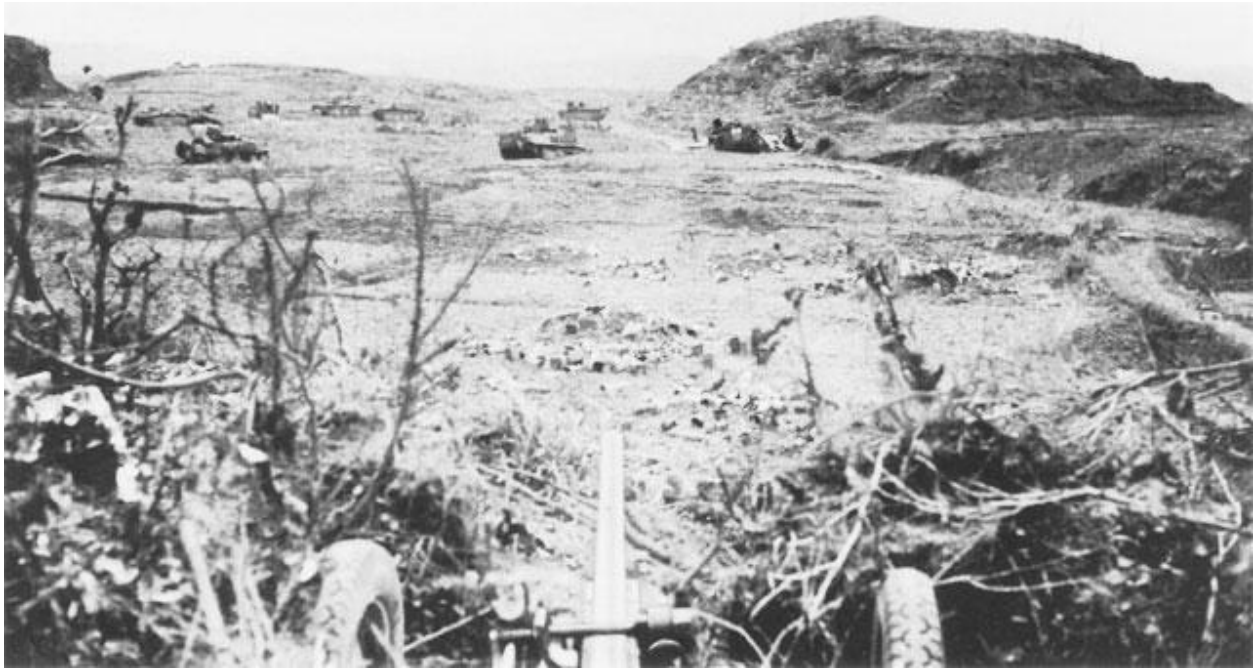
It goes without saying that I turned everybody off the barbecue idea, and Russ has continued to tell this story to someone, every time we get together, for 59 years. What seems to fascinate him is that I knew about something as exotic and technical as trichinosis. He never mentions leaving a submachine gun lying around for a Jap to pick up, so I tell that part of the story, relentlessly.

I don't remember much about the next few days, which means that not much happened.

No artillery harassment in our area that I recall, and despite the pig episode, no infiltrators to worry about. So while the 5th and the 7th grubbed away at the stubborn positions in front of Wana Ridge, my regiment had a relatively quiet five-day vacation. We knew it couldn't last, and it didn't.

Back in the Hopper…

When the 1st Marines were called back to the line it was the end of the third week in May. I think, but I can't remember for sure, that the 7th Marines were dropped back in reserve. We slid in on the left of the 5th Marines, who sidled over toward the western end of Wana Draw and more or less tied in with the 6th Division. The 6th was having big troubles with a place called Sugar Loaf Hill. It actually was a complex of three low hills ideally situated to support each other with mortar, anti-tank, and small arms fire.



The deceptively innocuous looking Sugar Loaf Hill on the right was not that big (note the tanks in front for scale). The 6th Marines estimated it would take an afternoon to subdue. However it was packed with 2,000 crack Japanese infantry who had two other hills supporting it as well as artillery from Shuri Ridge one mile away. 10 hellish days and 2,662 casualties later (1/3 of the 6th Marines casualties for the entire battle), the hill finally fell into American hands. It was one of the toughest fights of a very tough campaign.

Unable to take these bastions replace with "After pacifying these bastions"?, the 6th shifted

their attack westward and took the capitol of Naha, without opposition. This was the first, almost imperceptible sign that the Japanese resistance was faltering – they were keeping their strength in the defensive network protecting Shuri and did not have the manpower to hold the entire western end of their line. It would have been costly and difficult in any case, because the terrain around and in Naha was relatively flat and they would have been looking down the 16" barrels of nearby battleships.

This moved the right flank of the 10th Army line quite a bit forward of the center, and the same thing had occurred at the eastern end near Yonabaru, where the Army had finally broken a couple of key Japanese defensive positions. A two-prong envelopment of Shuri became the goal of the two American corps, but a new monkey wrench was about to be tossed at the good guys.

While we were gone the 5th had taken up where the 1st Marines had left off, with about the same success. The significant event of the day we moved in was that a new and terrible element befell the entire 10th Army line – RAIN! – and I mean rain like we had seen on New Britain. It was a deluge that went on for a solid week or so, almost without letup, and it changed the entire face of the battle.

In one day, the clay-founded roads all became impassable to wheeled traffic. By the next day tracked vehicles, even amtracs, could not move except in a few limited areas. The entire 10th Army offensive ground to a shuddering halt and for the line companies it became a simple effort to survive. Virtually all supplies for the front had to be hand-carried forward and wounded had to be carried out by litter-bearers for long distances. This was a slow and inadequate solution, for even the bearers often were in mud up to their knees or higher. Where there was no other way to go except across open areas swept by Japanese fields of fire, air drops of food and ammunition were used during occasional breaks in the rain, and wounded could only be evacuated at night or under the cover of heavy smoke barrages. The walls of foxholes continually were collapsing from the incessant drenching, the all-pervasive mud jammed the actions of individual weapons, and uniforms were unceasingly wet for days. For several days no offensive action was undertaken.

Chuck Manhoff
Rockhound Extraordinaire

Okinawa, mid April

Two days ~~after~~ the rains came – we had to move supplies by Amtrac – the 6x6 trucks just floundered

Many of the regimental CP personnel were put to work moving ammunition and other supplies forward and bringing wounded out. Even the R-2 clerk-typist was drafted. Again, it was fortuitous to be a regimental scout because we were the principal CP security and were not drafted for the dangerous coolie work. We didn't even try to set up a regimental OP for several days, but we did run limited screening patrols around the CP area to flush out any infiltrators, as well as manning the key Cossack posts at night. We didn't intercept any infiltrators during this period, although one of the rear posts manned by the Comm section shot one. The worst part, for us, was huddling for two hours under a poncho in the

rain, in a hole with six inches of water in it, trying to keep the action of our weapons clear of mud. The line people had it worse.

Marines moving supplies in the torrential rains.

I don't remember the rain being particularly cold, which was fortunate. Russ Keyes was a better scavenger than I was and had come across a wooden door that had been blown off something, which he appropriated. It was about four feet wide and six feet long, and for several nights the two of us slept on top of it, keeping us out of the mud. My lesser contributions came from one of our little patrols where we found a reinforced tomb that had been used as a pillbox by Japanese defenders.

I haven't mentioned the Okinawan tombs before, but I should. There were hundreds, probably thousands, of them all over the island. The Okinawans venerated their dead and generally preserved their bones in big, earthen jars which they placed in tombs, usually cut into the side of a hill and reinforced with coral blocks. Many were again reinforced with concrete by the Japanese and used as pillboxes and gun emplacements. Twice I

remember using an abandoned tomb instead of digging a foxhole.

An Okinawan "turtleback" tomb…

In this particular tomb there were two items left behind. A half dozen ivory-colored, two-piece, plastic gas protection suits – a top with a hood and a pair of trousers with a drawstring waist. I thought we could put them on to keep the rain off as we slept on our door, so I took two sets back. I don't think Russ even tried his, but I put one on and felt quite protected – for about a half hour. Although it was raining lightly, I was wetter inside from perspiration than the suit was wet from the rain. I took it off and slept in the rain.

The second item was a softwood box like tea is sometimes packed in. In it were individual packets of rolled oats that were compressed into tablets about two by four by one inch, each tightly sealed in cellophane. One had been removed, but the rest sat neatly in the box. I had never heard of Japanese people eating oatmeal. I looked at the printing on the box, which was not Japanese. There was the name of a company, which I don't remember, but it said Singapore. What I do remember was it also said "Packed for the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders".

In my imagination I have since constructed several scenarios about how that box ended up in an Okinawan tomb. However it arrived there, I decided one of the Japs tried one of the little packets, didn't like it, and left the rest for me. The sealed cellophane reassured me they weren't doctored, so I opened one and tried it, dry. The little biscuits were pre-

sweetened, and even dry they weren't bad. Nobody else was interested, so for several days I had this little windfall to munch on and break the C-ration monotony.

Meanwhile, the regimental front faced Wana Ridge, with the Draw in front full of mud and water. For a week neither side did much, other than exchange mortar and artillery fire and send out a few short-range foot patrols. Tenth Army was convinced the Japanese were determined to fight down to the last man defending Shuri, and that we would have to dig, blast, and burn them out one by one. Based on progress up to that time, it could take months and many lives. In the almost constant rain, morale was poorer than I had ever seen it, even on Peleliu.

For the first time in my Marine Corps experience we began to see significant numbers of battle fatigue cases conducted to the rear, so-called "non-battle" casualties. The 77th Division on our left was doing no better.

Something Is Afoot …

The weather was so poor during the period of heavy rain that aerial observation of the enemy was almost non-existent. Battalion patrols saw nothing to indicate movement by the Japanese. For almost all of the last ten days in May, 10th Army was convinced that the Japanese intended to fight it out around Shuri. They were wrong. The whole story didn't unravel until after Okinawa was secured, but in this ten-day period the Japanese 32nd Army decided, planned, and carried out a mass withdrawal to the southern end of the island. They had considered holding around Shuri but finally decided that withdrawal south provided the best chance to prolong the conflict and increase attrition of the enemy.

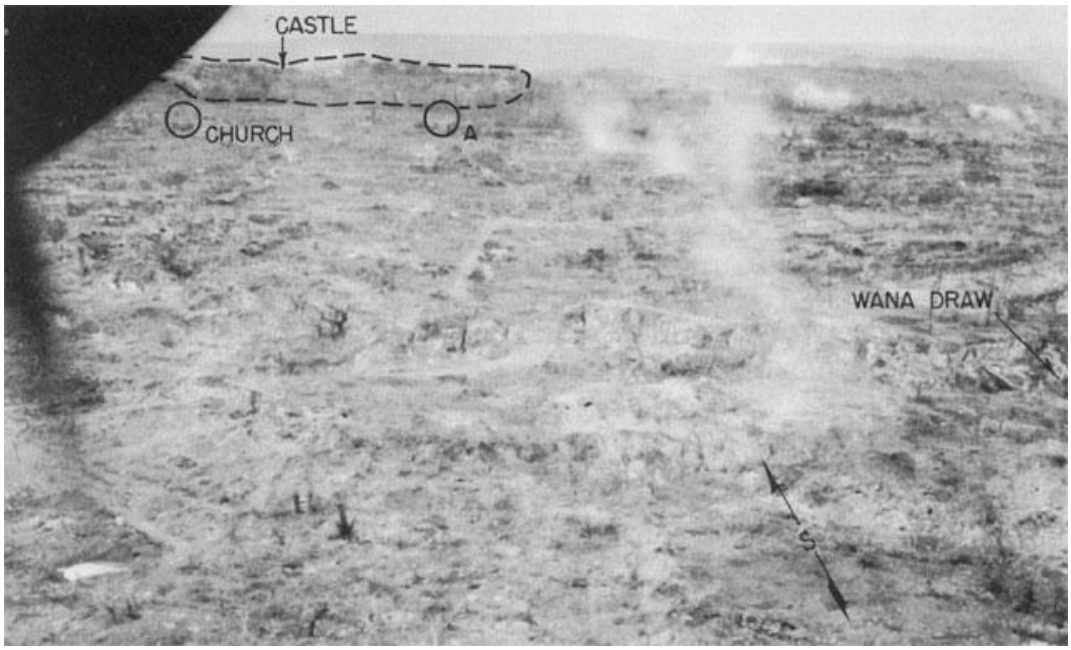
The strategic withdrawal was done with adroit use of the bad weather and effective rear guard action by troops holding the Shuri line. As late as 28 May the 10th Army intelligence officer reported in a staff meeting that it "now looks as though the Japanese thinks holding the line north of Shuri is his best bet….It is probable that we will gradually surround the Shuri position."

It wasn't until 30 May that a joint meeting of XXIV Corps and 3rd MAC intelligence officers finally agreed that the "enemy was holding the Shuri lines with a shell, and that the bulk of the troops were elsewhere." The 10th Army intelligence officer estimated that only 5,000 troops were holding Shuri, and admitted he didn't know where the rest were.

I have reflected many times about the rainy ten days when 10th Army was so totally in the dark about Japanese intentions – at least for me and the rest of the regimental scouts, the weather was a gift from the Holy Spirit. For the first time in the two months of the invasion, the tactical situation was one where the regimental scouts should have been out and

looking – where was the enemy, where were they going, what did their actions indicate they were going to do? The most dangerous condition for reconnaissance is when the enemy's units are moving, and even though I have always since carried around "survivor guilt", I'm glad we didn't have to do it. Tenth Army thought they knew what the Japanese were doing, and there were no calls for reconnaissance beyond the immediate battalion fronts.

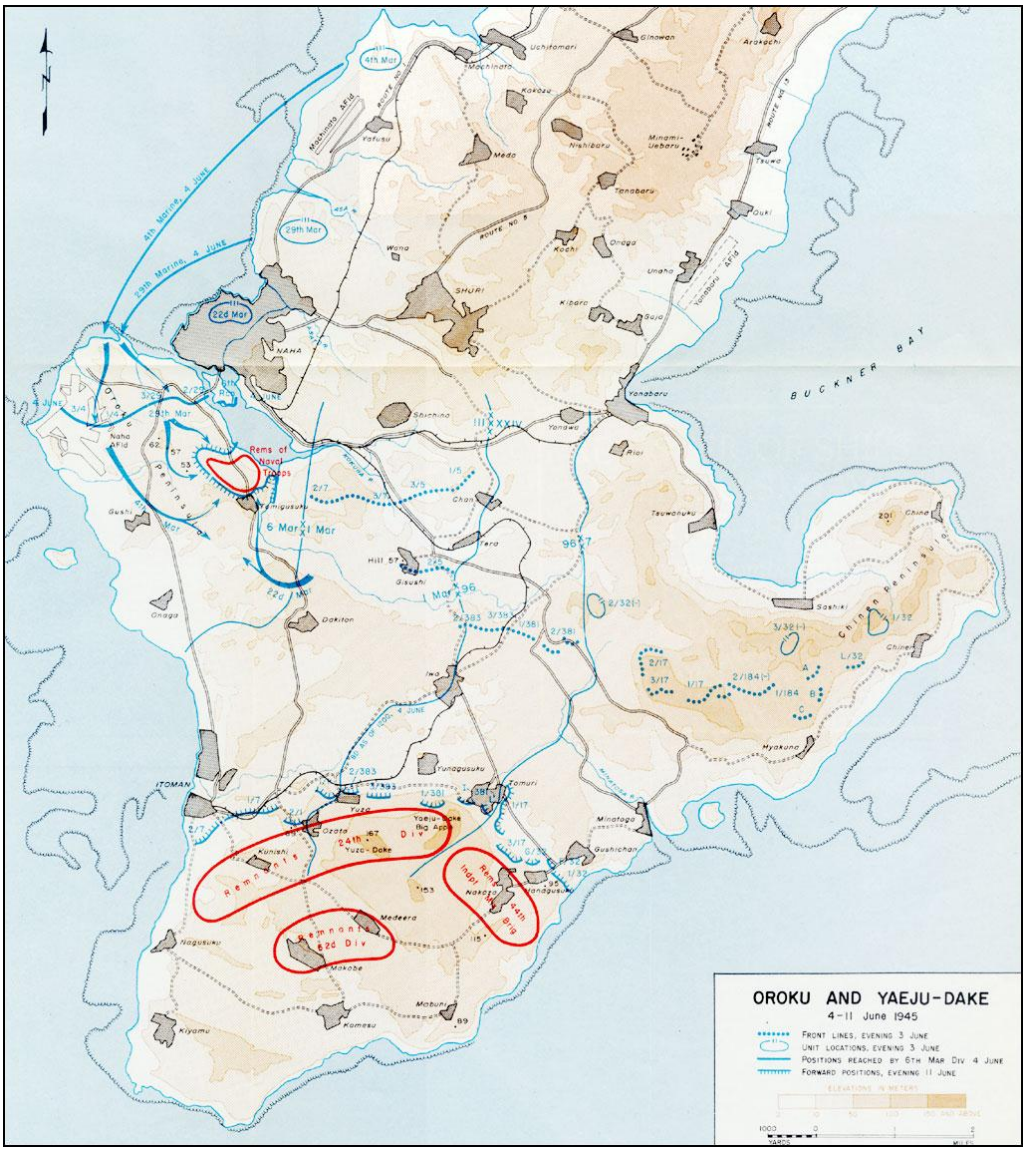
The Japanese rear guard units performed with such skill that no changes were observed along the 77th and 1st MarDiv fronts until the end of the month, when a 5th Marines battalion patrol reported that the Ridge in front of their unit seemed to be held more lightly than previously. Up to this time, every advance toward the high ground had been thrown back with losses. The next day the 1st battalion, 5th Marines attacked Shuri Ridge and occupied it without significant opposition.



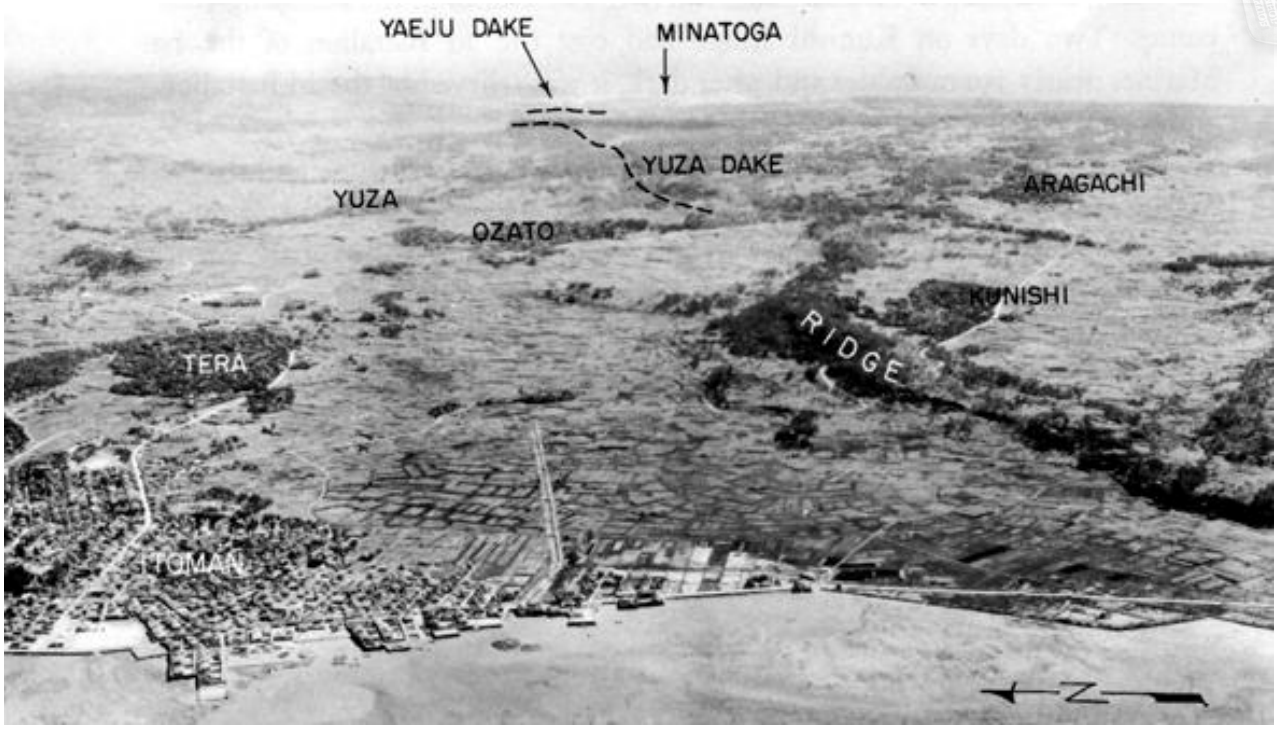
Aerial view of the Shuri Heights with the castle and several ruined buildings noted. Note the Wana Draw on the right. The view is looking South.

This achievement was the first in a series of advances by Marine and Army units that secured the entire Naha-Shuri-Yonabaru line as the holding action by the Japanese crumbled. Some of the rear guard held to the end and died in their caves, and some slipped away to the south.

Tenth Army still hoped to catch the Japanese in their retreat and destroy them piecemeal, but within a day it was obvious that Ushijima's decimated army had escaped intact and was establishing new positions on a coral escarpment four miles to the south called Yuza-Dake – Yaeju-Dake, which formed a wall across the southern end of the island. It was actually a bigger, higher terrain feature than that which the Shuri defenses were founded on.



Final stand of the Japanese on the Yuza-Dake – Yaeju-Dake line. Also note the Oroku pocket to the north.



Aerial view of the same area looking east from the coast. Note the Kunishi Ridge in the lower right of the picture, described below.

The biggest impediment to the pursuit was continuing heavy rain. The XXIV Corps was to advance in the east while III MAC moved down the west coast and isolated the Oroku Peninsula (see map), destroying any enemy encountered rather than by-passing them. Gen. Geiger's decision was to push the 1st MarDiv south to seal the base of the Oroku Peninsula, while the 6th Division made an amphibious landing on the western tip of the Peninsula.

Once again we were on the move south, but it was easier said than done. The Division did not meet much resistance at first, but the rain had completely immobilized traffic along our lengthening supply route. Initially, we were entirely dependent on air drop and carrying parties for supply. This made it impossible to keep up with XXIV Corps on our left. After a couple of days there was a gap in the line of nearly two miles. The Division had to close this gap and at the same time provide the anvil for the 6th Division advance from the western beaches.

The 6th Division executed their amphibious assault against fierce resistance from the Japanese naval troops ensconced in elaborate tunnels and prepared defensive positions, who were determined to fight to the last man. Over several days the 6th managed to accommodate them, but at the cost of more than 1,600 casualties. (This a very abbreviated account of a difficult, costly action.)

As our Division closed the gap with the XXIV Corps it then faced a place called Kunishi Ridge, held by the best of what was left of the Jap 32nd Army. The 1st Marines and 7th Marines abreast were to attack this fortress complex. Japanese defenses facing 10th Army in the east were collapsing, but it was not to be so at Kunishi Ridge. The only positive factor was that the weather started to improve.

The combination of open, flat approaches and previously prepared defensive positions on the high ground of Kunishi Ridge turned the fight into the most costly and difficult of all the battles in the southern end of Okinawa. The 1st Marines were the first to venture out and the first to pay heavily. In the first day's action our 1st Battalion had 125 casualties, with no ground gained. Over the next five terrible days, the 1st and 7th Marines, working with a large part of the Division's tank battalion and fifteen battalions of artillery, plus tactical air support, managed to climb the heights on Kunishi and hung on grimly under blistering automatic weapons, mortar, artillery fire, and numerous local counter attacks. Half a mile to the east was Yuza-dake, 300 feet higher than the Ridge, which the 77th Division had not yet been able to reduce. It was the source of punishing enfilading fire against the 1st and 7th Marines ridge-top positions for days.

During those five days the only way reinforcements and supplies could be brought in and casualties evacuated was in tanks. Most supplies and reinforcements had to be unloaded through the escape hatches in the tank floors, with wounded loaded the same way because of exposed positions on the top of the Ridge. Dead Marines were carefully gathered at the north base of the Ridge. During those five days the tanks brought in 550 reinforcing troops and 90 tons of supplies, carrying out 1,150 troops to the rear, almost all of them casualties. The tank battalion lost 21 tanks destroyed or damaged. We did not know all these statistics at the time, of course. I dug them out of the 10th Army history.

We did know pretty much what was happening, saw a lot of the wounded being unloaded into ambulance jeeps and amtracs, helped load ammo, rations, medical supplies, and water onto and into the tanks for the return trip, and in the process listened to a lot of stories.

During the battle at Kunishi Ridge. Note the tanks mentioned above. They were the only way to get supplies in and casualties out.

And what else was the R-2 Section doing before and during those five days? Well, a little more than we had been doing. With the regiment and all the rest of the 3rd MAC units moving there was little "line" integrity and gaps existed between units, some of which were substantial at times. The scout section had small patrols out behind our rifle battalions most of the time, to screen the CP from potential infiltrators.

Twice during this moving time our patrols (neither of which I was on) encountered two small groups of Japanese. In one case the Japs were driven away, and in the second instance all four were killed. At least, they were presumed to be Japanese. The 32nd Army originally had about 20,000 Boeitai, Okinawan Home Guard, organized as labor and service units. In addition, as Japanese infantry numbers shrank, Okinawans were conscripted and integrated into army fighting units.

It was getting hard to tell who was who. By this time regular uniforms were not always worn by Japanese infantry. Our side had dropped leaflets by air on the Okinawan civilians telling that the Shuri line had broken and we were coming south in force. We told them to

wear white at all times so we could tell they were not the real enemy. It was a dumb move because, naturally, some of the Japanese troops started to wear white. To be honest, having gone through all the hell that Okinawa had been, few of our line troops cared what color was worn. If they didn't come to us naked with hands clasped on their heads, they got shot. My personal attitude was very close to that unless they were younger than seven.

I won't drag you through all of the last few days in detail. By the third or fourth day of the operation on Kunishi it was becoming obvious that Japanese military integrity was crumbling very rapidly. Most of the crack troops that originally made up the core of the 32nd Army were dead, most of their artillery had been destroyed, and command and control was breaking down.

The terrain south and east finally was ideal for massed armor and the 10th Army tanks were having a field day in the two by four mile area that remained to the Emperor's boys. There was no integrated defense left. After nearly three months of being far outgunned and progressively destroyed by an enemy as implacable as themselves, the Japanese 32nd Army collapsed totally, becoming a small, ineffective mob, that was rapidly being shot to pieces. Organized combat in the battle for Okinawa was over by June 22.

The speed that this happened surprised a lot of us. The last official order of the 32nd Army, on June 18, was that remaining troops would travel in small groups of two to five and migrate to the northern mountains to conduct guerilla warfare. An estimated 15,000-18,000 were all that were left of the original 100,000+. Some chose this course and some chose to fight on where they were. Whichever the choice, most of this remainder were killed.

Three Sherman tanks protect a disabled tank (center) from counter-attack during the final push. Shellbursts mark enemy positions.

A sad event occurred just three days before this final Japanese order. The 8th Marines, 2nd MarDiv had come ashore in early June, to participate in the final stages of the fighting. Why, I have not found out. On June 18, Gen. Buckner visited an 8th Marines OP, and while there was killed when a Japanese 77mm shell exploded and broke off a large piece of coral which slammed into the General's chest. He was dead within ten minutes. Gen. Geiger, 3rd MAC took command temporarily until replaced by Gen. Joseph Stilwell.

Lt. General Simon Bolivar Buckner (Picture shows major general stars so it was taken before 1943)

A-Bopping We Did Go…

There were a few days of organized mop-up in the south, in which Col. Mason did not let his R-2 scouts participate, keeping us close to the CP as security against the fairly large numbers of Japs trying to migrate north. Night security by us and others of H&S Company was by two-man Cossack foxholes, each man keeping a pair of two-hour watches a night. The theory behind this is that each will keep the other awake, and it even works that way, sometimes. The scouts always manned the two forward posts, which infiltrators bumbling about in the dark could be expected to bumble into first.

I sat my watches along with the others, although I usually scheduled myself for the 8-10 evening watch and the 4-6 morning watch. On one of these evenings, without revealing who my watch mate was, we were sitting facing each other, without talking. I wasn't sure if my buddy was awake or not, but when I heard noises to the front not more than 20 yards away, I hissed quietly at him, "Heads up! Look front!"

His reaction was very fast. Before I could stop him he whirled around and threw an illumination grenade he had in his hand. "Lum" grenades used burning magnesium, and they are BRIGHT. It popped and, with our pupils wide open because it was a moonless night, instantly blinded both of us. I yelled, "Password!" Hearing nothing, I cranked off two rounds from my carbine toward the noises I thought I had heard, and waited. Nothing.

After a minute or so, partial sight returned and we could see nothing, no indication of hostiles who might have been out there. My buddy accused me of crying "Wolf!" and I accused him of being sound asleep and reacting without even thinking. And then we both started to laugh, which discouraged the two of our own coming up to see what the ruckus had been. I told him I would use hand signals next time to see if he was awake, rather than hissing, which kept us laughing, and he said he promised not to go to sleep with a "lum" grenade in his hand, which made us laugh some more. Laughter does relieve tension. This guy actually became my favorite watch mate.

During the mop-up in the south end of the island more than 7,000 Japanese soldiers threw down their weapons and surrendered, which was the first and only really mass surrender in the Pacific War. Once convinced that their cause was hopeless, the thin veneer of phony Bushido doctrine fabricated by the Spirit Soldiers fell away, for many of the lower ranks in particular. Not so for Generals Ushijima and Cho, who committed formal hara-kiri together, Gen. Cho going first.

Surrender was rare for the Japanese but it did happen. Here a group of survivors wait for transport back to the rear areas.

Hill 89 – The last Japanese command post. Here Generals Ushijima and Cho committed seppuku – ritual suicide –before it was overrun by the 32nd Division, 7th Infantry.

Catch Me If You Can…

Our job after the mop-up was not quite finished because a significant number of the defeated army were trying to carry out Ushijima's last order and infiltrate northward to wage guerilla war. To prevent this, a number of units including the 1st Marines moved north and set up a blocking line in the vicinity of the old Shuri defenses, but stretching all the way across the island. It was not a line in the literal sense, and I think it was as much for the initial recuperation and refit phase as for capturing infiltrators. Individual companies set up as strong points along the main road running from Naha to Yonabaru, and the "line" was staggered in depth a bit. If the "first one don't getcha, the second one will," a la Tennessee Ernie Ford.

My recollection is that the 1st Marines were somewhere near the middle, not too far from Shuri. It was pretty civilized – after a few days we had pyramidal tents to sleep in, arranged along two sides of a kind of company street. We even had a field mess, and the Mess Officer managed to acquire fresh eggs, milk, and California navel oranges from the Navy. My memory dims but I believe we were there for about ten days, during which H&S Company did stop several of the die-hards, almost always at night.

There were two daylight episodes I was involved in. One of the regiment's line companies was set up about 300 yards to the west – separating us was a 4- or 5-acre sugarcane field. The cane was 8-10 feet tall and very dense. I remember being sacked out early one afternoon when Boyd himself came running over and jostled me awake. Apparently somebody in the line company had seen three Japanese (?) sneak into the cane field, and part of a rifle squad was moving (carefully) into the cane field to roust them out. Col. Mason wanted a block on our side to stop them if they came running our way.

I grabbed my carbine and cap, and Boyd said, "Corporal, put your helmet on," so I naturally did, intending to dump it if it became necessary to go into the cane field. Running, I grabbed Cernik, Bauman, and I think Hall, and headed toward the cane field about 75 yards away. Lt. Chandler showed up as we went and I told him I intended to set up along some broken tree stumps 20 yards from the edge of the cane, facing north (the cane field was west of us). I didn't want anybody shooting into the cane. Since there were only three Japs I figured we could easily pick them off if they came running out toward the main CP. I suggested the lieutenant might go back and make sure nobody in the CP fired either into the cane field or at the four of us, which he did.

Well, it all died in anticlimax. We saw nothing and didn't hear much for about five minutes and then there was the C-R-RUMP of a grenade, one of ours. Following that, there was the roaring of a flamethrower and a big cloud of dark gray smoke rising above the other side of the cane field. After a few seconds we heard some low gutturals in Japanese, some rustling in the cane, and silence. After awhile, Chandler came over and told us the grenade and flamethrower had just been a show of force intended to scare the Japs, and it worked. They had come out with their hands in the air and surrendered to the infantry, who found two Arisaka rifles, bayonets, and some grenades in the center of the cane field.

On the very last day in this location another event was more personal. In the early morning just after we shut down the Cossack posts, Russ Keyes and I were in our tent getting ready to go to the mess tent when we heard several wild shouts down the "street," along with two or three reports that sounded like pistol shots.

By reflex, I unslung my carbine as I stepped out of the tent and saw a bandy-legged figure about 75 yards down the street running like the hounds of hell were after him. Two or three other people along the street appeared in their tent doorways as I brought up the carbine, but my sight line was clear. The runner had on a black top and knee-length black pants, clearly not a uniform, and he did not appear to have a weapon, but the shots I had heard translated in my reflexing brain to "Bad Guy", and I squeezed off one round. He went down on his face like the proverbial pole-axed steer and didn't move.

By the time Russ and I ran up to where he lay, others had turned him over on his back. My bullet had gone through him, coming out just below his sternum, and purplish blood was pulsing strongly out through the exit hole. It was obvious the bullet had ripped his aorta and he had only seconds to live. His unshaven face wore a grimace of pain and his eyes were squeezed shut. I turned away without saying anything, stood up, and walked back to our tent. Nobody said anything to me as I walked back, and I don't know what was done with him. It was the last bullet I fired in World War II.

Memory does fade, but I still think about this event from time to time. I don't know whether I killed a Japanese guerilla on his way north or a pathetic, little Okinawan rice farmer, and I have had no message of solace from the Holy Spirit.

I didn't feel guilty then, nor do I now, but a feeling of regret has stuck and it sort of epitomizes war in my mind. No person, enlisted or officer, ever said anything to me about it, so I don't know what anyone thought, and that makes it lonesome.

Given the same circumstances I believe I would do the same thing again. "Watch out for Charlie, he'll kill you before you can run away!" Sad, isn't it?

Well, What Do We Do Next…?

That same day the regimental CP packed up and moved north again. I haven't a clear memory of where we went but it was south of Yontan Airfield by a couple of miles, I think. The move up was a revelation. Thousands of SeaBees, engineers, supply mavens, and other types of support and base-building people had transformed the island. Row after row of pre-fab buildings, tank farms, parade grounds, barracks, ammunition bunkers. What was behind this, of course, was that Okinawa was going to be the support and jump-off base for the final step in the Pacific campaign – Japan.

The camp they set up for us had a more permanent look than the last one. That's right, some lovely construction types actually did the work, and we just moved in. Still tents, but these had board floors. After a couple of days there was a movie screen erected, and the lushness of the mess hall was a wonder. Once again, we were issued new uniforms, and we even had an inspection. All this normalcy induced a letting-down that surprised me. For two or three days I was sleepy most of the time, and I wasn't the only one. We put up a volley ball net and organized an intramural league among the various headquarters sections.

The reason I know we were near Yontan is that I would watch the Army Air Corps fighters come in for landing after a raid on the homeland. It was the first time I had seen a P-51 Mustang. They usually would come in from the north, flying in formation, and then peel off individually and come in from the south, flaps and wheels down, on landing approach. Sometimes the last one would come around, wheels up and clean, at full power and only 300 feet up, point his nose up 45 degrees and do a couple of victory rolls before going around again for his landing approach. The rules obviously weren't as strict in those days about hot-dogging, I guess.

I don't know how they chose which pilot got to do this – maybe it was the flight leader, or the guy who had the most fuel left. The P-51's with their in-line engines sounded like loud coffee grinders compared to the big-radial roar of the Corsairs and Hellcats, but they were fast. They were on Okinawa to link up with the B-29's and Liberators coming from Saipan and Tinian, to provide fighter cover for the bombing raids on Japan.

A P-51 Mustang

The easy life didn't last, however. After a week or ten days some new maps appeared in the R-2 office tent, along with a bunch of aerial photographs. Kyushu, scheduled to be our next Home Away From Home. The terrain was ugly – once away from the beaches it was 45 degrees up or 45 degrees down, an assaulter's nightmare. The landing was being scheduled for October, I think. I can't remember having any personal desire to go there.

I helped work on these maps for only a day or two before Lt. Chandler came in one morning with a smile on his face and told me to report to Col. Mason's tent. I did so, noting as I approached that Capt. Boyd was there talking with him. I searched my mind for something I might have done that rated a reprimand and came up with nothing. The thought then flashed through my mind that maybe there was some new plan for a pre-invasion reconnaissance and, unfortunately, I already had been through some of the training…

They spotted me approaching and the Colonel smiled and said, “Come in, Corporal, Acting Platoon Sergeant Manhoff.” My little heart leaped and I thought, “They are actually going to give me two more stripes!”

None of my guesses were even close. The Colonel had me sit down and said, “Corporal, Capt. Boyd and I thank you for a well done job. It has been a long and difficult campaign. We have notes on your performance from several officers other than ourselves, including Col. Puller, and we have a proposal for you to consider. A new Officer Candidate class at Quantico will begin in September. Thirty-two men in that class will be veterans of the POA (Pacific Ocean Area). Capt. Boyd and I have recommended your candidacy, if you are willing to accept. If you are, there will be a MATS flight to Guam out of Yontan day after tomorrow.”

I was 20 years old. I don’t remember exactly what I said after this bomb was dropped on me, but I expressed my enthusiasm and appreciation then and there. I didn’t have to think about it.

And that’s the way it came down. Two days later there were some modestly emotional farewells, and Lt. Chandler drove me and my seabag to Yontan in Capt. Boyd’s jeep, where I boarded a MATS C-54 (MATS stands for Marine Air Transport Service) and flew off to a new destiny. The weather was beautiful all the way.

Some of the band of 32 was already in the transit barracks on Guam, and the rest arrived over the next two days. It was late July. On a bright, sunny morning we were bussed down to the dock area where we boarded the escort aircraft carrier USS White Plains, bound for San Diego. For the first time in two and one half years I had no duty assignment, nothing to do but eat that good Navy chow, sleep in a clean Navy bunk, sun myself on the flight deck, and enjoy a delightful ocean cruise to the USA, with all of its remembered creature pleasures! Life was wonderful!

The Big Bang…

One morning about a week before our scheduled arrival in San Diego there suddenly was much whooping and hollering that progressed over the ship in a wave. I happened to be up on the flight deck at the time, so I was one of the last to find out that a B-29 had dropped some sort of gigantic bomb on a city in Japan. Atomic Bomb? What’s that? Wiped out the entire city!? Wow-ee! What does ground zero mean? Hiroshima? Never heard of it.

It didn’t take long to get the word out. Within an hour the ship published a one-page news sheet. At that point nobody knew just what it would mean in the war on Japan, of course,

but for the next day the ship kept publishing news bulletins as it came over the radio. When the second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki and shortly after that, the news that Japan had surrendered unconditionally, whooping hollering started all over again.

We also soon had news bulletins about the wild celebrations going on all over the States – and there we were, out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, no girls to kiss, no parades, we couldn't even buy a beer. Too bad, but those of us in the Marine OCS group mostly made bad jokes about "some guys have all the luck" while celebrating quietly inside our heads that most probably we wouldn't have to go back out there and climb down cargo nets off the coast of Japan. Good enough.

There's No Place Like Home For the Holidays…

We docked in San Diego, or maybe it was San Pedro, very quietly. No bands, no flag-waving, the euphoria was over and it was business as usual. Bussed to Los Angeles, we boarded a train headed east and about four days later we stowed our seabags in a transient barracks at Camp Lejeune, South Carolina, wondering what next. Nobody we talked to knew anything.

After about a week of doing nothing but playing some pool and drinking a beer or two in the evenings, a captain showed up in the barracks one morning and said, "We haven't known until last night what Headquarters and Quantico were going to do with you. All of you have a choice. You can choose to go on to Quantico for a commission in the Regular Marine Corps, or you can opt for immediate discharge. It's your call."

Of the 32 of us, I think two chose Quantico. I opted to go home, anticipating maybe getting into college that fall, since it was still only August. So it was another train ride, this time to Michigan. This trip, in a new set of Undress Greens, complete with campaign ribbons showing I had been in three campaigns in the Asiatic-Pacific Theater, and with my 1st MarDiv shoulder patch, I did get a few cheery greetings along the way.

My mother and sister cried, and my father put his arm around my shoulder when they met me at the Pere Marquette station in Traverse City. Michigan looked good to me. I was home.

Appendix 1 by C.C. Manhoff

To fill in a little more information for the reader, I attach a brief biography of my father after the war years. My father came home from the war and went to Ohio Wesleyan University on the G.I. bill where he received his Bachelors in English and Business Administration. In 1950, he rejoined the Marines, this time as an officer and served what seems to be a fairly tame and even enjoyable tour as intelligence officer with the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean – never went near Korea or the nasty war there. He mustered out as a First Lieutenant, USMCR and later served as a Captain in the Oklahoma National Guard where his military career ended honorably.

(Puller, of course, was in the thick of that war and led one of the first elements ashore at Inchon. He was still the regimental commander of his beloved First Marines and won his fifth Navy Cross leading his men out of the bloody, brutal retreat from the Chosin reservoir with his usual panache – during the breakout, he was visiting some of his wounded men when a messenger told him the regiment was surrounded. Puller responded, “Those poor bastards. They’ve got us right where we want them. We can shoot in every direction now.” When Dad heard that quote, he said, “I don’t doubt for a minute that is what he said.”

One more note on Puller before leaving him to his biographers. When I briefly considered going to Marine OCS in 1990, I noticed that there was picture of him on the wall. I mentioned to it the recruiting officer and was told that picture hung in every Marine base, barracks and recruiting office in the world. For all I know, it still does.)

Dad worked for Dow Corning for a while and in the mid-fifties, decided to go back to the University of Oklahoma where he received his Master’s in Geology. That is also where he met and married my mother. Dad went to work for Esso Eastern (a subsidiary of Exxon) and spent the next 30 years working in Manila, Mogadishu, Tripoli, Sydney, Houston, and wrapped up his career as Exploration Manager for two Exxon affiliates in Jakarta, Indonesia where he retired in 1986. Mom and he lived in Albuquerque, N.M. for eighteen years and also consulted in the Far East for a number of years after his retirement.

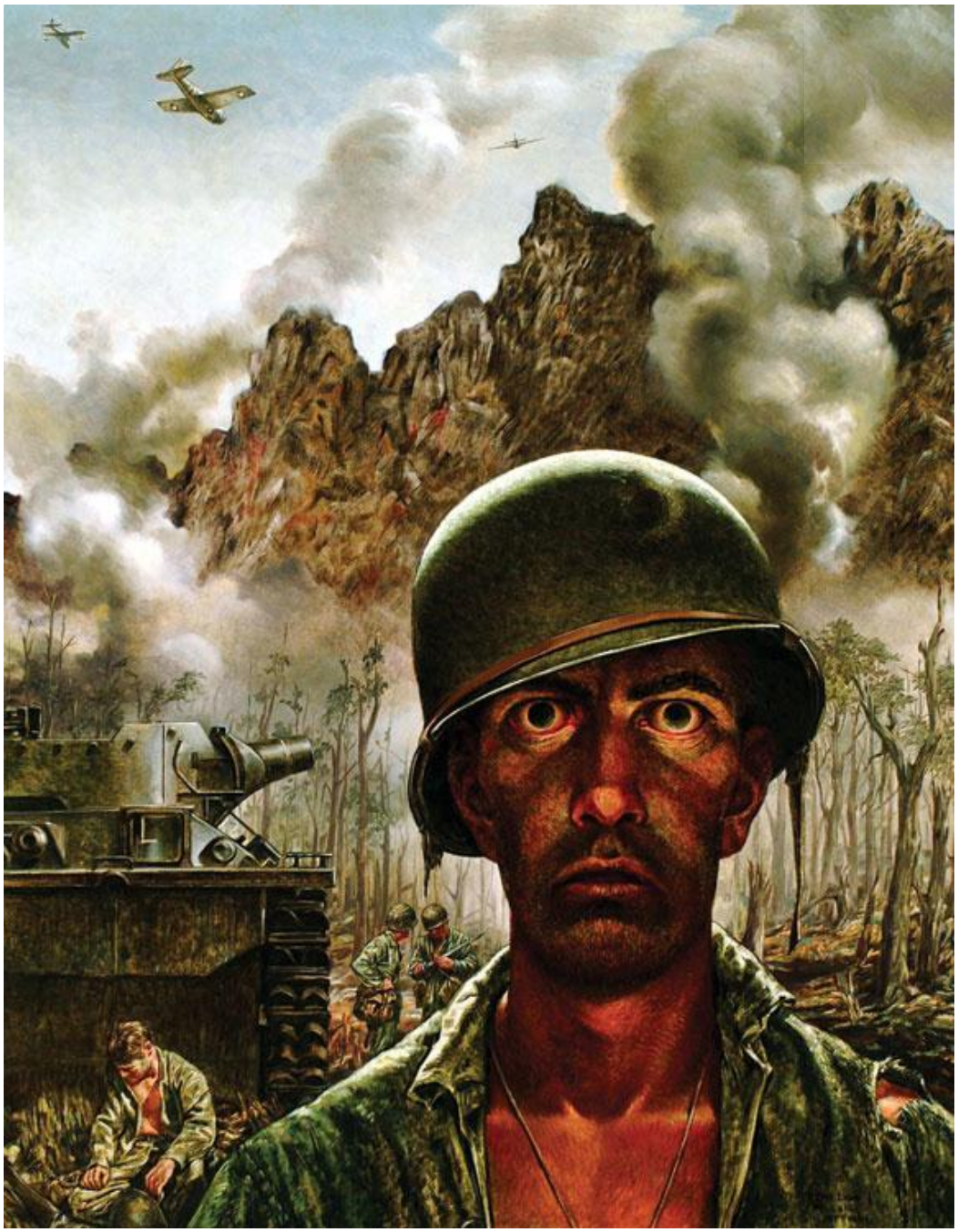
My parents now live virtually next door to my sister in Mesquite, TX and Dad remains feisty and mentally sharp as he was in 1942…maybe just a tad slower.

Second Lieutenant C.N. Manhoff, December 1950:

Appendix 2 – Tom Lea pictures of Peleliu

Caution – Extremely graphic!

One of Tom Lea's pictures for Life Magazine recording a death he saw on Peleliu. Roosevelt had decided in 1943 that the home front was too shielded from the realities of war and had started to urge the media to publish pictures of dead and dying U.S. military. Until then, the press had largely self-censored itself on this issue. Imagine your mother knowing you were in this battle and seeing this picture.



"The 2,000 yard stare" by Tom Lea. One of the most famous drawings in WWII of a Marine on Peleliu that has been too long in battle. A very large percentage of Marine casualties on Okinawa especially were "battle fatigue" casualties from Marines that had charged up one too many ridges in the face of determined resistance.