

# **FINDING CORPORAL WILLIAM FRED WHALEY**

**By Chuck Tatum**

**One day while writing my book, Red Blood Black Sand, I had the shock of my life. I really wasn't looking for Corporal William Fred Whaley. For the past forty-three previous years I knew what had happened to Corporal Whaley. Corporal Whaley had been killed on D-Day, victim of the guns of Suribachi. Now I didn't see Corporal Whaley get hit, as PFC Steve Evanson and I were with C County, 27<sup>th</sup> Marines due to a mix-up on the beach.**

**When PFC Evanson and I rejoined Company B in the late afternoon of 19 February 1945 and I asked what happened to Corporal Whaley I was told the Corporal had been killed on the beach. I remember my sense of loss; I really liked the Corporal. Besides that, we had lived together for the past year or so.**

**Corporal Whaley was a real pleasant Marine. His soft, southern drawl was nice to listen to as he told and retold about how it was to be a Marine paratrooper. Whaley was a real good-looking guy, very neat and on top of that he was a good squad leader. He always had a special glow in his eyes when he pinned on his Paramarine wings. I'm sure that some of my pranks had caused him extra concern. I don't believe that we ever had a cross word between us. Not that that soft-spoken Marine wouldn't dress you down if you had it coming. Corporal Whaley always smoked a pipe and had the manners of a real southern gentleman.**

**The main reason for my shock was that while reading a Marine Corps casualty report prior to the writing of Red Blood Black Sand, I discovered that the Corporal from Tennessee had survived his wounds! Now I just couldn't believe it! That report had to be wrong! Just had to be! No way could I have gone along for forty-three years believing that Corporal Whaley bought the farm on the beach at Iwo Jima. I'm hoping the report is right and that I have been wrong all these years! I have to check this out.**

**Former Staff Sergeant Robbie Robertson, who was a member of the Fifth Marine Division was a good buddy of mine from Stockton and was kind enough to loan me his personal copy of the history of the Fifth Marine Division. In the back of the book it listed the names of the Marines who had been killed or wounded at Iwo Jima. I instantly looked up Corporal Whaley's name, and find he is not listed in the section of the book naming those killed in combat. I now quickly turned to the wounded section, and hey, how about that, I found Corporal Whaley's name listed among the wounded! This is the best possible news I have ever had in my life!**

**Later on after I found Private First Class Gerald Hurd, I told him what I had discovered. He said, "Right!" He had discovered that Corporal Whaley had survived his wounds, too. That same casualty report listed his hometown as Middleton, Tennessee.**

**"Will I be luck this time with the Bell Telephone System?" I asked myself, "Will they have a listing for William F. Whaley in the Nashville**

phone directory?” I nervously dialed the long distance operator and asked her for the listing. No, it wasn't there. I asked her to check all of the cities in that area code, but still no luck. Well, what could I expect after forty-three years? Maybe he had an unlisted number, had moved somewhere else, or had died during the past forty-three years.

So I wrote in my book, *“If anyone reading this book knows where Corporal William F. Whaley from Middleton, Tennessee is, please call me, write me, send me a telegram or anything to let me know what has happened to him. I just have to know because I am still looking for the Corporal from Tennessee!”*

Corporal Whaley was 21 years of age when he was wounded on Iwo Jima and was evacuated the same day, 19 February 1945 to the U.S.S. Highlands, and then to the United States Army Hospital Number 369 on 28 February 1945 to begin a long recovery period.

**July 14, 1988**

As I'm finishing writing my book, I had the occasion to again refer to the above-mentioned casualty report on Corporal William Fred Whaley. In re-reading the report I realized that when I was first searching for Corporal Whaley I had only called Nashville and had searched the 615 area code. The report showed that Whaley's father, a Mr. Robert W. Whaley lived in Middleton, Tennessee. Then I looked up the area code for Middleton, Tennessee and found it was 901!

**I immediately called information and asked for a Robert Whaley, fully realizing that if Whaley's father was still alive he would be in his late eighties. I guess I was hoping against hope that he might still be alive. The operator tells me there is no Robert Whaley listed. So then I asked for a William Fred Whaley. To operator again says no listing. So as a last try I ask for any Whaley's listed and she responded, "Yes, there are four Whaley's listed."**

**I told her to give me their names and she said she could only give me two names. I agreed to the two name and she gave me a Rachel and a Randal Whaley. I dialed Randal's number, but there was no answer. Next I dialed Rachel's number, the phone rang a long time and then I realized I'm up to my old trick again, calling people back east, late at night! You see I do a lot of my writing late in the evenings, forgetting about the differential in time between the east and west coasts.**

**A voice answers and says, "Hello." I explain who I am and what I am doing and who I am looking for. Rachel says that William Fred Whaley and her husband were cousins. I am in for a second shock when she tells me that William Fred Whaley was killed a few years earlier in an automobile accident!**

**After I regained my composure I asked if Corporal Whaley had any remaining relatives. She said that William had two sons and their names were Randal and Ronald, and that William's wife was in a rest home. Since I had already tried Randal's number I decided to call**

**Ronald Whaley in Memphis, Tennessee. Well I finally got lucky, Ronald Whaley answered the phone!**

**I told Ronald who I am and what I'm doing and that I was searching for the surviving members of William Fred Whaley's family. Ronald replies that he is William's son. The next minutes were spent in a nice conversation about his father.**

**It seems that Corporal Whaley had lost his life in 1961 in an automobile accident when Ronald was only thirteen years old. His brother Randal was only nine years old at the time. Ronald explained that his father had become a teacher after the war in his hometown of Middleton and later was the principal of some of the schools in the Middleton area. In later years the Corporal had been a salesman for National Cash Register and had also sold insurance.**

**I had the pleasure of telling Ronald of the respect and admiration I held for his late father. I can't think of any Marine that served his county better than Corporal William Fred Whaley, United States Marine Corps. I promised to send him copies of the pictures that Lloyd G. Hurd, a former member of Corporal Whaley's squad, had loaned me.**

**I asked Ronald if he had any pictures of his father taken during the war. He said he had a few that he would share with me for the purpose of my book. I had truly been hoping that when I found Corporal Whaley he would still be alive and enjoying good health. But**

**somehow I had a sense of foreboding, like something had happened in the past. Guilt was one of my reactions, for not having made a real effort before now to contact his parents after the war to tell them about their son. Because at the time and for forty-three years afterward I truly believe that Corporal Whaley had perished in the service of his country on the black sand beach, three quarters of the way around the world from his hometown, Middleton, Tennessee, in the place that God forgot, Iwo Jima.**

**I will never forget Corporal William Fred Whaley. He will always be part of my life. As I sat writing this chapter of the book, if I closed my eyes I could still see this young Marine paratrooper in the lead of his squad as they stormed the sands of Iwo Jima! When America needed a few good men, she had Corporal William Fred Whaley, U.S.M.C.**

**What follows is my letter to Corporal Whaley's son, Ronald:**

*July 16, 1988*

*Dear Ronald,*

*It was very nice of you to spend your time talking to me about your father. To say that I'm please to at last have found a member of my former comrade-in-arms' family would be an understatement. Needless to say I share yours and your family's grief at his early death. Your Dad was quite a man and a Marine of the first caliber.*

*Enclosed you will find the questionnaire that I mentioned in our phone conversation. Please feel free to go beyond the questionnaire if you care to do so. I will be sending the pictures of your Father when I get them back from the developers.*

*At the end of my book I tell of trying to find the members of your Father's squad after forty-three years. Did your father ever communicate with any of the Marines from his squad? I'm still searching for a Private First Class Charles William Whitcomb from Chattanooga, Tennessee. Do you know if your Father had any contact with this Marine?*

*The story I have enclosed is about looking for your Father. It's in two parts, the second part was written last night after we talked. The first was written in early July of 1988. This is a rough draft form. I'm asking you to please read it and let me know if I have the fact correct. Feel free to*

*change it as needed. I have enclosed two copies. Please keep one copy and return the second, corrected copy in the self-addressed envelope I have enclosed.*

*Your Father appears often in this book and as I said I will furnish copies for you and your brother when it's published. I will close for now. Once again, I must say that I was pleased to make your acquaintance. Let's keep in touch. Call me when you are next in California. I will be looking forward to meeting you face-to-face.*

*Thanking you in advance,*

*Charles (Chuck) W. Tatum*

*Former Private First Class*

*Machine Gun Platoon*

*Company B*

*First Battalion*

*Fifth Marine Division*

*Fleet Marine Force*



In November, 1988 I received the following letter:

11-13-88

*Dear Chuck,*

*My son Ron Whaley told me about your call and plan to write a book about Iwo Jima. I'm Arline Whaley and would like to help get the information together. Fred was very proud to have been a paratrooper and in the Fifth Marine Division. For the time being I am able to work only short periods of time. I have a severe case of arthritis of the spine and chest and am in a lot of pain constantly. I also have Parkinson's disease, a silent killer.*

*Fred Whaley and I were sweethearts all through high school. We had fifteen blissful years together before his tragic death in a car wreck on January 16, 1962. He was returning from Ioka, Missouri, lost control of his car and ran off the highway hitting a Church of Christ building. Both church and car burned and Fred was pinned inside. He could be identified only by four false teeth on a partial plate. The body was so badly burned that the casket had to be sealed.*

*I then took on the role of both mother and father to two boys, nine and thirteen. Fred was an excellent and handsome husband, a super father and a devoted son-in-law. He was proud of his record in the Marines, but seldom ever talked about it. We saw the movie "Sands of Iwo Jima" several times on television.*

*One incident on Iwo caused nightmares as long as Fred lived. He was wounded on the first day on the island, February 19, and lay in the volcano ash for thirty-six hours before someone with a stretcher saw him move and removed his body to the ship that took them to a hospital in Hawaii and later to Oceanside, California. While he lay in the volcano ash seriously wounded, he could hear the screams for help from some men trapped in a burning building. He always regretted he couldn't help rescue them.*

*Fred was discharged in February 1946 in Portsmouth, Virginia. He used his G.I. bill to get two college degrees from Memphis State University: a B.A. and an M.A. degree. He worked as a teacher, insurance salesman, salesman for National Cash Register selling accounting machines and was a principal of a junior high school and a high school.*

*Fred loved the land and helped my Dad with farming. Fred's hobbies were woodworking, carpentry and reading. He taught a Sunday school class at a Methodist church for several years. Whatever he did, he did to the best of his ability. His motto might have been "Make the best better!"*

*A sad occasion brought the Whaley's together yesterday. Fred's oldest sister in Bolivar, widow, was found dead of a heart attack in her kitchen last Friday, Veterans Day, about noon. Her home had been the central meeting place for the Whaley family meals for years. Of seven*

*children in Fred's family, only three are now living. Three sisters and Fred have died since you knew him. Geneva Whaley of Memphis, Tennessee and Max Whaley of Jackson, Tennessee (who has cancer) and James Whaley of Huntsville, Alabama (who has a serious arthritis problem with his feet and legs) are still living. I was with the two sisters-in-law last Tuesday on Election Day, and one was gone before the weekend was out.*

*I've read and edited your copy of the manuscript. I remember Fred's speaking of you several times through the years. The remarks were very complimentary even though I don't remember exact statements. Since my son has had the material since July and hasn't had time to give to regular correspondence, I'd like to help in any way I can. I taught high school English for 37 years before retiring at age 60.*

*You may remember Arline Kirk from hearing Fred speak of me. He used to tell me he always saw my face when he was in a foxhole. He was so handsome and popular that girls flocked after him wherever he went! I feel most fortunate to have been his choice for a wife. I like to think we complimented and brought the best out in each other. We loved with a love that was greater than ordinary love and I surely agree with the poet Tennyson that "it's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."*

*Tell me what information you need from me, how often and what form? I can't believe Fred was 21 when he went on the island of Iwo Jima. According to other happenings I can't place him as older than 20.*

*He was discharged in 1946 and we were married in 1948. He was thirty-seven when he was killed in 1962. He was an ambitious young man, going somewhere in a hurry and death seemed to be an ugly intruder who snatched Fred at the peak of his ability to make his contribution. I am not bitter because Fred had a very positive attitude even about death. I have no private telephone here. You can call my son Randall (number given) or write to me.*

*I enjoyed the pictures! We'll try to locate some more if I can get back home. Fred never smoked a pipe regularly after he returned from World War II. He was a chain smoker of cigarettes though – Lucky Strikes!*

*Sincerely,*

*Arline Whaley*

*Middleton Home Care Center*

**U.S.M.C. CASUALTY REPORT**

**Date: 15Mar45 Card: No Cas. No. 017997**

**Organization: Co B – 1<sup>st</sup> Bn – 27<sup>th</sup> Mar – 5<sup>th</sup> Mar Div – FMF**

**Type of Casualty: WIA Area: Pac**

**Date of Casualty: 19Feb45**

**Date of Appt./Enlist: 6May43**

**Place of Enlistment: Nashville, Tenn.**

**Date Active Duty: Blank**

**Prior Ser: No Marital: S Race: W**

**Date of Birth: 10Oct24**

**Place of Birth: Middleton, Tenn.**

**Legal Residence: Middleton, Tenn.**

**Next of Kin: Mr. Robert W. Whaley**

**Relation: Father**

**Address of Kin: Middleton, Tenn**

**Beneficiary: Blank**

**Place of Casualty: Iwo, Volcano Is.**

**Nature of wound: Illegible**

**Present Status: Serious; progress favorable**

**Remarks: 28Feb45\*\* Admto USAStaHosp#369, APO#244**

**Date & Source of Report: AMB#1001 fr CG 5thMarDiv to  
SecNav dtd 24Feb45. CasRep#1. Rec'd CasDiv 9Mar45.**

**Name: Whaley, William Fred**

**Rank: Corp**

**Class: USMCR**

**Ident. No. 847971**

**\*\*\*Cas Rep fr USS HIGHLANDS (apa0119) to Cmdr,AdmComd,  
Amph Frcs. PacFlt rec'd 22Mar45 (mbb)**

**\*\* Rep#05-45 fr OIC PLG#10 USAGH#148 to CG, FMF, PAC  
dtd 1Mar45 rec'd CasDiv 16Mar45 (mbb)**

**CasBul#1 fr HQ 5MarDiv dtd 7Mar45, rec'd 22Mar45, states, SW  
Back. (md)**

**Adm USNH NAVY#10, 10Mar45. Rep fr USHN-Navy#10, dtd  
11Mar45, rec'd 3May45. Also states Frac comp. Rt. Tibia (lj)**

**\*\*Disch fr USNH#10 23Mar45 to USNH Mainland. USNH#10  
24Mar45 26 May45 (em)**

**\*\*Trans. To USNH, Memphis, Tenn, 2May45. Form F card fr  
USNH, Portsmouth, Va., rec'd 2Jul45. (ref)**

**Rep fr Off of DivSur, Hq 5thMarDiv, fr DivSur to BuM&S**

**Rep of Cas, 15Apr45 28Jul45 states man WFS, heel (wjw)**